



What are those chocolates?

Truffles or bonbons

That candy you get for your loved one on Valentine's Day is usually called a box of chocolates.

But technically, they are probably bonbons.

Bonbons have a molded chocolate shell with a soft non-chocolate center: fruit, nougat, creams or caramel, for instance.

However, some boxes of chocolates might also contain truffles. Truffles have a creamy, buttery chocolate center, and are usually rolled in nuts, cocoa powder or even sugar.

Truffles got their name because they are typically round and they resemble the edible fungus of the same name, which often fetches high prices and features in gourmet cuisine.

Remodeling versus moving

Should you stay or should you go?

Here is a happy problem: Should you renovate or move? No matter what choice you make, you are going to have something better.

But when you get into the details, both options are stressful.

If this is your decision to make, start by asking yourself whether you like the location of your home.

You might find yourself saying you like the neighborhood, the commute, the access to amenities, and the school district. If so, then ask yourself if your home has the space now to accommodate your needs and, if not, what it would take to make it work.

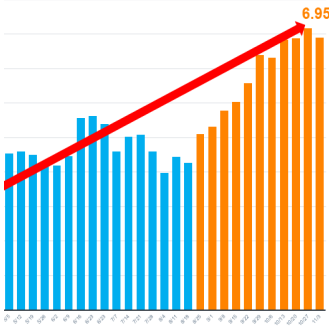
Changes are an important issue. It's fun to change the look of a home, but the most important renovations could be functional: roof, furnace, foundation, siding. These cost a lot and aren't nearly as satisfying, but they are crucial to maintaining your investment.

Cost is an issue. Adding a room can cost \$40,000, according to CNBC. Remodeling a kitchen averages about \$22,507. A new bathroom could cost \$47,000. Of course, it will be important to get a contractor to estimate the costs and the time it will take to make the changes. You'll be living in a construction zone for a while -- consider whether you are willing to do that.

Another thing to consider: the future resale value of the renovations. You don't want to have a house that doesn't fit the neighborhood, or your renovations will be worth less.

On the other hand, moving could get you into a house that already fits you. Of course, you'll have to sell -- and pack up and move. That is no treat. But when your lot is too small to add a room or if your kids need to be in another school district, it's time to move on and build memories in a new space.





Ask the Expert

We are buying our first house and we are concerned about interest rates. Someone mentioned a mortgage buydown to get lower rates. What is this?

A mortgage buydown could make sense for buyers if they have extra cash left over after closing and they are buying a house that they will live in for a long time.

A mortgage buydown is when someone (the buyer, seller or builder) pays mortgage points at closing and get a lower interest rate. If the real estate market favors the buyer, then sellers or builders will sometimes cover mortgage points as an incentive to buy.

A permanent mortgage buydown is when the buyer pays a lower rate for the life of the loan. In a temporary buydown, rates increase after a period of time.

Depending on the scenario, you should intend to stay in the home at least seven to 10 years. That's because a buyer typically wouldn't break even on the extra cash it takes to buy the mortgage points divided by what they would save in a month on their mortgage. If the points cost \$16,000 and you save \$201 on your mortgage each month, it would take at least 6.6 years to break even. If you move in three years, you lose money. In that case, it would have been better not to buy points.

There are several com-

Groundhog Day: Punxsutawney Phil ignores the experts

Groundhogs have been said to predict spring weather for hundreds of years, but Punxsutawney Phil (and his predecessors) has been doing it professionally for 136 years. He isn't all that accurate, but what do they know?

According to Live Science, Pennsylvania's star of the Feb. 2 festival has been right about 39 percent of the time.

According to the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, Phil has cast a shadow 108 times on Feb. 2, which heralds six more weeks of winter. He has also predicted 20 early springs. The club doesn't have records for Phil's predictions for some years before 1899, and Phil didn't make any predictions in the war years of 1942 and 1943.

However, checking Phil's prediction against weather records indicate that his predictions have been correct about 39 percent of the time. But if you just take his predictions for an early spring (when he doesn't cast a shadow), he has a 47 percent accuracy rate. Human weather analysts claim an accuracy rate of 60 percent.

However, Punxsutawney Phil's Inner Circle claims a 100 percent accuracy rate.

Hibernating animals have been associated with Feb. 2 and

the length of winter for centuries. The special date of Feb. 2 is known as Candlemas, a celebration of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. According to ancient lore, you don't even need a hibernating animal to predict the weather. The date alone will do it. Here is a common rhyme that describes the scheme:

If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, winter will have another fight. If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain, winter won't come again.



By Chris Flook, wikipedia

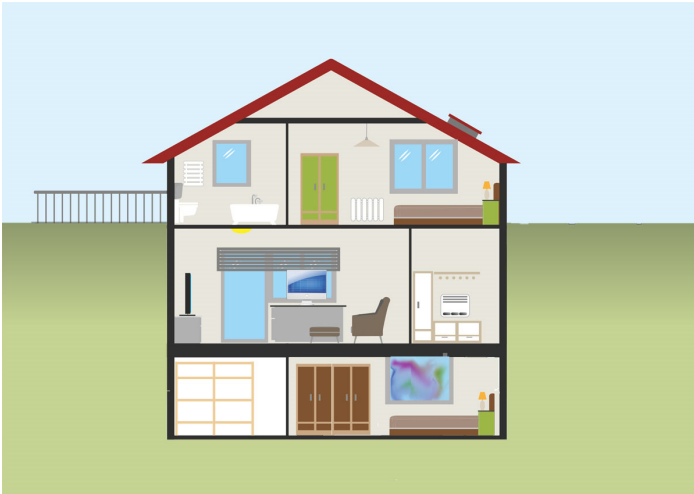
mon variations on the buydown. One is a 3-2-1 buydown. In this case, suppose the buyer gets a mortgage at 6 percent. With the 3-2-1 buydown, the buyer pays an interest rates of 3 percent the first year, 4 percent the second year and 5 percent the third year. From years 4-30, the buyer pays 6 percent.

The cost of points will vary depending on the lender and the prevailing interest rates. With a 30-year loan on a \$400,000 house at a rate of 6 percent, a 3-2-1 buydown would cost about \$17,421 and that is what the buyer would save on payments over three years.



"How long have I had hand cramps? It started after I filled out your new patient forms."

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Instead of going up, mansions go down

Down is the new up when it comes to luxury homes. Or at least that's what architect Randy Correll said in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal. Instead of expanding their homes' footprints or building new floors -- sometimes prohibited by local zoning codes or historical designations -- wealthy homeowners are building huge basements with amenities that most homeowners can't even fathom (pun intended).

These aren't the musty unfinished basements or dated rum-pus rooms of your youth. Luxury basements occupy thousands of square feet, sometimes across multiple levels. Natural light warms the spaces through skylights and staircases, and high-tech engineering keeps Mother Nature out.

When former Dallas Mavericks owner David McDavid and his wife Stacie purchased a 9,000 square foot Aspen estate, they dug into the mountainside to add a 4,000 square foot basement at their daughter's insistence. The new subterranean space has multiple guest suites, a gym, and a vast hot tub and steam room.

On the island of Nantucket, where house footprints are often strictly regulated, another homeowner is constructing a 16,000 square foot home with an extra 5,600 square feet underneath for a bowling alley, 3-D golf simulator and spa. Not to be outdone, another new Nantucket build will be a modest 5,000 square feet on the surface, but with 10,000 square feet below to house a basketball court, garage, additional bedrooms, and a bespoke "wellness space."

And in Beverly Hills, a \$500 million mega-mansion boasts about 105,000 total square feet -- about half of it below ground.

But while homeowners might love their underground mansions, not everyone feels the same way. Massive basements require noisy, dirty and prolonged construction, and the neighbors will certainly complain. After a local outcry, the city of Aspen recently limited basements to a paltry single level. And Beverly Hills may never see a 50,000 square foot basement again -- property owners in the Hillside area now need special permits to remove more than 3,000 cubic yards of earth.

Should you remodel the house or tear it down?

Sometimes it pays to raze a house and build a new one.

Is your house 80 or 100 years old and seriously damaged, but in a location you love? You might be better off knocking it down instead of trying to remodel or buying a house somewhere else.

Tearing down a house is a good idea when:

- * The house has rotted beams and antiquated wiring or plumbing.
- * The foundation is faulty.
- * A renovation that solves all of its problems would be too expensive.
- * The house is on a large or attractive lot and you like the location. Sometimes the land alone would be more valuable than the house on the land.



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* The house has structural problems and is less valuable than others in the neighborhood.

Tearing down is a bad idea when:

- * The house has historical value or features that would be difficult to re-create.
- * You can get the updates you want with a modest renovation.
- * If you aren't sure you will stay long enough to justify the effort and expense of a

teardown.

If you decide on renovation:

- * Never start a renovation yourself if you don't already possess the skills and time to finish it.
- * Never count on an interested party to help you with renovations.
- * Plan for at least three to four months in renovation mode for a room.
- * For whole house projects, plan to live somewhere else.
- * Reserve at least 20 percent over your budget for unexpected problems.
- * Leave serious structural issues to a professional.

Flowers by the numbers

In 2022, lovers and friends spent more than \$2.3 billion on flowers for Valentine's Day, according to Statista, the equivalent of the all-time high in 2020. In 2010, consumers spent \$1.7 billion on flowers, a number that remained relatively stable until 2015, when expenditures broke the \$2 billion mark. Roses, particularly red, are the favorite flowers of Valentine's Day, a holiday second only to Mother's Day for gifting flowers. Up to 250 million roses are grown for Valentine's Day and 73 percent of the givers are men.

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| 12 Super Bowl | 13 | 14  | 15 | 16 | 17 Bird Count begins | 18 |
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