

Home & garden

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A 20-foot expanse serves as a family story wall with photographs from vacations and documents of their history.

Designing a room to fit the family

Blackhawk makeover creates a room no one wants to leave

BY DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Most people decorate their living room and dining room twice in their lifetime, said designer Dorene Gomez. These rooms are mostly neutral, and people may change their accent pieces for a new look.

"But a family room is redone every 10 years," she said. "It gets more wear and tear." Plus people spend more time in it, and they are ready for something new.

Sometimes there is nothing wrong with a family room; it just gets a little "tired." So people call in a decorator.

Enter Gomez, a designer with J. Hettiger Interiors.

She said when she begins a project she meets with the clients to learn what they have in mind. Then she spends an hour or two—or three—at their home.

"You have to know about the people," she said. "You want the personality of themselves to come out."

She also wants to learn their expectations—how much the room will be used; what they want replaced and what is to stay; how much seating they'd like; and whether they are budget-minded.

"Some people say, 'Make it pretty,'" said Gomez. "Some say, 'I don't want too much clutter.'"

Her latest redesign of a family room was in a 14-year-old Blackhawk home. Its owners said the well-used room was starting to show wear and tear, plus there was sun damage to the carpet and drapes. Gomez first met with them in August.

"They wanted to make their family room functional, comfortable and colorful," she said. They requested a room that made them want to stay in it.

"I brought part of their lives into the room—lots of pictures and their favorite books," explained Gomez. The family has two teenage sons.

The owners wanted to get away from the mauve carpet they'd had but still wanted the family room to tie in with the wallpaper of the adjoining kitchen, which has tiny fruit branches.

"They wanted something completely different and they wanted something warm," said Gomez. "Now it is livable and warm—but sophisticated."

Gomez added furniture with fabrics in several colors and textures. The couch color is similar to that of the walls, with a slubbed texture, and the chairs are a crisp blue green with large pillows in complementary fabrics.

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JANET PELLETIER

In 1894, Charles Bruce built this home at 4636 Second St., a one-story Queen Anne cottage. He lived in the home while he was building a much grander home next door. The cottage has been restored many times, including after a eucalyptus tree fell on it and a Model T Ford crashed through a room.

'Master craftsman'

Charles Bruce leaves legacy on many of downtown's most prominent houses, buildings

BY JANET PELLETIER

Charles Bruce's client list reads like a who's who of Pleasanton yore. Considered the city's most prolific builder, Bruce built between 30 and 40 homes in the downtown region, schools, bridges and some of the most recognizable and historic buildings. Take a drive down Second, St. Mary, Division and even Main streets and you'll see the indelible mark he's left.

Try "Googling" Bruce, who died in 1955, and you won't find much if anything at all, but ask another well-known Pleasanton architect who shares the same first name, and he has a wealth of information.

Charles Huff, Pleasanton's go-to guy for renovations to historic homes, is a regular at



Charles Bruce, shown in an undated photo from the Pleasanton Chamber of Commerce. Bruce was mayor of Pleasanton from 1924-1928.

the Livermore Public Library because that's where the architect, who also wears the hat of historian, digs up old articles from now-defunct publications such as the Livermore Herald. On a recent weekday, Huff, whose office is in an old train station at Neal and First streets, managed to produce 40 pages of materials on Bruce—the homes he's built, his

family life, obituary and even some of his old advertisements for C.A. Bruce and Sons. He's performed renovation and restoration work on some of Bruce's original homes.

Charles A. Bruce had been a builder and contractor for over 40 years in the Tri-Valley in the later 19th century and early part of the 20th century. He began building Victorians, and there are some Queen Anne homes that are sprinkled through downtown that have Bruce's stamp on them.

One such home is at 443 St. Mary St., a Queen Anne. The one-story house was built in 1880. In 1898, Herman Detjens, who was a Pleasanton grocer and builder of the first Pleasanton Hotel, bought it. In 1900, the home changed hands to Charles S. Graham,

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Take back your bird feeder from the squirrels

Most effective tactic is taste aversion

Frolicking in the trees, foraging for acorns on the ground, even begging for a peanut or two at your back deck—squirrels can be cute—until they stake their claim to your bird feeder.

Squirrels love birdseed as much as birds do, and both groups of backyard pets routinely battle for rights to the backyard feeder. It's not an equal fight—most squirrels are bigger than the average bird, so chances are they're going to devour all the seed.

Squirrels are the number one problem for people who like to feed the birds. They can eat large amounts of seed, destroy bird feeders, and chase birds away. When squirrels claim your feeder as their territory, it is hard to get rid of them. They will take up residence close to their feeding territory, and they'll soon have babies at your feeder as well.

Squirrels can be relentless in their perpetual pursuit of your bird feed, especially if you have chosen to let the birds dine on sunflower seeds or chopped peanuts. However, it doesn't really matter if you're giving your feathered friends sunflower seed, millet seed, safflower seed, chopped peanuts or cracked corn, the fact of the matter is that squirrels will eat pretty much whatever the birds will, and most squirrels are hard-wired programmed not to share their food.

Bird-lovers have tried countless devices and gimmicks over the years to thwart seed-stealing squirrels. One of the most effective

tactics is taste aversion. Simply put, if the seed you serve tastes bad to squirrels, they'll seek sustenance elsewhere.

Studies show that mammals, including squirrels, have receptors on the tongue and in the mouth that react to chili peppers by sending heat signals to the brain. Although there's no actual damage, the sensation makes it seem as though the mouth is on fire. Birds lack the receptors that make chewing chili peppers such an eye-watering experience for mammals—they can eat peppers all day long and never feel a thing.

Put pesky squirrels on notice that your bird feeder is meant to be bird-exclusive by stocking the feeder with products that incorporate habanero pepper. The feed appeals to birds, but turns squirrels off with a chili-pepper oil. Cornell University scientists tested the technology and found it highly effective in reducing the number of squirrel visits at the feeder.

Another option is Flaming Squirrel Seed Sauce, a nutritional birdseed supplement that contains all-natural, 100 percent food grade ingredients with a super-hot and spicy flavor. Add this chili pepper formula to any quality birdseed to reduce squirrel visits, or spray it on garden plants to keep squirrels and other mammals from digging and eating plants.

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DESIGNING

Continued from PAGE 1

New oak flooring ties in with the kitchen flooring, and it has a dark mahogany band around the outside of the room. The walls are painted an earthen bisque.

"The room looks 20-25 percent larger," said Gomez.

The curtains are a darker pattern, with side panels with goblet sleeves and reeded rods, and Roman shades. The French doors opening onto the yard have a matching Roman valance with a triangular overlay of silk.

"They wanted maximum seating," Gomez noted. "I added a sofa with an attractive chaise lounge plus two oversized chairs that swivel, and ottomans."

With another family, Gomez said, she probably would have put an armoire holding the television against the 20-foot wall, which was heavily fauxed dark green. But this family said TV is not important to them so she kept the set in the side bookshelf, mounted so it could come out of the wall and swivel.

Gomez considered putting furniture against the large wall but the clients wanted the room to look more open. So she hung family photos framed in groupings, many of scenes taken on vacations. "It's a story wall of the family," she said.

"I mixed the frames up a little, and added original pieces of artwork." A clock adds color and variety. On the other side of the room are photos of other relatives.

In the corner against the wall, Gomez designed a reading nook for the husband with a comfortable chair and a light in front of built-in bookshelves on the intersecting wall. The chair can be pulled further into the room for additional seating. The wall was also designed to look good from the chair with items hung at the lower eye-level. Next to the chair hangs a framed record of the family's ancestors passing through Ellis Island in 1906.

While some people request "minor" conversation areas, such as a grouping in an intimate corner, this family wanted a "major" conversation area. The room gathers around the large slate fireplace, which Gomez said was an asset in the decorating.

"The slate fireplace has different textures and colors and ties in nicely with the kitchen," she noted.

Speakers are hidden near the ceiling. "Music is important to them," Gomez said.

She was pleased that the family likes to mix modern with traditional so she chose a metal sculpture to hang over the slate fireplace.

"You will never see two of these alike," said Gomez. She tried out many pieces in that spot—including

"You have to know about the people. You want the personality of themselves to come out."

Dorene Gomez,
designer



DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

This family room underwent a transformation from pleasant but faded to colorful, warm and inviting—and distinctive to the owners.

ing a mirror—but when she hung this sculpture, everyone agreed it belonged.

"They wanted a room that was well planned out and they wanted it to be them," said Gomez.

In January, everything was ready to install at minimum inconvenience to the family.

"I think it turned out beautifully," said the wife. "It was great to have a professional do it. We

pretty much worked together but Dorene did the design and, fortunately, would get all the subcontractors."

This family room just might serve for longer than 10 years. ■

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Playful Labs still favorite breed for dog owners

Is your dog top dog?

For the 18th consecutive year, the Labrador Retriever is the most popular breed of dog in America, according to new statistics released by the American Kennel Club (AKC).

But while more than twice as many Labs were registered last year than any other purebred pooch, the Bulldog continues to amble its way up the list. The breed made news last year by returning to the AKC's Top 10 for the first time in more than 70 years and now has advanced two spots to land in eighth place.

"The playful Lab may still reign supreme, but the docile and adaptive nature of the Bulldog is gaining ground as a family favorite," said AKC Spokesperson Lisa Peterson. "It's no surprise to learn that this devoted family companion is still growing in popularity."

Here are the current top 10 most popular dogs in the country:

1. Labrador Retriever
2. Yorkshire Terrier
3. German Shepherd Dog
4. Golden Retriever
5. Beagle
6. Boxer
7. Dachshund



STATEPOINT
The Labrador Retriever celebrates its victory as the most popular dog breed in America.

8. Bulldog
9. Poodle
10. Shih Tzu

Both big and small dogs shared the list this year, with the four larger breeds all renowned for their popularity as loving family companions. Indeed, the Labrador Retriever, German Shepherd Dog, Golden Retriever and Boxer are known for their versatility and intelligence, making them good companions.

The AKC has noted some interesting trends over the past decade. The Bulldog is among the breeds that have increased in popularity most significantly, along with four of its relatives: Miniature Bull Terrier, Bull Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier and the Bullmastiff.

Among breeds significantly on the decline are the Lhasa Apso, Rottweiler, Schipperke, the Basset Hound and the Miniature Pinscher.

"Today dogs serve people in very diverse roles, from guide dog to bomb detection K-9," Peterson said. "But most of all, dogs are companions that ground us to nature in a busy and increasingly technological world."

For information on the 161 breeds of dogs that the AKC registers and resources for would-be owners, visit www.AKC.org.

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PHOTOS BY JANET PELLETIER

One of the most recognizable homes in the downtown area is this distinctive, two-story colonial revival at 4397 Second St. The home was built for Joseph Arendt and his family.

BUILDER

Continued from PAGE 1

a mortician and businessman (Graham Mortuary). A home with the same exact design resides at 462 St. Mary.

Moving farther along St. Mary Street, Bruce built a home at 530 St. Mary for Randolph Apperson in 1923 as a wedding present for his new wife, Ann. Apperson was the nephew of Phoebe Hearst and the manager of the Hearst San Simeon Properties, according to Huff. The front door to the home, now occupied by William and Anne Apperson was brought in by Bill Apperson from Hearst Castle. It was a former prototype of doors installed at the popular tourist site in San Simeon, Calif.

Bruce, who operated C.A. Bruce and Sons, worked with his sons, Allan, Robin and Charles Bruce Jr., and architect J.L. Weilbye.

In 1895, Bruce built a home at 733 Division St. for Frank Lewis, who owned Lewis Bros. Hardware and Candy Store. The one-story home was distinctive then and remains so today with a turret, or cone-like tower. It was said that the neighborhood children thought a witch lived there because it looked like a witch's hat. Bats, who were attracted to it, would fly into it. The home was also unusual because it had a basement.

Later, Bruce moved into Craftsman-style homes. He was also known to combine architectural elements of different styles to put his own unique signature on them. To show his versatility, Bruce built a Mediterranean-style home in the early 1920s at 517 St. Mary St.

One of the most recognizable houses he built was at 4397



Architect Charles Huff, also a historian, has performed renovations on some of Bruce's homes. Much of the information on Bruce was dug up by Huff through old newspaper clippings and given by those who have lived in his homes.

Second St. A colonial revival, the two-story home is striking. Palm trees surround the 1893 structure, which was built for the Arendt family (there is an Arendt Street nearby named for Joseph Arendt).

Bruce himself didn't live far away from the Second Street home. He built a one-story redwood home in 1894 using

square nails at 4636 Second St. It was one of the first he built. The Queen Anne-style cottage has been restored a handful of times, including after a eucalyptus tree fell on it and a runaway Model T Ford crashed through a room. The home has been inhabited by some prominent Pleasanton families, including the Bruces, who lived there for 45 years. More recent owners, Lori Scott-Venter and Ardith Urban, said in an old newspaper clipping that it was haunted by a friendly, female ghost.

Bruce and his family lived there while he was building a home next door, 4672 Second St., a western stick-style.

Vintner C.L. Crellin, who operated the original Ruby Hill Winery, hired Bruce to build him a new home in Ruby Hill after his home was burned to the ground in a fire. The new home was two stories and had 11 rooms.

One of the most well-known developers in Alameda County during his heyday, Bruce was also credited with building Amador Valley High School, Livermore High School and many area bridges, including the Niles Canyon roadway and bridges. He also built the old Fire Station No. 1 at 4444 Railroad Ave., which is currently being transformed into the Firehouse Arts Center.

Stroll down Main Street and you'll see what was known before the turn of the 20th century as the "White Corner"—the Kolln Hardware Building. Built in Italianate and Colonial Revival styles in 1890, the building was operated as a hardware store by the Lewis brothers. The building underwent an extensive restoration recently by Bud Cornett. A yogurt shop will open in the back portion of the building this weekend and Comerica Bank will open in the front of the building facing Main Street in June. ■



ARA CONTENT

Filling a basement, game room or family room with games and munchies will be the key to a teen's heart.

Keep teens home by giving them a haven

Most parents would agree that raising teenagers is never easy. But in a down economy, when many American families are trimming extras from their budgets, it can be even more difficult to keep teens happy, entertained and engaged in family life.

With the prospect of unemployment and falling home values on many parents' minds, sending teens on a ski trip with friends, or funding mall excursions and meals out are just not in the budget anymore. Parents may find it's a better investment—both for their homes and for their teens' development—to create a haven at home where teenagers can socialize for free.

"We decided to turn our basement into a place where my son Ian and his friends could spend time together," said Ann Mackinnon, a Minneapolis mother of a 15-year-old. "It's cheaper than sending him out somewhere, plus it gives me the peace of mind of knowing where he is, what he's doing and who he's with."

Turning your basement, game room or family room into a teen haven doesn't have to cost a bundle. Here are some helpful hints:

Make it game time: Video games are a big part of social life for many teens, but don't overlook the value of board games and table

games as well. Besides Wii and PlayStation, stock your teen haven with teen-friendly board games. Consider adding a table hockey or foosball game if space and budget allow.

Master the munchies: Teen boys are notoriously big eaters, so be sure to have plenty of teen-friendly (and hopefully healthful) snacks on hand if you're hosting your son's friends. You could even add a small refrigerator in your teen haven to keep beverages and snacks cold and within easy reach for both genders.

Set the mood: Atmosphere has a big impact on mood, especially if you're an already-moody teenager. Be sure to provide plenty of comfortable seating where teens can lounge with their friends while they chat, watch TV or surf the Internet. Consider setting the mood for the room by adding punch with teen-friendly decor like a wallpaper mural of your child's favorite sport.

Make yourself scarce: Just because your teen is hanging around at home with his friends, don't think it means you're automatically invited. Teen havens only work if parents respect the child's space and make their presences barely felt.

—ARA Content

Cleaning up your act

Spring cleaning tips offered by a pro

Springtime means flowers, rain showers and spring cleaning. It's easy to procrastinate, but spring cleaning is an excellent way to simplify your life simply by reducing clutter.

"Spring is a great time to go through your wardrobe. Remove items that are damaged or haven't been worn in two years, and have a yard sale or donate them to charity," said Mia Kile, who is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers, the Interior Design Educators Council, and an interior design instructor at The Art Institute of Dallas.

To reduce desktop clutter, Kile suggests burning music and data CDs onto an external hard drive. Earn a few extra dollars by selling the CDs to a used book or music store. Look for other ways to de-clutter by visiting a home store.

Use spring cleaning as a time to check the batteries in your smoke detector and to change your air filters.

"Take this opportunity to call your air conditioning guy and have him take a look

before the busy summer season, Kile added.

As for spring decorating, Kile suggests changing out artwork or family photos as the seasons change.

"This will keep things fresh, and you will notice things instead of walking by them every day and taking them for granted," she said.

The same can be said for small decorative items like pillows and throws. Keeping a neutral color palette will allow you to add blasts of color depending on the season—Kile hints that muted, citrusy colors are in for spring. You can also bring in color through paint on walls, furniture or trim. It's an inexpensive way to make a room look refreshed.

Replacing heavy drapes with light, linen or sheer fabrics can open up a room and allow natural light to come in. Slipcover the sofa or chairs with a floral print or pale, springy colors. Even rearranging the furniture can make a room feel like new, just in time for spring.

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More people decking their homes out with vinyl

Material may cost more up-front, but lasts longer, doesn't fade

When it comes to home improvements, deck systems top the list with an estimated 4 million new decks built annually in the U.S. and 40 million remodeled decks gracing today's homes.

This rising trend has led manufacturers to offer a wider variety of deck materials, styles, and options, but choices can be overwhelming. While wood has traditionally won the popularity contest for decks due to its natural appearance, vinyl is becoming a choice material for outdoor home entertaining due to its combination of carefree maintenance, aesthetics and value.

Why are more people "decking out" their homes with vinyl? One big reason is time. Working families value leisure time more than ever because they have less time to maintain their outdoor environments. Vinyl decks are virtually maintenance-free, requiring only a yearly power-wash to maintain, whereas wood fades and deteriorates with costly regular stain and sealant applications. Unlike wood or composite, vinyl is color-



fast and non-porous, so dirt and stains don't collect to compromise appearance. Vinyl decks retain their original fresh appearance for many decades.

"Consumers are also choosing vinyl to save money. While vinyl has a higher up-front cost than wood, it lasts longer and delivers a total return on investment in just five to seven years versus wood, which delivers no payback due to its prohibitive maintenance costs," said Deron Manwaring, national sales and marketing manager for Royal Outdoor Products.

Not all vinyl deck systems are the same. Find a supplier with a complete vinyl package that includes not only basic deck materials, but compatible vinyl rails, posts and trim to create an integrated look that adds curb appeal to your home exterior. Whether you're a homeowner or residential contractor, you want an experienced vinyl deck company that delivers custom, innovative solutions to suit specific needs and tastes.

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Vegetable gardens save families money

Balconies, porches great locations for container gardens

During World War II, Americans were encouraged to convert their backyards into Victory Gardens to contribute to the war effort. The gardens also saved families money, something that was not abundant to most at the time. With the current economic downturn affecting many families' budgets and in light of produce scares in 2008, starting a backyard vegetable garden is a great way to help reduce grocery bills during the summer months while keeping your family supplied with healthy foods.

Even if you don't have a lot of space, you can still produce plump red tomatoes, fresh lettuce, spicy peppers and more before the end of summer. Here are some simple tips for gardening in small spaces for big results:

Mix vegetables with flowers

If you already have an established flower bed, but no more land available for a vegetable patch, work some of your vegetables in between perennials. Carrots and onions don't need a lot of root space, and their foliage above ground can bring variety to the overall look of your landscape. Just make sure your vegetables will have plenty of sunshine and are protected from hungry wildlife.

Start a container garden

Balconies and porches are perfect locations for container gardens. Start easy with lettuce seeds or onions set in a deep window box. Or use a larger pot for peppers or tomatoes.

To kick off the growing season for your tomatoes and peppers, use an insulating system in your container that will help protect seedlings from frost conditions and extends the growing season.

Some helpful tips for container gardening are:

- Find containers that are large enough for the fully-grown plant to prevent root binding.
- Make sure containers have adequate drainage holes and are not plugged with soil or rocks.
- Avoid container materials that contain products toxic or harmful to plants.
- Don't use regular garden soil. Instead, use potting soil or a mix of garden soil with compost or perlite for enhanced drainage.
- Water plants frequently as plants in containers are more likely to dry out due to sun and wind exposure.

Grow tall gardens

Cucumbers, squash and melon plants take up plenty of space when they're sprawling across your ground. But getting them off the ground is an ideal solution for maximizing your harvest in a minimum amount of area. Installing a trellis next to plants allows you to direct vine plants' growth upward, while protecting fruit and vegetables from ground rot and pests. Using nylon netting around your container pots, a porch railing or your garden beds is a great and durable way to encourage climbing vines.

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Going with stock cabinetry, as opposed to custom or semi-custom, will allow you to spend on such extras as decorative moldings and accents.

Stock cabinets are affordable kitchen upgrade

Bypassing custom, semi-custom a major cost savings

Families all across the country are tightening their purse strings and looking for ways to cut back on expenses. As a result, many are choosing to stay home and cook instead of going out to eat. This growing trend has sparked a demand for kitchens with the capability to handle high traffic and store a wide array of cooking essentials.

Connie Edwards, certified kitchen and bathroom designer and director of design for American Woodmark cabinetry, offers some useful tips and advice:

Stocking the cupboards: "One of the major steps in getting the look for less is using stock cabinets instead of custom or semi-custom," Edwards said. "These days, stock cabinetry isn't what it used to be, as there are so many ways to personalize with moldings, hardware, wood species and finishes. Best of all, by using stock cabinets, you can get a fabulous look with money to spare for upgrades or future remodeling projects."

According to Edwards, up to 50 percent of the average kitchen remodeling budget is spent on cabinets, so it's important to get the most out of your money and minimize excess spending.

A little extra goes a long way: Choosing stock cabinets means you'll be able to make your dollar go further. For instance, consider extras in your budget such as decorative crown molding to give cabinets a finished, furniture-like look. If moldings aren't your style, try personalizing cabinets with decorative accents such as corbels and overlays or glass inserts. To finish off the look, use attention-grabbing hardware to complement the overall design. Manufacturers list a variety of accessory combinations and hardware options on their websites, making it easy for customers to achieve a result that reflects their personal style.

Reorganize your options: In the past few years, stock cabinet companies have dramatically increased the cabinetry options available. Specialized organizational accessories such as base pot and pan organizers and wall china displays are among the popular stock cabinetry upgrades. Options like these can help maximize functionality and enhance the aesthetics of smaller kitchen spaces, making them an asset in increasing home value.

Old World look at a new price: A pop-



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ular trend in custom cabinetry is using the arsenal of finishing options to give cabinets an old-fashioned or rubbed look. However, similar styling can be achieved by choosing a stock cabinetry line that offers glazed door styles. Colors such as coffee, mocha, chocolate and butterscotch glazing give kitchens a deeply textured look without reaching deeply into your pockets.

Separating the dollars and cents: The first thing to do is set kitchen priorities. If you can't live without that state-of-the-art refrigerator with three ice settings, go for it but realize you may have to cut back on something else. On the other hand, the money you save using stock cabinets can be used on a trendy tiled backsplash or to upgrade appliances. The key to staying on budget is realizing it's OK to invest in some higher-priced items as long as you balance them with more affordable ones.

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It's time to shape your lawn for summer

Spring lawn care makes care easier in warm weather months

The grass is always greener in your neighbor's yard, or so it seems.

With the economy in doldrums, more Pleasanton homeowners will likely be grabbing gardening tools and undertaking lawn maintenance themselves rather than paying lawn care professionals.

But doing it yourself and knowing what to do are two different things.

"Many lawns emerge from the winter months dry, barren and some even diseased, making a lawn care regimen an important part of spring cleaning," said Mark Short, vice president of product development at Agri-Fab, a manufacturer of lawn and garden attachments. "The good news is there are affordable tools that allow for homeowners to tackle lawn chores themselves and even save on time and backaches associated with tools of the past."

To ensure you're on your way to a lush lawn, consider the following:

•Sweeping: Just as you use a sweeper for indoor cleaning, apply the same idea outdoors. Before your lawn can blossom, you'll need to remove dead leaves, twigs and debris that have gathered. Instead of using a rake or picking up debris by hand, save yourself the backache and some time by buying, borrowing or renting a lawn sweeper. Push lawn sweepers work well for smaller lawns; a tractor-tow-behind model that sweeps up everything in its path is best for large lawns. When using a tow-behind, look for one that collapses for compact storage and eliminates wheel skipping, the leading sweeper frustration.

•Rolling: As the seasons change, you may see subtle bumps and grooves in your lawn. Rolling the lawn at the start of the season is important for proper fertilizer and grass seed application, as well as precise mowing.

•Dethatching: Thatch is a layer of problem material that hides between layers of soil. Thatch build-up can spread harmful pests and disease. It also can prevent water and nutrients from reaching the lawn's root zone. Invest in a dethatcher, which brings matted layers of thatch to the surface for easy removal.

•Aerating: Aerating should be done at the beginning of the season to improve oxygen circulation, reduce weeds and help absorb fertilizer. To determine whether your lawn needs aerating, use the screwdriver test. Try to insert a screwdriver into the ground. If it's difficult to penetrate, you need to aerate. Many aerators conveniently attach to the back of a tractor and include knives that effortlessly slice into soil.

•Re-Seeding: To give your lawn a boost and repair seasonal damage, re-seed at the start of the season. Use a spreader for even distribution to ensure the lawn grows evenly. Both push and tow-behind spreaders are available. Your local lawn and garden store can help if you don't know what type of seed to purchase.

•Mowing: Once your grass reaches three inches tall, begin mowing. The first mowing will help remove old, damaged grass and reveal a green lawn you can enjoy for the remainder of the season.

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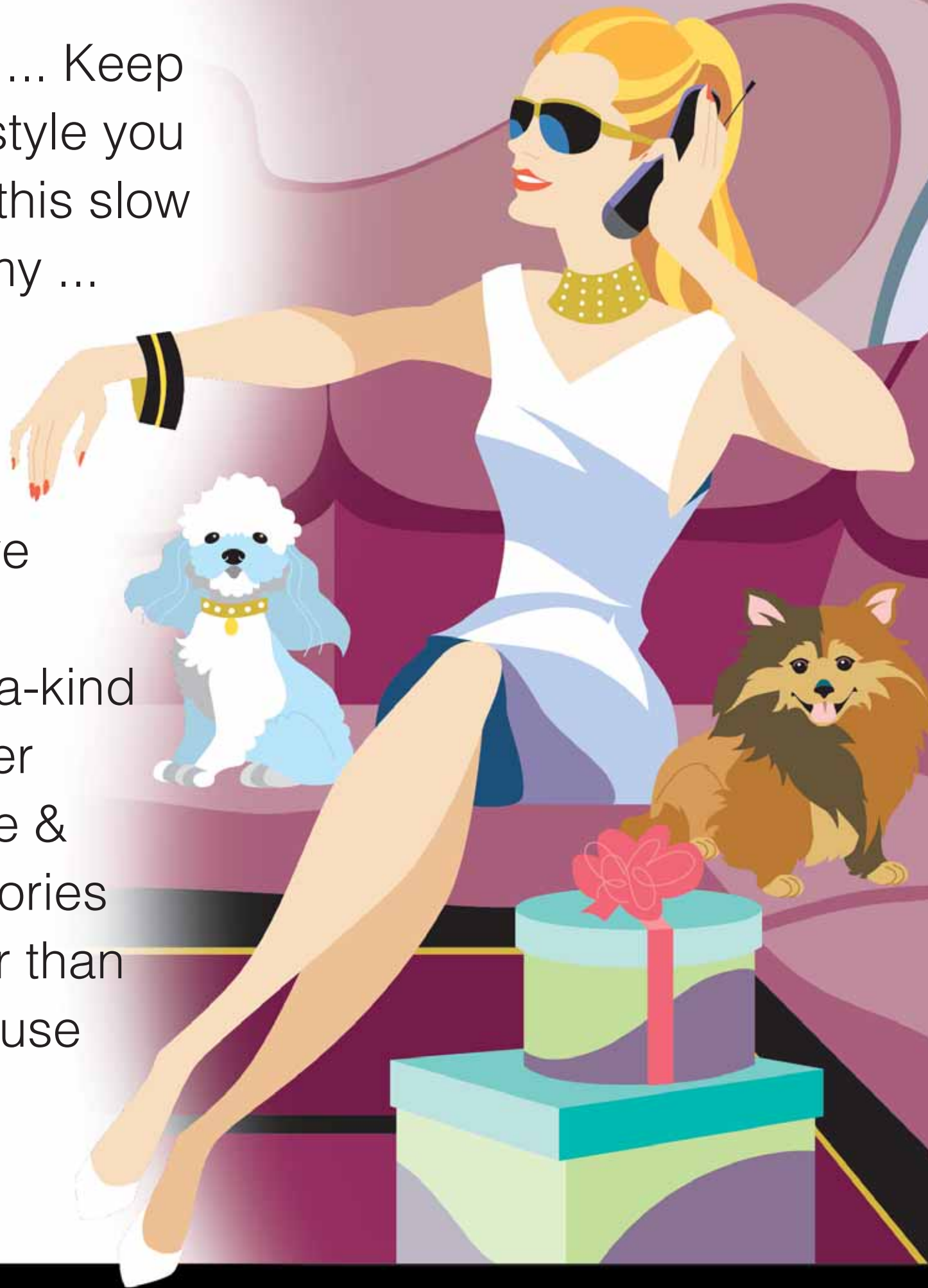


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