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Exterior doors and shutters offer style, efficiency and value to home

By HEATHER JOHNSON DUROCHER

Special to the Record-Eagle

When it came time to pick exterior doors for their newly built house, Lisa and Kevin Hockin didn't mind paying a bit more in exchange for quality. But the Traverse City couple also wanted doors requiring as little maintenance as possible.

"We really like wooden doors but we also knew we didn't want to have to do the maintenance involved in caring for wooden doors," Lisa Hockin said.

Working with Wes Hernden, a longtime sales associate at Astro in Traverse City, the couple discovered fiberglass doors.

"They had some beautiful doors that are fiberglass and they have a wood texture to them and you put finish over them," said Hockins.

The Hockins liked the look, as have family and friends who've visited their home, built two years ago.

"We've had a lot of compliments on our doors. They look like an oak," said Hockins.

Exterior doors as well as windows and shutters offer homeowners the opportunity to show off new styles and individual tastes. Home experts suggest learning about what's available and matching that with what you personally like when making these purchases, whether building or remodeling. Sticking with styles that match your home also is a consideration.

"There always should be rules about keeping the style of the door in harmony with the style of the home," said Eileen Cochran, marketing director at Brown Lumber in Traverse City. "If you've got a very contemporary home, you don't want to put a six-panel door with etched glass and brass hardware. You'd want to go with something more contemporary — a nickel or brushed chrome, and a more streamlined door. Or something custom-made in wood that would be in harmony with the style of your home."

"Same with shutters," Cochran added. "There are many homes that shouldn't have them and don't need them. There are other ways of dressing up a window than just shutters. There are all

kinds of materials that can go around windows, all kinds of trim."

Exterior Doors

Fiberglass doors are popular, according to Hernden, because not only can they simulate the appearance of custom-made wooden doors, but they don't require the eventual touch-ups due to normal wear and tear that true wood does. In addition to fiberglass, which can be stained as well as painted, homeowners may choose from steel doors for the home's exterior entrances, said Hernden.

"The difference between fiberglass and steel is the fiberglass has more detail than steel. But we still sell a lot steel," he said. "I don't know if fiberglass is any better than steel, but for an entry door, they want more detail and will go to fiberglass. Entry doors are the center of attention."

Cochran agreed. People recognize the value of a nice-looking door, which is why more and more homeowners are opting for fancier doors, especially those made of fiberglass, Cochran said.

"The trend is to go with something a little more dressy, sort of like side lights, which are glass panels that go aside the door and a transom which is the glass panel above a door," she said. "The reason that people are doing more of that is because it does not add that much more cost to the home but it has an extremely high perceived value ... It's a good investment, especially in a resale type of situation."

Steel doors are another popular choice for exterior doors, and are economically priced, Cochran said. These doors can be flat or feature patterns and cut glass.

"A steel door can't be stained, it needs to be painted, but that's another thing that can be dressed up on a house," she said. "It comes primed and ready to paint. Most people do paint them. It doesn't have to be just white."

The Hockins, whose front door includes a glass feature, were pleased with its cost. Hockins described the design as "a modern, simple look."

"I was relatively surprised at how affordable it was," she said, adding price was important since they built their home on

one-income; the couple recently returned to the area after living downstate and Lisa stays at home with the couple's 9-month-old son.

A quality door needn't cost a fortune, Hernden said.

"You could get into a good exterior door starting at \$150 and go up and up as elaborate as you want," he said.

In addition to style, a door's energy efficiency is important, Hernden said.

"The better doors are energy efficient," he said. "This is very important. If you spend a little more for a good door it's going to save you more down the road."

Door handles, which can add to the look of a home's entry, have changed a bit.

Although "there's nothing real fancy about door handles, the finish is getting a little better," noted Hernden.

"It used to be there were pretty much two types of finishes — chrome or brass — and then they started sealing the brass so it wouldn't tarnish," Cochran added. "Now there is nickel plated finishes, finishes that look like a brushed chrome instead of a shiny. There's a lot of different things they're doing with the metal to give it a different color and look."

Shutters and more

Homeowners wishing to feature shutters on their home have more choices than ever, Hernden said. Unlike in the past, when they were made in standard sizes and colors, shutters now come custom-made.

"A lot of them are all vinyl, custom size — any height you want," he said. "There are 20 some different colors as opposed to the white, black and brown."

Varying shades of green and burgundy top the most-wanted color list, Hernden said. Another window trend is the use of single-pane windows for porches. More and more homeowners, whether they're building, adding on or making the most of current amenities, are using these windows for porches to create a three-season room.

"It'll extend the use of your porch a little longer," Hernden said. "The trend seems to be everyone has decks now, big porches. Everyone wants to be outside."

Heather Johnson Durocher is a local freelance writer.



Record-Eagle/Jim Boyin

Above, Astro Building Products in Traverse City carries this Classic Craft fiberglass door set. The compressed, molded fiberglass is weather-resistant and easy to stain. Below, Copper and nickel plated door handles are just some color choices for homeowners. And today's door handles are given a finish that protects their luster from the elements.



Spring brings new products for summer living

By LORI HALL STEELE

Special to the Record-Eagle

Slinky-like hoses, stainless steel grills, retro awnings and vacuum-powered mosquito catchers are among new products this year aimed at enhancing life in the great outdoors, from backyards to decks to front porches.

The new mosquito trap, by Lentek, is a propane-powered device that controls the pesky biters in a ¾-acre area. This is not your typical bug zapper. Rather, the device emits an even temperature and carbon dioxide, mimicking a human body and luring the bloodthirsty insects toward its blue light. A fan sucks them into a chamber. Voila: No more mosquitoes.

"You won't feel the vacuum — mosquitoes are not real strong," said Shawn O'Brien, operations manager for Ace Hardware in Traverse City, Acme and Chum's Corners. "These are hot. They're going to be everywhere this year."

The \$300 units are about 4 feet tall and run off a 20-pound propane cylinder that lasts about a month.

For a sense of wilderness in the middle of town, Eric Harris, manager of Northern Paradise swim spas in Traverse City, suggests an outdoor fireplace. But not just any outdoor fireplace. The new campfire gas fireplace looks like the real thing, with a circle of stones and criss-crossed logs.

The \$450 campfire can be used anywhere, including on decks, and is about 20 inches in diameter. It is fueled either by a propane cylinder, like those used on gas grill, or by a gas pipe, run underground.

Chores in small areas will be less cumbersome with the new self-coiling 50-foot hose, available for about \$20.

"They are slick. You pull it out like a Slinky," O'Brien said.

Kooky, artsy sprinklers — introduced several years ago at high-priced galleries and garden shops — also are helping keep yards irrigated this year, but now at lower prices. These spinning wonders remain in the ground when not in use, providing a punch of whimsy and structure in gardens. They are typically made of copper, often adorned with glass or twisted metal.

Models run anywhere from \$30 to \$130, and quality varies.

"They're just beautiful when they're not on and spectacular when they're spinning," said Julie Sovereign, owner of Garden Goods in Traverse City. "The motion of the water is just breathtaking — it dances."

Retro colors and reinterpreted classics also are debuting this season. Advance Awnings in Traverse City will be selling awning fabrics in colors that were the best sellers in 1947 — beiges, soft sage and mellow yellow. Lois Stoppel, vice president of the Acme-based Advance Awnings, called the tones "a soothing color combination."

Glen Raven, parent company to Sunbrella, one of the nation's largest fabric suppliers, recently reintroduced the palette. The 1940s colors will be used in awnings, upholstery for outdoor furniture, cushioning, umbrellas and other applications.

Speaking of retro, tiki torches are making a comeback. The new-millennium interpretation of these backyard flames are "like the tiki torch of old but

much improved in terms of visual interest," Sovereign said. Some of the oil-fueled torches include globes that were hand-blown in Poland or made of recycled glass in Mexico. Some are actual torches that stick in the ground, while others hang from branches or sit tabletop, illuminating those midsummer nights.

In addition to the reintroduction of retro colors, some outdoor furniture sellers are seeing a splashier palette.

"Up in northern Michigan, we carry more of the greens and grays, but it's gotten brighter this year with blues and yellows and a lot of patterns in the outdoor furniture," said Bill Grove, assistant manager of VanDrie Home Furnishings of Traverse City.

Thinking kabobs? Shrimp on the barbie? Well, backyard barbecues hit a new level of high-tech seriousness this summer with Weber's Gold B stainless steel grill. The classic grill manufacturer is selling the new \$550 gas grill with a lifetime warranty. It has all the bells and whistles: flavorizer bars and multiple cooking surfaces, O'Brien said.

Among high-end outdoor products, Harris says there's been a revolution in hot tubs. The Bullfrog Spa is the only hot tub that allows people to change the whole jet configuration — and seats — at whim. Also new is a stereo system that uses the hot tub shell as a speaker. Nothing's exposed.

"You can stand outside the spa, and you don't hear music," Harris said. "You sit in the spa, and you hear the most incredible surround sound that you've ever heard. You can have one in the city and have your

stereo blaring away and you're not going to be bothering your neighbors."

Swim spas also are catching on, and sales at Northern Paradise have doubled in the past year. The 4-foot-deep units are smaller than in-ground pools — starting around 14-by-8 feet — and use about one-tenth of the water. The spas start around \$12,000, compared to about \$16,000 for a conventional pool.

"You can exercise in it, you can use it for soaking, you can use it as a hot tub, it's just many things in one package," Harris said.

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Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

The "Night Fire" from Heatilator offers camp-like heat even on a deck or patio, featured at Northern Paradise in Traverse City. Delaine Beckman, 3, hangs out "pool side" in the Swim Spa at Northern Paradise in Traverse City. The swim spa is a mini-swim pool with jets that make you feel like you're swimming against the current.

