

On the homefront

Home improvement comforting during uncertain times

By SALLY D. KETCHUM
Special to the Record-Eagle

The recent terrorist attacks and subsequent events have strongly affected the American home front.

A particular effect during war is a greater appreciation of home. Experts say the natural response is to seek comfort in home, friends and family. Dr. Pepper Schwartz, a Washington University professor of psychology, says these effects are both psychological and physiological.

An interesting side effect is that while Americans always seek to maximize the comfort of their homes, home improvement businesses are still reporting boom, despite the recession.

Brent Kirkby, spokesman for the Lowe's home improvement chain, said that war brings out the "nesting instinct" in people.

Traverse City residents are no exception. Stewart-Zacks in downtown Traverse City is "busier than usual," said co-owner Mary Zack.

People are looking for the comforts of home," she said. "For instance, we are selling a lot of New Zealand sheep skins."

Though sheep skins and leather are at the unprocessed end of comfort coverings, the emphasis on natural fabrics, even those processed intricately, is clear.

Nature is a key in fall color trends, too, with the myriad hues of brown, gold and burgundy. Some designers refer to this range as "the horse-hunting" colors. It is all nature, however, with botanical prints and embroidered fabrics following the trend.

One upscale, Salamandre fabric, for instance, features unusual shades of a calm and muted red in blooms and some leaves, then sage and olive greens on stems and other leaves, all on an off-white background. Salamandre is also introducing upholstered furniture which complements its fabric lines.

Although recent developments in high-tech, synthetic fabrics offer nicely draping, buttery-soft fabrics, a return to simple comfort during stressful times also means a return to the pleasures of former times and production methods. This means that quilts and quilting are big now.

Interior designer Patricia Wood of Harbor Springs combines "comfort, function and style" in her projects.

Wood, who divides her time between northern Michigan and Dallas, offers "a fantasy of antique furniture upholstered in vintage quilts."

Stewart-Zacks emphasizes comfort goods for the home, but also offers a price range of fabrics which can be special ordered after making choices from the manufacturers' (Salamandre, Anna French, Schumacher, etc.) sample books at the store. Their in-store quilts fall into three ranges, \$124, \$250 and \$600-\$700.

Mary Zack said that Traverse customers are busy people. "They know what they want; they like custom goods and have good taste, but most don't have the time to sew or quilt. We are very busy offering these services to them."

Hamilton Fabrics of Traverse City has materials in the store for just about every price range, according



Easy maintenance flooring tile that resemble, but are stronger than marble or granite, are a popular home improvement choice. They are more wear-resistant, easily cleaned and do not support mold, mildew or bacterial growth.

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to Jeff Hamilton. He aims to accommodate both taste and budgets.

Home improvement customers seek sensible, easy maintenance floorings, too. Crossville Porcelain Stone, for instance, is stronger than marble or granite and more wear-resistant. It is easily cleaned, but does not allow mold, mildew or bacterial growth. Area dealers include Tile Techniques, Western Concrete

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