

homes plus

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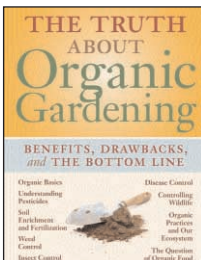
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YOUR GUIDE TO REAL ESTATE

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By Morris and James Carey
Associated Press

Q. I tore out and replaced the concrete on my patio and sidewalk with pavers over crushed rock. Joints are filled with sand. Should I use a sealer on this, and if so, how often?

A. No, crushed rock covered with pavers is not a solid mass and therefore does not require sealing. Sealers are used to keep a surface clean and to shed water. With a paver system water is designed to pass through so a sealer is not needed.

For the cleaning part, simply use a degreaser, such as an automotive type degreaser, for your next cleaning project. Pressure washing is still an option even though the joints are filled with soft material. Just be careful.

SEND QUESTIONS TO
'HOMEWORK Q&A' AT:

Popular Mechanics
Reader Service Bureau
224 W. 57th St.
New York, NY 10019

The desired demographic for new homes sales?

WOMEN

By Philip Medeiros
Journal Inquirer

The film "What Women Want" was released in 2000 accompanied in some publications by an unfortunate plot synopsis: "A freak accident leaves Mel Gibson with the ability to know what women are thinking."

It's good fodder for jokes, but as women represent an ever-stronger consumer demographic, more markets have given the question — what women want — the attention it deserves. When the numbers started to indicate that women were driving the real estate market, Design Basics, a home design firm based in Omaha, Neb., took a radical step to find out what women wanted in a home.

They asked them.

The result of their research is what they call "Woman-Centric Home Design," which puts an emphasis on four areas that were high on women's wish list: entertaining, flexible living space, relaxation, and effective, uncluttered storage.

In many homes, the kitchen serves its historic purpose without necessarily lending itself to socialization. A home built by Superior Builder — the exclusively licensed women-centric builder in Hartford County — on Aspen Drive in East Windsor shows a utility that's growing in popularity: the "kitchen becomes the hub of activity," according to design basics. A walk-in storage closet helps avoid clutter just behind the cabinet doors and minimizes the need for expansive cabinetry. And the kitchen flows seamlessly through an informal dining area and into the living room.

This allows for casual entertaining, and also makes the kitchen a center for activity. Since entertaining usually involves food, that's a plus. Suzy Couture, director of sales and customer service for the family-run business, also points out it's a convenient vantage point throughout much of the first floor and back yard, which can be helpful in those "Where are the kids?" moments.

Another aspect of the focus on entertainment is outdoor socializing. The Aspen Drive home had a 168-square-foot deck, Superior Builder's standard size and plenty big enough for summer picnics or just relaxing outside. The deck is made of Trex decking, a maintenance-free composite. It's part of an entirely maintenance-free exterior, which includes a vinyl composite that is indistinguishable from cedar shingles.

"Maintenance free" is part of the relaxation theme that Design Basics calls "de-stressing." Less time for upkeep of the home, more time for enjoying it. Another aspect of de-stressing



Superior Builder, Inc

The kitchen of a woman-centric home isn't just for food preparation. It's an entertainment hub, adjoining the informal dining area and great room, with excess space minimized by a walk-in pantry. The sink is inset in a granite countertop for easy cleaning.

91% of home purchases are made directly by women or include a controlling influence in the purchase.

92% of women use the Internet to shop for homes, making them the most powerful online audience of homebuyers.

70% of all household bills are paid by women, and 70 percent of households' financial security is managed by women.

74.6% is the increase in median income for female wage earners in the United States between 1973 and 2005, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The increase in median income for male wage earners over the same period was two percent.



Superior Builder, Inc

The 'drop zone' just inside the garage entry is a convenient place for keys, papers, and other transitional items like shopping lists or baby bags. At right is an enclosed laundry room.