

Full House

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Renovation help is in the Houzz

On my bookshelf is a well-worn binder that's a memento of my first year as a homeowner. Inside are a carpenter's sketches of each room's dimensions, fabric and wallpaper samples, magazine clippings and ads from stores long gone (remember Handy Andy?). It reminds me of days spent in a blur of appointments and shopping trips, and evenings spent leafing through it while curled up in bed.

If I were starting to decorate my house now, I'd ditch that binder and just use Houzz.

What is Houzz, you ask? I was in the dark, too. When it came up during an interview, I pretended to know what the heck the person was talking about. A quick Google session revealed that it's an online guide that matches homeowners interested in renovations with design and building professionals.

Annie Nozawa, marketing manager for Houzz, spoke recently at the Ohio Design Centre in Beachwood to explain how Houzz works. The word is a combination of the words "house" and "buzz," and it's a searchable listing of more than 1.5 million architects, interior designers, contractors and home remodeling professionals in the United States and around the world.

Homeowners who sign up on Houzz — it's free for nonprofessionals — click on photos of professionals' work to create online "idea books" that are like virtual manila folders, Nozawa said. "Houzzers" — folks who use the site — can click and drag photos into their idea book, and add searchable keywords or notes. Idea books can be kept private or shared with designers.

Once they've gathered ideas, customers can contact designers and contractors they would like to work with and check out reviews written by past clients.

"Homeowners are finding the right professional to work with," Nozawa said.

SEE FULL | E2

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FULL

FROM E1

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Houzz (houzz.com) has recently become popular in Northeast Ohio, said Chip Tiber, president of Studio 76 Kitchens and Baths, a design studio in Twinsburg. If a customer isn't already using Houzz, often a Studio 76 design consultant will grab an iPad and help the customer create an online design book right in the showroom, Tiber said.

James Justice, owner of the Medina design firm Architectural Justice, said his company works hard to keep a high profile on Houzz to attract customers. "We keep loading it with cool stuff," Justice said. "The best stuff in the world is on there. It's such a resource."

Three-year-old Houzz has grown into a lively interactive design community, Nozawa said. Houzzers can post questions for professionals, upload before-and-after photos of their projects and even ask other Houzzers their opinions about which backsplash tile to choose.

Houzz was founded by Adi Tarko and Alon Cohen, a married couple living in Palo Alto, Calif. The idea was sparked when renovations of their ranch house turned into a nightmare project, and their stacks of home-design magazine and books weren't



HOUZZ

It's free for homeowners to sign up on Houzz. Then they can browse more than 1 million photos by room and style, and find home professionals in their area.

pointing them to the help they needed. "They built the company to solve a problem," Nozawa said.

The site recently announced the results of its second annual "Houzz and Home" survey, which analyzed more than 100,000 responses from 14 million monthly unique users. While that's not a scientific survey that fairly represents the entire country, it's fun to find out what's trending with Houzzers, and Nozawa had some Cleveland-centric



Nozawa

users are mostly affluent, older homeowners. Their average home value is \$265,000, their average household income is \$106,000 and they are age 51.

Thursday, May 16, 2013

Their biggest challenges are finding the right home design products (37 percent) and defining their personal style (28 percent).

Cleveland Houzzers spent between \$5,700 and \$48,000 for a kitchen remodel, and between \$3,400 and \$27,000 on a bathroom remodel, according to the survey. When it came to budgeting, 39 percent spent more than they planned, 35 percent stuck to their budget and 20 percent never set a budget.

Nationwide, most respondents said they are remodeling to improve their homes' look and feel (81 percent), increase the home's value (51 percent), improve storage (44 percent) or increase energy efficiency (33 percent). More people are planning to stay in their homes and aren't tackling improvements to flip the property, Nozawa said. "There are a lot more personal reasons why people are doing these projects," she said.

I can relate to the Houzzers who are remodeling to improve storage, have trouble articulating a personal style and never set a budget. I've set up my own pie-in-the-sky idea book on Houzz, hoping to scope out trends and get ideas for freshening my kitchen.

Pointing and clicking sure beats ripping and Scotch-taping, and I can still curl up in bed with my idea book, falling asleep to my laptop's glow as pictures of to-die-for kitchens dance in my head.

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