

Name Game from page 1F

"They (buyers) want to know who made the windows, what kind of carpeting it is, how good the kitchen cabinets are," he said. Builders are going to respond to that if they want to sell a house.

"Everyone who comes through has a notebook, and they mark down things like such-and-such appliances, carpeting, cabinets. That's what I did when I bought my house," Cococetta said.

How to choose
How does a builder decide what's good and what's not? Same as anyone else — experience, a little research and word of mouth, said custom home builder Ray Hurley of Hurley Homes in Livonia.

Before a product ever goes in one of his houses, Hurley said he'll talk to other builders and contractors, flip through trade journals, take walks through other builders' models and look over the products.

"(Buyers) always want the latest," he said. "I've got to go with what's going on today."

Some of the best places to find new products, Hurley said, are the national builders conventions where manufacturers show new products.

Even so, the builder has to be careful and look past the glitz at such shows, he said.

"Show girls don't make toilets. Still, such shows offer builders a chance to take a look at some of the new products so he can begin researching them. Not all products work as well as advertised, Hurley said. "I've got a whole garage full of things that didn't work as well as expected."

That's where experience

comes in, he said. Products that are impractical or that come from manufacturers with poor records aren't going to get a second chance.

If a product turns out to be a stinker, Hurley said, it's best if the builder removes it from his models because buyers will always look at that one thing, and it will drag down an otherwise fine house.

Dependability the key
Builders don't just choose name brands for their familiarity, said Tom Augularo, vice president of Kimron Construction in Novi, a builder at Windcliff Woods in West Bloomfield and Oxford Estates in Farmington Hills. There's a reason name brands become name brands, rather than remain obscure, off-market products — they're dependable, he said.

"They're sound, well-built, dependable products," he said. The first thing the builder has to do is establish his price range — top-of-the-line kitchen cabinets in a four-room, starter bungalow wouldn't make a lot of sense, he said.

After striking a balance between quality and price, there may be an equally important consideration. "What's going to be available?"

The least expensive cabinet isn't going to suit a builder's purposes if he can only get one, he said.

Builders have an edge when it comes to buying products for houses, he said. Unlike buyers hunting for a new range or windows, sales representatives come to the builder and try to hawk the wares.

"Builders have to be careful, though," he said.

Time to fix up patio party gear

"The moment of truth usually comes around Memorial Day," says Kevin Halpin. "People get out the patio furniture and barbecue grill just before their first party of the season, and they don't like what they see."

If the furniture still has an aura of newness, cleaning usually brings it around, says Halpin, vice president of Fortunoff's, a retail chain in suburban New York and New Jersey that has hefty sales in lawn and patio pieces.

Halpin says if you follow a regular maintenance plan, your outdoor furniture can look good for 10 years or more. The plan includes pre-season cleaning and protective coating, occasional care — mainly wiping off spots — during the summer, and a post-season cleaning before storing.

If, however, the furniture is beyond maintenance or the homeowner's expertise, professional refinishing often can restore it to a good-as-new appearance.

One process useful for wrought iron and solid aluminum furniture involves sandblasting and re-coating the framework. The baked-on powder-coat color process is similar to that used for

new metal outdoor furniture. The companies that refinish also replace straps, slings and cushions.

"Professional refinishing is fairly costly, so it makes sense only if you have top-quality furniture," says Tom Martinez, co-owner of Long Island Outdoor Furniture Co. in Bohemia, N.Y. "You might save 50 to 70 percent compared to buying new top-line name brands and about 35 percent for mid-line brands."

In addition to restoring top-of-the-line pieces, Martinez says the process is useful when you've added pieces to the furniture you already have and you want them all to match.

There's hope for even the most unsightly wrought-iron furniture. Patti's Portico in Greenwich, Conn., is one place that restores battered old pieces to newness.

Patti DeFolice, a co-owner, says business is booming because the graceful old furniture, particularly dining sets, has become valuable. Outdoor dining pieces from the 1950s are even being restored for use indoors, she says.

DeFolice says almost every kind of damage can be repaired, up to and including extensive rust



Patio party: The movie "Weekend at Bernie's" may not have exactly revolutionized the patio furniture industry, but this photo does serve as a reminder that, with the weather warming and Memorial Day coming, it might be time to get your outdoor furniture in order.

and broken parts.

Recently, the company repaired a 50-year-old table that was not only a rust bucket but had also been bent when hit by a car. The workshop heated the metal and reshaped it, cut the legs to improve the dining height, spot-welded to repair the lacy pattern,

sandblasted, primed and painted the table white. Finally, new rubber protectors were put on each of the legs to keep the table from scratching a floor or patio.

"The labor was \$450," DeFolice says. "A new table of this quality and design might have cost as much as \$2,000."

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