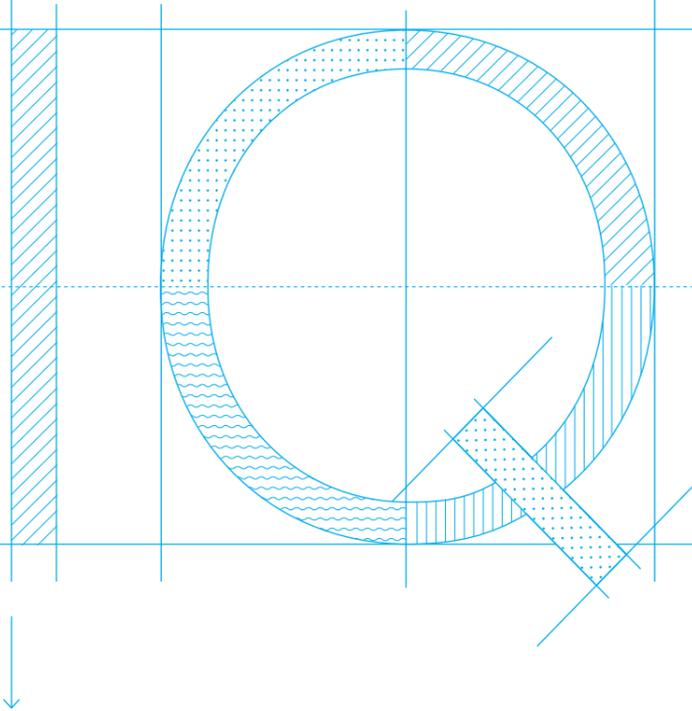


RAISING YOUR HOME'S



The building blocks of a solid place are beams, bricks, and plaster. The elements of a thoughtful home go well beyond that, but the blueprint is equally simple: Begin with clever ways to run it more efficiently and save serious money; factor in smart devices that will make life easier; and create a space filled with things you love in a way that works today—and tomorrow. Achieve this marriage of form and function, and your home will be an exponentially better, safer, and happier spot to live in for years to come. And that's just brilliant.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN LIEBE | TEXT BY SARAH COLLINS

PROP STYLING BY LILI ABIR REGEN; TYPE DESIGN BY CLAUDIA DE ALMEIDA



For sources,
go to page 119.

Start with basic ways to save water, energy, and money



LOWER YOUR WATER HEATER TO 120 DEGREES

"Most manufacturers set them to 140 degrees, but 120 is hot enough," says David Nemtzow, director of the Building Technologies Office at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in Washington, D.C. With this minor tweak, you'll cut costs 6 to 10 percent.

TURN OFF THE "POWER DRY" FEATURE ON YOUR DISHWASHER

This setting was designed to speed up the drying process. But if you're not going to run another load right away, there's no need, according to Tom Kraeutler, host of *The Money Pit*, a nationally syndicated home-improvement radio show. Plus, you'll save about 30 percent on your dishwasher energy costs.

SWITCH TO "ADVANCED" POWER STRIPS

These multiprong bars reduce the electricity wasted when your desktop computer, printer, TV, phone charger, game console, etc. are idle. Nemtzow points out that these "energy vampires" can add nearly 10 percent to your monthly electric bill.

REPLACE YOUR SHOWERHEAD

"Water-efficient models are phenomenal these days—they deliver a stream that wakes you up in the morning," says Kraeutler. He likes ones from American Standard, which use 40 percent less water than conventional showerheads and can save a family up to 8,000 gallons a year.

UPGRADE YOUR INSULATION

It's not sexy, but "it's the number-one way to reduce your energy bill," Kraeutler says. Peek into your attic. There should be 15 to 20 inches of insulation throughout; if not, hire a contractor or handyman to install it. (Kraeutler suggests looking for one at homeadvisor.com.)

PLANT TREES STRATEGICALLY

Positioned near the south or southwest corners of your home, deciduous trees (ones that lose their leaves in autumn) offer shade in summer and let in light in winter. The DOE estimates that they can cut energy costs by 15 to 50 percent. Gigi Saltonstall, principal at G2 Collaborative, a landscape-architecture firm in Waltham, Massachusetts, loves the black tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*) for this job: "It has beautiful horizontal branching, and its fall color is a super-glossy cherry red," she says.

Choose smart gadgets wisely

Try a smart-home device or two, but proceed with caution, since they're essentially mini-computers connected to the internet, and many of them still don't communicate with each other. "Start with one, like a plug-in light switch or wireless thermostat, and add others later," says Grant Clauser, a tech journalist at the product-testing site *The Wirecutter*. Before buying, ask yourself these five questions:

1 / Will this really be convenient?

"Think about how you usually operate your heating and cooling system or appliances," says Clauser. "Will it simplify your life, or be neat at first, then grow tired after a while?"

2 / Is everyone in my household on board?

"If you have smart light bulbs, and someone doesn't have the app and switches a lamp off physically, the app won't work for other people," explains Clauser.

3 / Is the brand reputable?

"Cheaper versions are cheaper for a reason," says Brian Barrett, tech editor at *Wired*. "To work, these things need to be consistently connected to the internet; you don't want a product that can't get that consistency."

4 / Do I have a strong Wi-Fi connection?

Barrett recommends a mesh network router, which is a pack of two to three routers sprinkled throughout your house.

5 / Am I willing to take the security risk?

Every time you add a device, you're more exposed, says Barrett. "Hackers can use devices for another purpose that you won't notice, but will result in slower Wi-Fi." Always change the default user name and password, too.

7 STANDOUTS TO CONSIDER

Above all, go for gadgets you'll get a lot of use and value out of. For instance, "the Alexa voice assistant in Amazon's Echo is now in a ton of other devices, like the Ecobee Smart Thermostat," Barrett says, so you can vocally control heating and cooling. Our top picks:



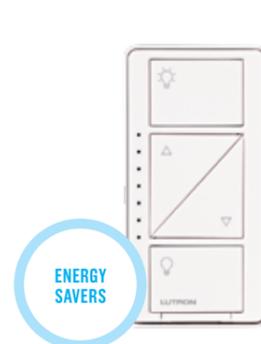
PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

► **Amazon Echo** (\$179, amazon.com) and **Google Home** (\$129, google.com): These are ideal devices to try first, because they're user-friendly and fun. "Voice assistants can tell you your schedule, what the traffic will be on the way to work, or who won the college-football championship back in 1988," says Ismael Matos, a deputy field marshal of Best Buy's Geek Squad. And more and more, they can control other smart-home devices, like light switches. Asked to choose between the two, Matos leans toward the Echo because it's been around longer. "If a product has a track record of working with other things, that's a big plus," says Clauser.



HOME SECURITY

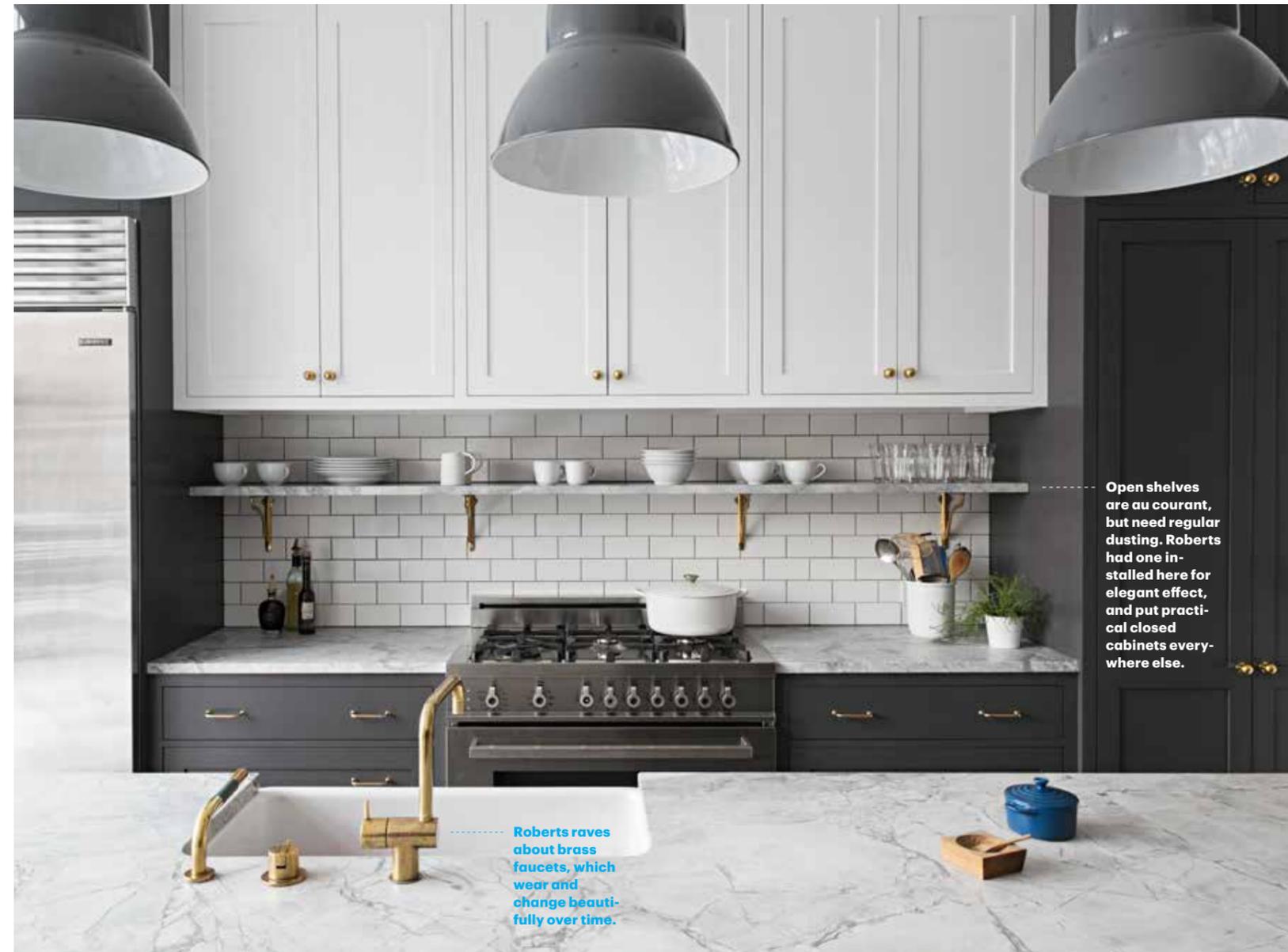
► **Nest Cam** (\$199, nest.com): It's designed for both indoors and out to keep tabs on comings and goings and spy on the dog. It shoots 24/7 HD video that can stream to your phone, and stores it in the cloud for 30 days. **Schlage Sense Smart Deadbolt** (from \$229, schlage.com): Enter your home with an access code or by using your phone. (Yup, you can forget about forgetting your keys.) **Nest Protect** (\$119, nest.com): This smoke alarm will tell you (out loud, in words) where the danger is, send a notice to your phone (because if you're not at home, you'll still want to know), and monitor for carbon monoxide.



ENERGY SAVERS

► **Ecobee 3 Lite** (\$199, ecobee.com): This thermostat can save you an average of 23 percent annually on utility bills. It keeps track of whether you're at home or not via geofencing (it reads where your phone is), and gives you energy reports. (Experts still love the **Nest thermostat**, too.) **Lutron Caseta** (\$100, homedepot.com): These wireless switches and dimmers work from your smartphone. They also use geofencing, so when you leave the house, your lights automatically turn off. **Insignia Wi-Fi Smart Plug** (\$20, bestbuy.com): With an app on your mobile, this cost-effective starter gadget lets you control and program anything—air conditioner, lights, appliances—you've plugged into the same outlet.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF MANUFACTURERS (PRODUCTS); OPPOSITE: DUSTIN AKSLAND (KITCHEN)



Open shelves are au courant, but need regular dusting. Roberts had one installed here for elegant effect, and put practical closed cabinets everywhere else.

Roberts raves about brass faucets, which wear and change beautifully over time.

Make your kitchen covetable

It's the most expensive room to upgrade, but doing so adds tremendous value—and happy living—to your home. Here's how to tackle a refresh.

STAY OPEN-MINDED

If you prefer to cook (and clean dishes) behind closed doors, you're in the minority: Open kitchens are still popular as hubs for entertaining and family togetherness. "People want informality and rooms that are multipurpose," says Elizabeth Roberts, an architect in Brooklyn. "You're prepping food in the kitchen, and the kids are doing homework at the dining table." Consider opening up your space if you can.

SPEND SELECTIVELY

Splurge on the one or two items that matter most to you, and opt for tried-and-true basics elsewhere. In the kitchen, a "can't-go-wrong combination" of white subway tiles and IKEA cabinets will keep costs under control, says Julie Carlson, editor-in-chief of the home-design site *Remodelista*. (Big box stores, like Home Depot, are also worth perusing.) Then, if you're an avid cook, you can buy the best range you can afford.

BE A SNOB ABOUT YOUR SINK

Invest in high-quality, classic faucets, suggests Carlson. "There's nothing more annoying than a leaky or temperamental one. And knockoffs of higher-end brands are made with plastic components. You want solid metal—we like ones from Chicago Faucets."

SELECT COUNTERTOPS WITH CARE

They should be strong, heat-resistant, and nearly non-porous. Marble, to the lament of every aesthete, comes up short. But there are lots of gorgeous choices that meet these criteria. Natural stones include granite, soapstone, and quartzite (just as lovely as marble). For man-made, try composites like Caesarstone or Corian, or check out the new ceramic slabs—they're hugely durable and come in lots of shades.

Pick a timeless palette

And by “timeless,” we mean grays, whites, and natural tones. “Neutrals are durable and long-lasting,” says Nino Sitchinava, principal economist at the home-improvement site Houzz. Roberts also has a cache of “non-boring neutrals” she uses, including Benjamin Moore’s Blue Veil (a cool blue-gray) and Farrow & Ball’s Railings (an inky blue). Once you’ve established a simple and serene foundation, add bolder tones through less-permanent objects, like a piece of furniture, drapes, or throw pillows—and change them up as your taste or trends evolve.



From left: Behr paint, in Flannel Gray, behr.com. Benjamin Moore paint, in Blue Veil, benjaminmoore.com. Farrow & Ball paint, in Railings, us.farrow-ball.com.



This room divider houses storage, A/C ducts, a refrigerator on the back facing the kitchen, and (ka-ching!) a powder room.

CRAFT STORAGE SYSTEMS

A zero-tolerance policy against clutter is impossible to maintain. Instead, “Ask yourself, ‘What happens in each room?’ Only objects that support those activities should be in there,” says New York City professional organizer Andrew Mellen. **To keep things from migrating and multiplying**, he uses a tactic he calls the organizational triangle: “One home for everything; like with like; something in, something out.” **But be creative**, too. Mellen champions installing shelves in the sides of closets, and extra-high storage in kitchens. (“My library step stool is one of the best purchases I’ve made.”) Barbara Bestor, principal at Barbara Bestor Architecture, in Los Angeles, incorporates hidden cupboards and built-in bookshelves in her designs. “Storage can be an opportunity to create joy, not just duty,” she says. **Last, accommodate everyone:** “If there are six people in your household, you need six coat hooks and six charging stations,” Mellen says.



Light up your life

1

Change to LED bulbs everywhere

According to the DOE, they’re six to seven times more energy-efficient than incandescent lights, cut energy use by more than 80 percent, and can last 25 times longer—up to 10 to 20 years per bulb. They also come in limitless styles (design experts love Philips’s vintage-style Edison LED bulb, above, \$9, [homedepot.com](#)). A tip from Bestor: “For warm light, buy bulbs that are 2,700 Kelvin or below,” or your space will feel like “an airport.”

2

Swap out window treatments

“If they’re dark and heavy, changing them can make a huge difference,” says New York City interior designer Steffani Aarons. “I’ll say to a client, ‘Why don’t we take off the 40 yards of fabric on your windows, and you’ll get 40 percent more light?’”

3

Let it shine outside

Illuminate trees or specific landscape features at night, “as opposed to using standard flood lights,” says Bestor, who adds that among her West Coast clients, “lighting pools in the evening is a big deal. They glow like jewels.”

Treat it like a retreat

A brainy home is cost-effective and organized. But an emotionally intelligent home stimulates your senses and makes you feel calm and happy, too. “It’s a sanctuary where you rest, entertain, raise a family, and maybe work,” Mellen says. “It should reflect your values and support you in all these things.”

FILL IT WITH THINGS YOU LOVE

Aim for a “collected over time” look, versus “furnished in one week,” says Carlson. And remember, no detail is too small to spark joy: Even your tiniest choices—coat hooks, key drop, drawer pulls—should please your eye, so don’t settle. “The marketplace has every flavor of everything; you can find whatever you’re looking for in a period and style that matches yours,” says Mellen. “Why settle for an approximation?”

CREATE A PLEASANT FLOW

Whether or not you practice feng shui, your home should feel open. Be sensitive to pinch points in the entryway or living-room seating situation, and leave some space in big rooms,” Aarons says. “This makes even a small home feel gracious.”

COMMUNE WITH NATURE

If you have a patio or deck, “take the footprint of your living room and duplicate it outside,” Bestor says. Presto: You’ve doubled your common space. Likewise, bring the outside in and add greenery. “Being in a place with a lot of living things has positive psychological and physical effects, says Bestor. She loves succulents, spider plants, and fiddle-leaf fig trees.

Go for fail-safe fabrics

“Most people have kids or pets—why not take away the anxiety that something will get spilled on?” says Aarons. The market is full of stainproof, washable options that are so luxurious you’d never know they’re super-practical. Aarons especially likes the chic options from Holly Hunt, Holland & Sherry, and Sunbrella. “I’d say about 70 percent of the fabrics we order for a job are stainproof,” she says.



From left: Perennials Tatton Stripe, in Pumice, [perennialsfabrics.com](#). Holly Hunt Great Outdoors Lienesque, in Slate; and Country Estate, in Golden, [hollyhunt.com](#).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOANNA GARCIA (STORAGE); COURTESY OF MANUFACTURER (LIGHT BULB); PETER ARDITO (OTHERS); OPPOSITE: DANA GALLAGHER (BATHROOM); ART DIRECTION BY KATIE FIELD AND DAWN SINKOWSKI



Bathe in beauty

A comfortable, well-appointed bathroom can make every single morning and evening better. Here are five redesign “dos” to keep in mind.

Stick with classics

High-quality, traditional tubs (with or without feet) and big pedestal sinks will never look dated. Wainscoting on the walls adds subtle texture and charm.

Spend less time scouring

Marble may not be the most practical material in the kitchen, but a large slab of it in your shower is both beautiful and a breeze to clean because there’s no pesky grout, says our home editor, Lorna Aragon.

Build in extra space

If you do a full reno, try to increase your square footage. “There’s a movement toward spaces you can hang out in and talk to your spouse while they shower, or bathe the kids,” says Bestor.

Get ready with the sun

If possible, install a mirror near a window. It’s uplifting in the morning and natural light is best for applying makeup.

—Additional reporting by Claire Sullivan

Seek help when you need it

Interior designers aren’t only for deep-pocketed homeowners doing a complete overhaul. “Even if you’re just updating your kid’s room after she’s gone to college,” Aarons says, “they can be a huge value.” These are four ways to work with an expert:

BY PROJECT

“A designer can come up with a concept for one room,” says Aarons. “People will say, ‘I bought all this stuff—the colors don’t match; the scale is off.’ The market is inundated with light fixtures, wallpapers, and furniture. A pro can edit it down to the look you want.”

BY THE HOUR

“If someone is working with an architect, I advise on things like pairing paint colors and tiles, and help choose other options, so the elements mesh well,” says Aarons.

VIA SKYPE

Well-reviewed online services such as Homepolish, Havenly, and Decorist pair clients with designers for video or phone chats and offer a range of packages, from consultations and concept boards to comprehensive designs by published pros.

BY STORE

Chains like Home Depot, Sears, and JCPenney make design house calls for projects including kitchen and bathroom remodels, closet overhauls, and custom window treatments. In-home consultations are free.