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Whether purchasing appliances for better energy savings, to invest in your home’s value or simply to enjoy new levels of functionality, homeowners can reap the benefits of technological innovations in the kitchen.

A relatively new technology for cooktops is induction, which uses a high-frequency electromagnet to transfer energy into metal. The transferred energy causes the metal in the cooking vessel to become hot.

“You can put your hand on the cooktop all day long, and it will never get hot,” said Keith Eilts, owner of Arrow Maytag Home Appliance Center, 1224 E. 27th, “But if you use a pan that’s magnetic, it will heat up.”

Seventy percent more energy efficient than a gas cooktop, an induction burner can bring water to the boiling point in 90 seconds. In addition, the burners adjust to the size of the pan being used.

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Mention a holiday in October, and a lot of people will think of Halloween. Not Caroline Von Lintel, an interior designer and owner of dV8 Design Haus, 809 Main, an interior design business specializing in tile boutique and cabinetry set to open later this month in Hays.

Von Lintel already was thinking Christmas when she went to market in Los Angeles in September. She goes to market several times a year in different parts of the country and brings back with her new ideas.

New trends this year, said Von Lintel — who also does complete Christmas decorating as a consultant — are clip-on ornaments and metallic or glass ornaments, eliminating the bag of hooks to keep track of.
She said if you didn’t get all you wanted in after-Christmas, super-deal aisles in January, the beginning of November would be a good time to start looking. Some even start decorating by that time.

Of course, if you are partial to fresh trees, the week after Thanksgiving is more practical.

A way to enjoy decorations longer and still have a lot of green at the same time, Von Lintel pointed out, is to go with live potted trees you can replant.

“That is a huge trend,” she said, adding another popular trend is themed trees and children’s trees.

Children’s trees give youngsters an “opportunity to collect and participate and not have the worries of them breaking heirlooms or collectibles,” while themed trees let kids of all ages express themselves.

And some folks do both.

“I have found that people are doing more than one tree,” she said. “(They’ll have) the larger traditional tree and a smaller, playful interactive tree.”

A convenience, as well as a safety feature, for any kind of tree lights in recent years is a remote or wireless power bar where all lights can be turned on or off with a touch of a button.

While there are lots of stores that sell online holiday merchandise, Von Lintel likes a website of a store in a small town in Michigan called Frankenmuth.

“It’s a community that is committed to promoting the spirit of Christmas,” she said. “And it also is a German community like Hays.”

Bronner’s Christmas Wonderland in Frankenmuth — www.bronners.com — calls itself the world’s largest Christmas store featuring “your one-stop shop for ornaments and everything Christmas.”
Even in a tough economy, homeowners who take the time to “stage” their home often are able to sell their homes faster and at a higher selling price.

It’s important for homeowners to know staging is a process, said Kris Dewell, accredited home-staging specialist, accredited buyer’s representative and certified residential specialist.

“It’s a process of pulling together your home and putting your best foot forward for your home so that you can get top dollar,” she said.

Pointing out the attributes of the staged home at 1404 W. 45th provided by Covenant Builders, developer for the new King’s Gate Addition, Dewell emphasized the use of space and color.

“This home has personality,” she said. “It’s got some pop.”

Since nearly all real estate now is marketed through real estate Web sites, staging has become a particularly important step in the marketing process.
The appearance of clutter in photos can undermine a home’s appeal to online shoppers.

Often a homeowner has difficulty being objective about the strengths and weaknesses of his or her own home. Dewell has been an accredited home stager for four years and assists homeowners by pointing out pitfalls of a home’s appearance and suggesting changes that can make the home appealing to a wide range of potential buyers.

“The seller should somehow connect with the buyer and make them feel like this could be their home,” she said. “They need to remember that buying is an emotional decision.”

Adding furniture to a vacant home is helpful, Dewell said. In metropolitan areas, many homeowners rent furniture to make the home look lived-in. However, Dewell finds a more common issue in her local business is removing excess furnishings from a home.

“The homeowner may have to rent a storage unit or move the furniture to the new house they’re buying,” she said. “So that is more of a problem than actually having to find furniture.”

Staging doesn’t have to be costly. Dewell recommends painting as the technique that often provides the “biggest bang for the buck.”

She pointed out a recent listing, on the market only a few days, with several offers already in the works.

“Painting that home cost under $500, and I can almost guarantee it made several thousand dollars difference in the price,” she said. “We had purple walls, pink walls, yellow walls, green walls, wallpaper and borders. It was a mishmash of ’80s style. Now it’s cohesive.”

Several steps are involved in the staging process, according to Dewell.

1. De-clutter: Make every effort to show as much square footage of the home as possible without making the home look bare.
2. Clean: Go through the house with a careful, thorough and objective eye, and make everything shine — the home should smell clean as well.
3. Repair, replace, redecorate: Don’t start any major projects, but finish small projects that are in the works and fix things that are broken.
4. Depersonalize: This doesn’t necessarily mean making the home entirely generic, but can mean repainting rooms formerly decorated in team colors or removing a few family photos.
5. Finishing touches: Replace dingy or dated bedding and towels, add throw pillows to a couch, replace worn window treatments or add deck furniture and a potted plant.
With her four children grown and out on their own, Pam Pyle was looking to downsize when she moved to Hays from Dodge City this past spring.

She wanted to concentrate on her new job as a registered nurse at Hays Medical Center and not have to worry about keeping up a large home and yard.

Something easy, something small, she told her real estate agent.

Then one day on a whim, Adele Shaver showed Pyle an old 3,500-plus square-foot, two-story home at the corner of 14th and Ash.

“She couldn’t figure out what I wanted,” Pyle said of Shaver. “I was kind of all over the place. She mentioned this home one day, and I decided to take a look.”

The Victorian-style home, built in 1903, was the exact opposite of what Pyle had been looking for. But one look at the woodwork and high ceilings, and some precious memories from her children’s days of growing up in Dodge City came flooding back.
“We lived in a two-story house that had all the bedrooms on one floor,” Pyle explained. “The kids would go to bed acting like the Waltons,” she said of the popular TV series that ran from 1972 to 1981. “They would say each name, like ‘Good night, John Boy,’ go through the whole list.”

That kind of home, however, was not what Pyle was looking for in Hays.

“I had wanted the laundry room and bedrooms all on (the same) floor,” she said. “But I did want a dining room large enough to have all the kids home at once, plus four grandkids.”

That all seemed simple enough, except she also wanted a porch on the house.

“I always wanted a porch,” said Pyle, who admitted it was love at first sight when she drove up to the home with a wraparound porch along the east and south sides of the house. “This house had everything I wanted, so I said, ‘I think I’ll take it.’ ”

“Really?” Shaver asked.

Really.

That was a few short months ago. After looking at the house in April, Pyle closed on the deal in May and moved to Hays in June.

Now, Pyle spends her free time — which sometimes is in the middle of the night because she is used to working the overnight shift — working in her yard.

A large wooden deck on the back side of the house provides a “perfect” outdoor area for her two small pet dogs, Abby and Molly.

Pyle already had plenty of furniture to furnish the home, and before she makes any significant changes, she is having fun learning about the house’s history.

“I looked up some of the history on the Internet, and nuns lived here, and some nursing students,” Pyle said, admitting that bit of news was interesting since she is a nurse herself.
The kitchen has been modernized; otherwise, the rest of the home appears to be much the same as when it was built. A small butler's pantry serves as an entryway from the kitchen to the dining room. Hallways are wide and spacious, and a large, wide wooden staircase takes her to the second floor that features three bedrooms, an office and a bathroom. Wooden floors are in all but one room.

A third-floor loft that can be reached only by an extremely narrow, steep staircase could be finished and make for even more room. In one corner is a turret with several windows overlooking the street below.

“I think that could make a really cute apartment,” Pyle said. “And I already have a college kid from Dodge who wants to live up there.”

Smith said she “loves” the space and already hosted a large family gathering during the Fourth of July weekend.

She said it was the first of many such events she plans to have at her new home, which, for her, the real drawing card still is the porch.

“So relaxing to sit out there, especially at night,” Pyle said. “Watch cars drive by, people go by on foot or on bicycles. Really peaceful.”
Electrolux also offers wall ovens featuring convection cooking modes and multi-stage cooking options. Some innovative features include: perfect turkey button, “my favorite” settings, bread-proof mode and slow-cook mode.

Energy savings is an important concern for many appliance shoppers. By replacing existing kitchen appliances, including dishwasher, microwave, refrigerator and oven, with Consortium Energy Efficiency Tier 3 rated appliances, a homeowner can realize up to $400 a year in energy savings, Eilts said.

All Energy Star appliances are not created equal. Eilts said shoppers need to consider the differences in an appliance’s CEE Tier ratings. Tier 1 rated appliances save 10 percent in energy costs, Tier 2, 20 percent and Tier 3, 30 percent.

Replacing that outdated, 30-year old refrigerator might save up to $200 a year. Eilts said an Electrolux Tier 3 energy rated refrigerator uses less energy than a 60-watt lightbulb. With a temperature-controlled drawer designed for specific items such as wine or cheese, the appliance is really a refrigerator within a refrigerator.

It’s not just a matter of energy savings, but food budgets can be reduced with the addition of a new energy efficient refrigerator. A refrigerator that keeps your food fresh longer can mean less food is wasted and pay for the upgrade in food bill savings.

Selecting the right appliance also can increase the bottom line when selling your home.

“This is what will make or break your house,” Eilts said. Adding functional, technologically advanced appliances will bring “added value and a return on your investment.”

“If you have a good kitchen, people will overlook other distractions in the house and want that kitchen,” Eilts said. “But not only that, you will have something you can really use and appreciate.”
KANSAS CITY, Mo. — This year’s spring and summer severe storms took a toll on homes, businesses and communities throughout the Midwest, leaving many to muck out, clean up, repair or rebuild.

The silver lining amid the devastation, though, is individuals and communities can take action to better protect themselves in the future against the impacts of all kinds of weather, from tornadoes and floods to ice storms and blizzards. Those actions are known as mitigation, or disaster-resistant measures. The ideas of what can be done are endless and the costs can fit any budget.

“It’s been proven time and again that mitigation works and that the impact on lives and properties can be reduced in future disasters,” said Beth Freeman, FEMA Region VII administrator in Kansas City. “Financially, the savings can be as significant as four or more dollars for every one dollar spent on mitigation. If that’s not incentive enough, just think about the heartache and inconvenience that can be saved. There’s no doubt that taking protective action before the next storm is worth it.”

Repairing, remodeling or building a new home or business — no matter the reason — all present perfect opportunities to incorporate mitigation measures. Residents always should check with local officials to determine what kind of permitting is required.

Consider some of these ideas:
• Reinforce the roof.
• Seal all exterior openings, such as holes where wires, cables and pipes enter or exit a structure (winds of 74 mph can blow water up a wall about 4 feet).
• Raise electrical panel boxes and outlets.
• Elevate appliances such as a washer and dryer, water heater, furnace or air conditioner.
• Anchor propane tanks.
• Strengthen garage doors by installing wood or metal stiffeners to an existing door or replacing the door with one that is specifically designed to resist high winds.
• Consider elevating an entire structure. Check with local building officials for details.

Purchase flood insurance.
Here’s how residents can get started:
• Make a plan.
• Set a budget to help avoid overspending.
• Check local requirements before beginning work.
• Hire a professional when needed.

Source: FEMA
www.fema.gov
Betsy Burnham loves designing bedrooms for young children. But before she can begin, she sometimes has to steer clients away from painfully cute design ideas.

“I don’t like cutesy things — the murals, the Disney things,” said Burnham, an interior designer based in Los Angeles.

“Why give them a really babyish room, when it’s so expensive to change everything” as the kids grow older?

A child’s room can be wonderfully whimsical, she said, “but it can also fit in with the rest of your decor.”

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Many parents feel obligated to stick with colors and imagery commonly associated with little kids.

“But when you do that,” said designer Brian Patrick Flynn, founder of decordemon.com, “you create a powder keg, because then you have to redecorate when they get bigger.”

How do you create a space that is kid-friendly, but will also grow with your child and mesh with the rest of your home?

Flynn, Burnham and HGTV’s latest “Design Star” winner, Emily Henderson, share their advice:

Break the rules

Forget the typical pastels and primary colors. Flynn loves vibrant oranges and greens for kids’ bedrooms: “They’re high energy, but totally gender-neutral.”

White and brown also are a great combination, he said, because you can accessorize them with a range of other colors as the child’s taste changes.

If you’re set on pink, Burnham suggests using a shade like salmon or watermelon instead of a more predictable bubblegum pink.
And rather than a basic royal blue, consider a deep navy for a look that’s crisp and a bit more grown-up.

“There are so many ways of doing color and pattern in sophisticated way,” Henderson said. “So many fabrics and wallpapers that are amazing animal prints, figures of animals that are modern and fresh and fun.”

Consider painting stripes on kids’ ceilings, or wallpapering the ceiling to bring in a pop of texture and color.

“Especially for a baby,” said Henderson, decorating the ceiling “is kind of going to wake up their imagination.”

Flynn likes using geometric print wallpaper that evokes ’60s or ’70s style, perhaps in black and white or olive and taupe. He also likes using indoor/outdoor fabric in children’s rooms, because of the impressive durability.

Skip the kiddie furniture
Burnham said a dresser with a changing pad on top can be a functional and stylish alternative to a traditional changing table. And rather than buying a prefab kids’ table and chairs set, Henderson recommends hunting at flea markets for vintage school chairs and desks.

No need to buy a toddler bed: Your child doesn’t need one.

“If you invest in a couple of really nice twin beds, or just one twin bed,” Burnham said, “you can probably turn that bed into a daybed once the child moves on to a full- or queen-size bed.”

And leave that Spiderman lamp on the shelf at the big box store. Flynn said vintage lighting can give a child’s room much more style. Chrome or brass works well, he said, “or use the plastic ones from the ’60s. They have nice fluid biomorphic lines. It’s playful and fun and doesn’t take itself seriously.”

Keep the characters in the toybox
“Buy them a Buzz Lightyear toy,” said Burnham, “but don’t put Buzz Lightyear all over the walls.”

Many kids’ rooms these days look like advertisements for popular licensed characters. Nothing dates a room more than focusing it on one character — within a few years, your child will be into something new and you’ll be stuck with the redecorating bill.