

Homeowners prefer decks with character

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quad house built on a hill. When you sit on the deck, you look at a stand of trees.

"Everything flows together now, it's all inter-connected," she said. "Before, we had no way to access the yard. The deck brings the outdoors indoors. It flows out into the yard. There's room for cooking, eating and entertaining."

Flexibility of design is another reason families are decking out. "Anything's possible," Kurmas said. "Builders used to level everything when they built a new house. Not anymore. They try to preserve the natural landscaping. A deck can be built to fit any terrain."

NEW HOMEOWNERS Tony and Jane Waslo live on a short sloping lot in Novi. They chose a deck over a patio because they wanted something that would flow into the house, as opposed to them having to go out a door and down steps. Their deck, which is designed for cooking, seating and sun bathing, also gives them some privacy.

Like the Waslos, who wanted to make the most of a small yard, think about what problems your deck is

going to solve before you hire a contractor or go to the lumber yard. "Really study your needs," Sturman said. "Think about furniture. Where do you want your patio table to be? How many chairs and chaise lounges do you want on your deck? How much room will they take up?"

Let your imagination soar. Think of all the possibilities: built-in benches and flower boxes, a gazebo, jacuzzi, gas grill, atrium.

Consider materials. Treated wood is used for the under-structure, but the top including decking, railings and benches, is up to you. Most people, about 80 percent, prefer cedar because it turns gray through natural aging as opposed to Redwood, the choice of 20 percent, which usually turns black, Kurmas said.

DECKS ARE no longer just flat platforms. "People want variety, something with character, distinctive from other decks in their neighborhood," Kurmas said.

Look at magazines and books, take rides and look at other decks. And don't forget about lighting, especially for nighttime entertaining.

Then go to a place that specializes

in decks and talk to someone about your ideas.

Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer, or someone who doesn't have the time or ability to build a deck, take the time to talk to experts.

"A lot of people under-estimate what's involved in building a deck. Price it first before you start buying lumber," Kurmas said. "Check with

your local building authority for code restrictions. There might be subdivision restrictions."

At some lumber companies like H.A. Smith Lumber, free design help is available to help you avoid some costly mistakes.

H.A. Smith Lumber will offer a deck clinic in May. Call 474-6610.

Home facts you may not know

- The Home Furnishing Council found we view our homes as a sanctuary and a source of comfort. Our living spaces also provide an outlet for creativity and an opportunity to exercise control over our environment.

- Just as accessories give your wardrobe a lift, so they revitalize a room. A few Mexican rugs, white-washed walls and primitive-looking accessories will give a room a Southwestern feel without spending a lot of money.

- Use a steam iron to eliminate indentations left in the carpet by heavy furniture. Hold the iron two

inches above the carpet and brush the carpet with an old brush.

- Make any room look larger by not overfurnishing. Rooms with slanted ceilings will look bigger by placing the heaviest and largest furniture against the highest walls.

- A few basic security measures can deter a would-be burglar: Remember that deadbolt locks are the hardest to open. Reinforce sliding glass doors, make sure outdoor lighting is adequate and consider a front door made of sturdy hardwood, such as white oak.

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