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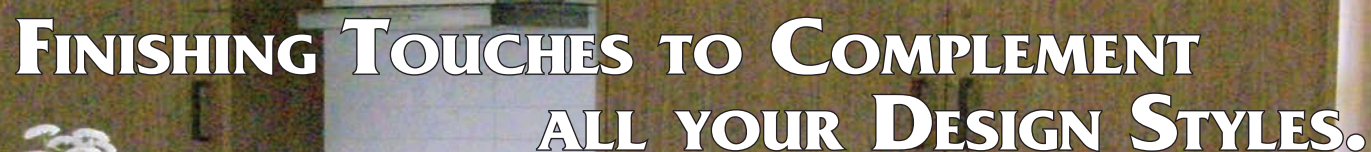
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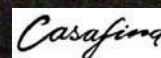
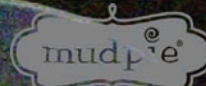
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A rundown on countertops



Countertops affect the look and feel of kitchens and other interior and exterior spaces. Choosing materials comes down to cost, durability and maintenance.

Kitchen renovations continue to top the list of improvements that offer a high rate of return on investment. Buyers pay attention to kitchens, which undoubtedly affects the ROI of kitchen renovations. According to the Journal of Light Construction's "Cost vs. Value Report 2025," a minor kitchen remodel offers an ROI of 113 percent, while a midrange remodel offers an ROI of 51 percent. Replacing a kitchen countertop can help homeowners see improvements to the functionality of their spaces and improve the value of their homes.

According to data from Grand View Research, the U.S. countertops market is projected to reach \$35.57 billion in 2026, driven by homeowners who desire high-value renovations over relocating. Those thinking about overhauling their spaces with new countertops can consider the leading materials and how they rank in cost, maintenance and durability.

ENGINEERED QUARTZ

The National Kitchen & Bath Association reports that 78 percent of design professionals expect quartz to be the preferred countertop material over the next several years. Quartz is non-porous, so it will resist stains, scratches and bacteria infiltration without having to be sealed. Unlike natural stone, quartz offers pattern uniformity, which makes it easier to map out seamless transitions. Quartz costs between \$50 and \$150 per square foot installed.

GRANITE

Granite still holds a considerable chunk of the countertops market and remains a solid standard for those who value a one-of-a-kind look of natural stone. Granite has exceptional heat resistance and adds significant resale value. However, it requires periodic sealing to maintain its good looks. Costs range from \$40 to \$190 per square foot.

PORCELAIN

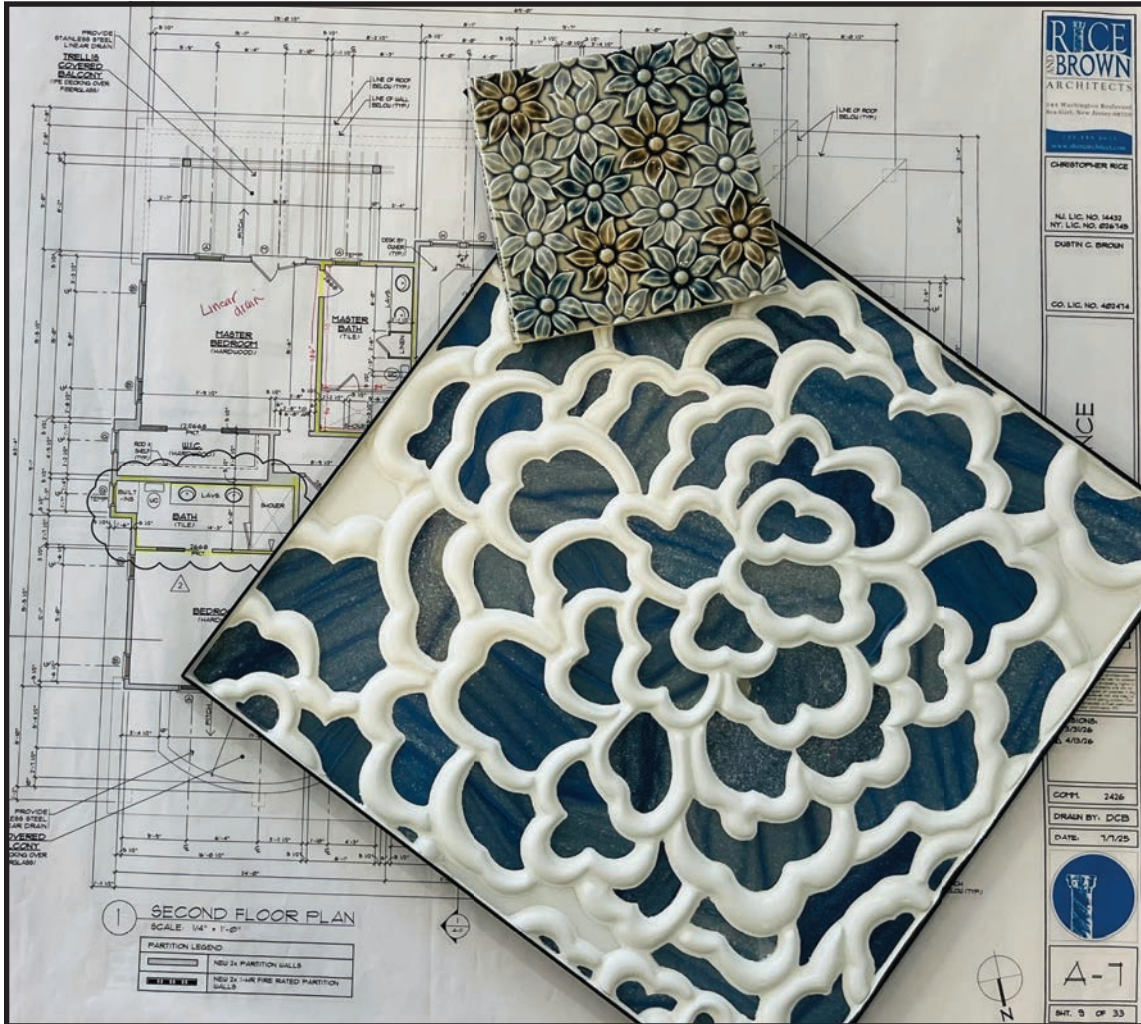
Porcelain tiles and slabs are projected to become the fastest-growing segment in the ceramic tiles market, according to reports from Yahoo Finance. High-precision printing technology enables porcelain to mimic rare marble and other stone with superior accuracy. Porcelain is even harder than granite and effectively impervious to UV rays. This makes the material a solid choice for outdoor kitchens. Plus, at a cost of \$60 to \$120 per square foot, it is competitive with other similar materials.

BUTCHER BLOCK

Those who appreciate a soft, organic texture and "warmth" in their spaces can look to butcher block. Wood is making a comeback, as many homeowners are moving away from stark, white designs. Butcher block is self-healing, meaning scratches can be sanded out. Butcher block costs between \$50 and \$150 per square foot.

LAMINATE

Laminate is a budget-friendly option for homeowners at \$20 to \$80 per square foot, but is not as durable as other materials. Some laminates mimic the look of high-end materials, and they don't require much maintenance.



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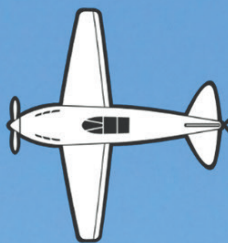


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Plan a playroom all can enjoy

There's no shortage of ways to utilize interior spaces in a home. Interior spaces have grown considerably in recent decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median size of a new home in 1980 was 1,595 square feet. By 2018, the median size of a newly constructed home was 2,386 square feet. Though Realtor.com data indicates the median home size started to shrink between 2015 and 2025, modern homes continue to provide lots of room to maneuver.

When confronted with ample interior space, homeowners may wonder what to do with all that extra room. Playrooms can be a great way to utilize extra space to the fullest, particularly in homes with children. Parents planning a playroom in their homes can consider these tips to ensure the space becomes a fun room everyone can enjoy.

MEASURE THE SPACE

Measuring the dimensions in a prospective playroom can erase any doubts homeowners may have regarding how much space they have to work with. Taking measurements also makes it easier to identify which furnishings, including couches and storage units, will fit comfortably into the space. Homeowners who plan to install new flooring or carpeting also will need to know the dimensions to get an ac-

curate idea of how much that portion of the conversion project will cost.

KEEP IN MIND YOUNG CHILDREN'S PREFERENCES TO STAY CLOSE

A basement playroom may work as children enter their tweens and early adolescence, but such separation from the rest of the home may compel young children to avoid the space. Elementary school children and younger kids generally like to stay close to Mom and Dad, so a basement playroom may not be ideal for such youngsters. In such instances, converting a seldom-used formal dining room into a temporary playroom may be a better option. As children age, the basement can be utilized as a playroom with greater frequency until it becomes the lone play space in the home.

EMPHASIZE ORGANIZATION

Playrooms can quickly be overrun by toys. Though no two children are exactly the same, the professionals at Brain Balance Achievement Centers note the expected attention span of a two-year-old is four to six minutes. A four-year-old's expected attention span may peak at 12 minutes, while an eight-year-old's expected attention span is between 16 and 24 minutes. That means kids will pivot from one toy to another with frequency, which underscores the



A playroom can make for a fun way to utilize extra space inside a home.

need for ample storage. Storage should be built into the design of the space after measuring its dimensions. Avoid storage solutions that extend too high up the wall, as that's hard for children to reach and might lead to accidents. Creative storage solutions abound online, and parents are urged to exercise due diligence to find the safest, most effective units for their children and their space.

MAKE IT MULTI-GENERATIONAL

Free play is important for youngsters, but kids will want Mom or Dad and even older siblings nearby even when they're playing on their own. So it makes sense to equip the space with areas that accommodate everyone in the household. A reading chair for adults and a ping pong table and arcade game for older kids can ensure everyone gets to have fun in the playroom.

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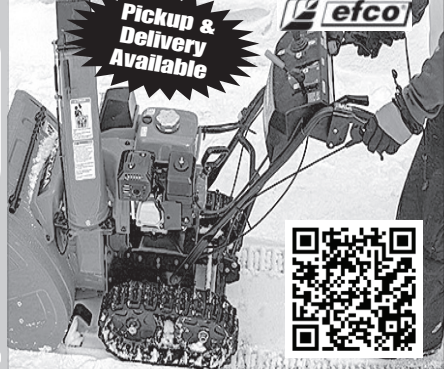
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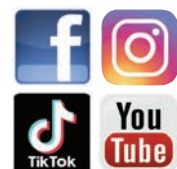


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Features that can redefine a living room



Homeowners can consider any number of features when looking to give their living spaces a fresh look.

Spring is widely cherished as a season of rejuvenation. As winter winds down, many people embrace the arrival of spring blooms and the regrowth of grass on the ground and leaves on the trees, which can breathe new life into landscapes that might have grown a bit stale in previous months.

That same staleness can affect a home's interior as well. Home interiors can benefit from periodic updates in much the same way a landscape benefits when spring blooms return. As homeowners seek to refresh their living spaces, they can consider these features to redefine their living rooms.

• **Fireplace:** A wood-burning fireplace is undeniably a game changer when looking to redefine a living space. But such a project could be a significant undertaking in a home that does not already feature a wood-burning fireplace. Homeowners who want to add a wood-burning fireplace can reinvent a living room, but they will likely need to adhere to building codes, secure permits and even consult with an engineer to ensure such an addition does not affect the structural integrity of the home. A gas-powered fireplace is a less demanding project, but will also require some extra work if homeowners need to connect a gas line where no such line currently exists. A plug-in electric fireplace can create a new ambiance and will not require as much time, effort and money as the alternatives.

• **Coffered ceiling:** A coffered ceilings can immediately redefine the impression people get of a living space. Coffered ceilings feature a series of rectangular, square or octagonal grids that are typically accentuated by molding. Coffered ceilings provide a luxurious and even historic aesthetic, making them an ideal addition for homeowners looking to redefine an existing space.

• **Windows:** New windows are another option when homeowners are hoping to redefine a living room. Modern windows are energy-efficient, so replacing aging windows may help homeowners combat rising energy costs. If a yard is a notable feature of a home's exterior, new windows that accentuate the view from a living space can quickly redefine how residents and guests see the room. Permits may be necessary if you're expanding existing windows, but that can be worth it if you're able to design the space around the view. All that extra natural light also may reinvent the feeling people get upon entering the space.

• **Wallpaper:** Interior design specialists note that wallpaper is making a comeback. Wallpaper can be used to draw attention to a wall in much the same way bold colors are chosen for accent walls. Wallpaper on an accent wall can feature a bold pattern or a strong color to add a sense of personality to a room that might be lacking if the walls are currently painted in neutral colors.



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The benefits of a fall roof replacement

A roof is a vital component of a home that protects the structure from the elements and ensures that sun, rain, wind, and snow do not compromise the integrity of interior spaces. Peak Performance Roofing says the average asphalt shingle roof found on many homes lasts between 15 and 30 years. Alternative roofing materials, such as metal or clay tiles, can last much longer.

Homeowners who stay in a home for many years will likely need to replace a roof at some point. Choosing when to replace the roof may come down to selecting the right season. Experts typically consider fall the prime time to upgrade a roof for a variety of reasons.

- **Moderate temperatures:** Fall weather tends to be comfortable in many regions of the country. Magnolia Home Remodeling Group says fall temperatures are better suited for roofing and allow materials to work the best. When temperatures are too hot, shingles can become soft and

prone to scuffing, while cold temperatures can make materials brittle and difficult to seal.

- **Comfort for workers:** The same moderate conditions can make it easier for roofing contractors to get the work done. It can be extremely hot on a roof during summer, necessitating frequent breaks for workers. Winter weather conditions are not ideal for working on a roof, with snow and ice making things slippery. Fall weather can help workers feel more comfortable.

- **Avoid the rush:** Roofing companies say spring and early summer are peak seasons for roofing contractors due to post-winter repairs. Homeowners may experience shorter wait times, better pricing and flexible scheduling if they opt for a fall roof replacement.

- **Prepare for winter:** Getting a roof in the fall means having a new and functional barrier against winter storms that can be hard on old roofs. It also means the roof will be ready for rainy, spring weather.



Fall is an ideal time to replace a roof for many reasons. Homeowners can use the summer to vet various roofing contractors and come up with a package that fits their schedules and budgets.



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How to make a laundry room a more functional space

Functionality is important when designing the interior spaces in a home. Homeowners who redesign their interior spaces can emphasize functionality to help reduce clutter and create a more efficient and even calming space.

Laundry rooms may not be the most glamorous rooms in a home, but they do get lots of usage, particularly in homes with children. Because laundry rooms tend to be well trafficked areas, it makes sense for homeowners to make them as functional and user-friendly as possible. With that in mind, homeowners can consider these tips to make laundry rooms more functional spaces.

- **Purchase laundry pedestals with storage capacity.** Laundry pedestals make useful additions to a laundry room. Many homeowners place their washing machines and dryers on top of pedestals with storage drawers, which can be used to store everything from dryer sheets to clothes irons to

stain removal kits. Pedestals can be particularly useful in cramped laundry rooms where the only means to adding storage is to go up and not out.

- **Install a freestanding laundry sink.** A laundry sink also adds function to a laundry room by enabling homeowners to hand wash certain clothes and apply stain removal products in the same space where the rest of their clothes are being cleaned. Installing a laundry sink is a relatively inexpensive job, but the cost may go up if new plumbing, venting or electrical work is necessary.

- **Add a countertop work space.** If you already have ample storage and won't be placing the washer or dryer atop a laundry pedestal, then installing some countertop above the appliances can add function and aesthetic appeal. A countertop workspace above a dryer provides an accessible space to fold laundry the moment it dries, reducing the likelihood that clothes will become

wrinkled and ensuring you won't put off folding.

- **Install floating shelves.** Floating shelves won't cost a lot of money, but they can be ideal in cramped laundry rooms. Shelves provide a space to store detergent and other items that may not fit inside laundry pedestals, including baskets.

- **Add hanging storage.** Some articles of clothing should not be dried in a dryer for fear of shrinking the fabric or destroying the item. In such instances, some readily accessible hanging storage capacity can make the laundry room more functional. Items can be hung on hangers or over a hanging rack suspended from the ceiling if space is minimal.



Laundry rooms are heavily used spaces in a home, so it makes sense to take steps to make these areas as functional as possible.

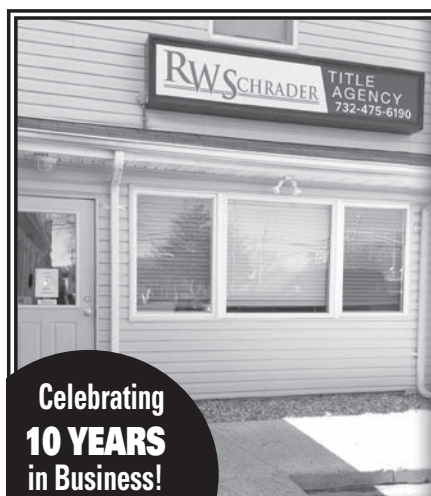
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Is a sunroom *right* for you?

There is no denying the appeal of a sunroom. Sunrooms bring more of the outdoors inside by bridging the gap between home and yard. Demand is shifting, with more than 61 percent of homeowners now preferring four-season insulated rooms for year-round use, according to Market Reports World. A sunroom has the potential to offer a roughly 50 percent return on investment and can cost anywhere from \$22,000 to \$72,000 on average.

A sunroom addition is a significant investment and a decision not to take lightly, as it changes both the interior floor plan and backyard space. To decide if a sunroom really is a worthwhile endeavor, it's important for homeowners to consider the footprint of their homes/yards, how they plan to use the space, and the amount of sun the home receives.

HOME FOOTPRINT

Professionals with the National Association of Realtors say that a sunroom should not consume more than



To decide if a sunroom really is a worthwhile endeavor, it's important for homeowners to consider the footprint of their homes/yards, how they plan to use the space, and the amount of sun the home receives.

30 percent of the remaining backyard and urge homeowners to avoid over-developing a lot. If installing a sunroom will leave a homeowner with only a small patch of yard afterwards,

the result can feel heavy and unbalanced. It also won't match the neighborhood. Another consideration is the local zoning ordinances where a person lives. The City of Los Angeles, for example, warns that most towns require a setback between the sunroom structure and the property line. It's also important to look at the home's roof and whether or not the sunroom will fall right under the eaves or if it will require an expensive tie-in to the existing roof.

UTILITY

It is vital that homeowners determine how they will use the space and when. This will dictate the type of sunroom that should be built. A three-season room is typically uninsulated with only single-pane glass. This is ideal if someone is looking for a screened-in retreat without all of the bugs and a little weather protection. Four-season rooms are fully insulated and tie into a home's HVAC system. This space will be functional all year long, but it is a more expensive undertaking as well.

LIGHT EVALUATION

The purpose of a sunroom is to benefit from the sun. The value of the

space will depend entirely on which way the room faces. North-facing sunrooms have soft light with minimal heat or glare that likely can be used all day. Morning people can appreciate an east-facing sunroom while drinking coffee or reading, and the space will cool down in the afternoon. South-facing rooms will be bright most of the day and may need high-end HVAC hookups or shades to stay comfortable, even in cooler months. West-facing sunrooms are great for watching sunsets, but the hot afternoon sun must be considered. UV-rated glass to prevent floor fading and even sunburn likely will be needed.

It is important to work with a company that specializes in sunrooms. Such firms are experienced in helping homeowners design and ultimately build these spaces to avoid common pitfalls, advises Champion, a window, sunroom and home exterior company.

In general, a sunroom is not a DIY project since it typically involves a major structural change. It can be a viable addition to a home when built correctly to remain durable through every season.



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5 ideas to repurpose a formal dining room



Dining spaces may be going the way of the dinosaur, reflecting modern homeowners' preferences for more flexible and useful spaces.

Traditional formal dining rooms are not as necessary as they were a generation or two ago. A recent study by Realtor.com found formal dining rooms are often the most underutilized square footage in homes, and a significant percentage of Millennial and Gen Z homeowners prefer flexible “lifestyle rooms” over dining spaces.

So what can homeowners whose dining room tables are covered in mail or the kids' homework do to repurpose the space into something they will actually use? The following are five ideas to repurpose a formal dining room into a more usable space.

1. Lounge: Those who enjoy hosting friends or family without sitting down to formal dinners might appreciate transforming the dining space into a cocktail lounge. Swapping the dining room table and chairs for low swivel chairs around a coffee table or high-backed bar stools around bar tables easily converts the seating space. A built-in wet bar or a bar cart helps complete this social hub for intimate conversation. Paint the room in darker colors or use textured wallpaper to simulate an after-hours feel that separates the space from the rest of the house.

2. Library: Homeowners can create a digital detox zone by way of a cozy library. A timeless choice, a library can feature

floor-to-ceiling bookshelves or built-ins and comfortable reading chairs stationed by a window.

3. Music space: Homeowners who play an instrument may appreciate a designated space for jam sessions. Dining rooms with high ceilings and bare floors often provide excellent acoustics for music. Complement the space with a high-tech audio system and sound baffling panels for those who plan to record.

4. Home office: Hybrid work is a permanent fixture in today's career landscape. A dining room located near the front of the home presents a prime location for a professional workspace. Replace a table with a sleek executive desk. An existing buffet or sideboard can be repurposed as printer storage or for filing. Consider adding French doors or partitions to provide privacy without compromising on light flow.

5. Homework zone: Active families may need to transform the dining room into a homework lab that offers a quiet space for educational pursuits. Organized cabinetry can house school materials, craft supplies, and much more, confining it all to one room. Locating the computer in the space creates a centralized “safe” spot for internet browsing and monitoring young children in the process.

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How to brighten interior spaces



Brightly colored accents like throw pillows can help to brighten interior spaces over the winter.

If spring and summer are seasons when homeowners focus their renovation energy on outdoor living spaces, that attention shifts back inside upon the arrival of fall. People tend to spend much more time indoors than outside come late fall and throughout the winter. The ambiance inside in fall and winter is notably different, as fewer hours of daylight can darken interior spaces. Finding ways to brighten home interiors can make spaces more inviting in late fall and throughout the winter.

LAYER WITH SHEER AND BLACKOUT CURTAINS

The simplest way to brighten interior spaces is to allow natural light to illuminate them, but that can be difficult in homes with blackout curtains. Blackout curtains are highly effective at keeping light out, but they won't do much to brighten interior spaces in the winter. Layer blackout curtains with sheer curtains so you can still get some privacy but brighten interior spaces with natural light at the same time.

ADD LIGHTING WHEREVER POSSIBLE

The days when interior lighting was limited to floor lamps and overhead fixtures are long gone. Various types of lighting can now be used to brighten interior spaces throughout winter. Recessed lighting is a relatively inexpensive upgrade that can brighten any room in a home at any point in a day. Unlike a traditional overhead fixture where the light emanates from a single source, recessed lighting can be installed in various points in the ceiling so each corner of a room can be lit up. In addition to recessed lighting, under cabinet lighting in kitchens and on bookshelves can brighten spots that traditional fixtures typically fail to illuminate. Layering the lighting so light comes from various sources can create a brighter feel.

USE COLOR TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Color is another tool that can be used to brighten interior spaces in the winter. If homeowners are reluctant to paint walls with new and brighter colors, then accents can lend rooms a lighter feel. Vibrantly colored throw pillows, blankets and fixtures can create a lighter feel when residents and guests enter a room. Artwork with light colors also can help to brighten interior spaces.

WASH THE WINDOWS

They are easily overlooked, but dirty windows can block natural light and greatly reduce the amount of light entering a home through the windows. Clean the interior and exterior of your windows prior to winter so any grime that has built up in recent months and years is not preventing light from entering your home.





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