

At Home

INTERIOR DESIGN ■ DIY ■ GARDENING

THE FARMINGTON HILLS BRANCH
Drama
Students
share life
lessons. C5



Accents

Clean secrets

There's no escape from housecleaning; it's as certain as death and taxes. But doing it well means doing it quickly and less often. With spring cleaning close at hand, we're searching for tips and

techniques from readers for an upcoming story about housecleaning.

For instance, do you have a foolproof method for removing bathtub buildup? Is your wood polishing technique superior to all others? Did your grandmother pass down the recipe for a homemade cleaning solution that outdoes anything on the market? Share your cleaning secrets and solutions by e-mail, instafford@oe.com, or regular mail, Nicole Stifford, Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.

Lassie leads pack

For film fans, movies have gone to the dogs. The Pet Supplies "Plus" chain polled visitors to its Web site about their favorite animal actors of all time. Although there are more pet cats than dogs in the U.S. today, canines still have more power at the box office. The entire top 10 list in the Pet Supplies "Plus" animal poll was made up of dogs. Lassie led the pack with 17 percent, with Benji (15.5 percent) close behind. Other top finishers were Beethoven (17 percent), Hooch (16.5 percent), Eddie (from TV show *Frasier* at 6 percent), Rin Tin Tin (5 percent) and Buddy (4.5 percent). Visitors to Pet Supplies "Plus" Web site polled visitors to its site about favorite animal movies. *Lassie Come Home* finished first, followed by *Beethoven* and *Homeward Bound* (tied), *Old Yeller* and *Turner and Hooch*.

The chain conducted the animal film poll on its Web site, www.pet-supplies-plus.com in January and February 2003.

Fine furniture

The Antiques Centre of Troy and Judy Frankel Antiques welcomes Anthony Avey and Jill Meyer, purveyors of fine period furniture, to their list of fine antiques dealers. Judy Frankel will host a special event to greet Avey and Meyer 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. April 3, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 4 and 5. Located on the northeast corner of Maple and Coolidge, the Antiques Centre offers a greater variety of antiques and decorative accessories. For information, contact Judy Frankel at (248) 649-4399 or e-mail judy@judyfrankelantiques.com

Violet show

The Town & Country African Violet Club will hold its annual Judged Flower Show and Sale 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 29, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, March 30, at the Oxford Public Library, 530 Pontiac Road in Oxford. This event is a celebration of African Violets in the World of Music. For information, call (248) 332-7924 or (248) 693-2415.



Thaddius MacKillop, shop superintendent of the granite and marble shop of TJ Ceramic Tile Sales in Southfield, stands in the warehouse where hundreds of slabs of granite are kept, while Cliff Krupp moves a colorful slab.

Granite rocks in the kitchen

STORIES BY KEN ABRAMCZYK ■ STAFF WRITER

The creation of a granite countertop might begin in a quarry in Italy, India or Brazil.

Sticks of dynamite are placed inside a mountain. Workers scurry away from the work site. The charge is detonated, the mountain's face explodes and a 4- to 6-foot slab of granite is created.

Soon it will be cut into thin slabs, either two or three centimeters thick, then shipped to the United States, where it will end up in a warehouse where customers can pick out a slab, probably for the kitchen.

Granite has grown into one of the hottest commodities in home remodeling and new construction.

ADDING ELEGANCE

Julie Kudzia-Serilla, interior designer at Genesee Ceramic Tile at the Michigan Design Center in Troy, said granite adds "a classy look" to the home.

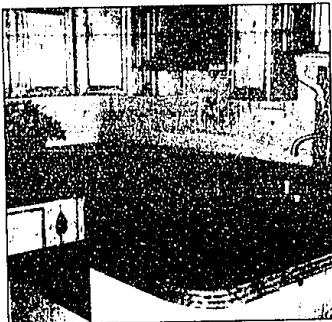
"It's classy and elegant-looking," Kudzia-Serilla said. "People are using it in bathrooms, kitchens and around fireplaces."

Black and green with gold are popular colors, Kudzia-Serilla said. When compared to Corian, it "isn't much more to do a granite countertop."

"Demand has increased for granite and the market is more competitive," she said. "People usually want to do a kitchen countertop, but they might do a backsplash. Some are doing powder rooms or bathroom vanities."

"It's very hard. With quartz in it, it's very strong. It's a natural look."

Bob O'Brien, general sales manager for Kurtis Kitchens & Bath Centers in Livonia and Farmington, said granite has a high-end appeal, or, as he puts it, "snob" appeal. "But the price is now affordable," O'Brien said.



Granite can bring a touch of elegance while providing durability in any kitchen.

And you don't have to live in a rich neighborhood to afford it, O'Brien said. More granite is available, he said.

"More is being quarried, more and more quarries are accessible in more countries," O'Brien said.

"It's a natural stone, so no two stones are exactly the same. It has an aesthetic value and each slab is unique."

Phil Mularoni, owner of Ceramic Tile Sales in

Southfield, Rochester and Farmington, called granite "the fastest growing commodity at the expense of Corian and synthetics. You always see a granite statue. It's impervious to any type of acid." Lemon juice and vinegar can create spots if left on other kinds of countertop materials, Mularoni said.

"The main component of granite is quartz," he

PLEASE SEE KITCHEN, C3

Creating beauty from rough edges

Once granite slabs end up at Phil Mularoni's warehouse at the Marble and Granite Shop inside TJ Ceramic Tile Sales in Southfield, they sit and wait for a customer to select one of them for a long-lasting and durable piece of beauty in their kitchen or bathroom.

Once workers know the dimensions, they can cut the granite by using a template in the shape of the counter in the customer's kitchen.

Mistakes cannot be made in the creation of the granite countertop. The machinery that fabricates the countertop and sinkholes are engineering marvels and highly specialized.

Florin Hrenic, a sawman and shop foreman who emigrated from Romania, operates a diamond-bladed saw at the shop. Water sprays on the blade where it strikes the granite, cooling it and

PLEASE SEE GRANITE, C3



Bromeliads, such as this *billbergia decora*, can warm up a room and a mood.

Bromeliads, orchids require care

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER

Sigrid Stern loves her exotic plants.

The Rochester Hills resident grows orchids and bromeliads, what she calls "the floral aristocrats" of the rainforest. Her love of exotic plants is evident when you visit her greenhouse, an addition to her home with several species inside nurtured under lights.

The bromeliads and orchids will be showcased at two different events. A bromeliad workshop is scheduled for Sunday, April 13, at 2 p.m. by the Southeast Michigan Bromeliad Society in the Rochester Hills Environmental Center, while the Michigan Orchid Society hosts its annual Palm Sunday Orchid Show, April 12 and 13, at Laurel Park Place in Livonia. (See related chart.)

Stern, who is a member of the Michigan Orchid Society and the Southeast Michigan Bromeliad Society, said the key to gardening bromeliads and orchids under lights is to create conditions as close as possible to the plant's native habitat. Gardeners must supply the plant's basic needs — correct temperature, moisture, humidity, soil and lighting.

ORCHIDS

Some orchids can be mounted with osunda fiber on pieces of bark or wood and hung on the wall. Others are grown in pots using various potting mixes — which drain well — such as chopped fir bark mixed with loose, inert mineral products (perlite, vermiculite and charcoal).

The idea is to have a coarse, friable and non-decaying medium that holds moisture with no trace of soggy and allows free movement of air. Once the mix breaks down and the orchids have bloomed, they need to be re-potted. Orchids can be grown exclusively under lights — full-spectrum fluorescent types. Lights should be left on 12 to 16 hours a day depending on the time of day. Water the plants in the morning, twice a week or as needed, depending on the species.

BROMELIADS

It isn't hard to figure out which of the two exotic plants are her favorites, either. The bromeliads.

"They are easy to grow, more than the orchids," Stern said. "Many of them don't need soil, they don't need much space and you can just hang some of them."

Bromeliads grow into various unusual shapes, unique markings, exotic flowers and bright bracts. They are native to the tropical and subtropical areas of the Americas; the majority are indigenous to South America. There are three types of bromeliad: vase-forming bromeliads, which create cups in the middle of the plants to hold water; a succulent that is planted in soil; and an air plant that grows without any soil. Only a soaking for about four hours a week is needed for the air plant, but overwatering can be

PLEASE SEE FLOWERS, C4

MARKET PLACE

Submissions

Do you have a special item you'd like to showcase in Marketplace on the front of At Home? We'd like to feature it! Send a photo or slide of the piece, along with information, to: Ken Abramczyk, At Home editor, Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.



Glass act

The Bohemia Crystal company gallery at 33401 Woodward in Birmingham offers a collection of luxury crystal decorative objects representing the rich Czech glassmaking tradition. A bridal registry is available. For more information, call (248) 594-0555 or visit www.bohemiacrystal.us.



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