

As you like it: Hot design trends for 2017 depend on personal touch



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By **Jack Romig**,
Special to The Morning Call

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Decorating trends often can seem one-dimensional, but Lehigh Valley-area interior designers offering educated guesses about what'll be hot in the coming year see things taking off in nearly opposite directions.

But, they say, that doesn't mean you can't come up with looks that are chic, coordinated and comfortable for the

living spaces you love.

What's fashionable

"I feel that contemporary design is finally hitting the Lehigh Valley," says Jill Jarrett of Jarrett Design LLC, in Emmaus. "Millennials are heading that trend, favoring sleek, contemporary lines in place of fancy turnings or carvings."

In contrast, Wandra Cain of WCA Interiors LLC of Easton says, "I'm really noticing that you can look at the fashion world to see what's happening with fabric and color in home design.

For instance, the rustic look is coming back, just as it is in clothing. I see browns, earth tones, greens, saturated colors, the beautiful colors of fall."

Milou Mackenzie, owner of V.M. Mackenzie Interior Design in Bethlehem, thinks things are getting a little warmer across the board.

"Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore are showing richer, almost jewel-tone colors," she says. "The cooler grays we've been seeing seem to be passé now. You can still have a neutral room, but parts of it could introduce those gem-like colors — purples, rubyish reds, peacock blues."

Au contraire, says Jarrett, who sees color a little differently. "I'd say the gray trend continues," she says. "There are still serene palettes and darker, moody colors — dark blues, grays and greens. Natural woods are strong. And burgundy is a top color: You see it in fashion; you see it in design."

Details matter

Working designers are encountering trendy details and can help their customers choose among them. Nancy Carroll of Nancy Carroll Interiors in Allentown, sees fabrics next year running to "heavy textures, very sturdy materials."

"That's good," she says, "because we want what our customers are buying into to look good in 10 years' time."

Carroll characterizes herself as "not a trendy decorator." As such, she's pleased when she finds details among the trends that can fit with longer-term design values.

"Styles can change; paints can change," she says. "To me, the feeling someone has about something is very important. If a customer's face lights up, I know I've hit the right button."

Among metals, brass seems to be a current star — with darker, brushed-surface finishes preferred over bright, highly polished variants. Black metal, Mackenzie says, is finding a place, and matte finishes are popular. "We're seeing manufacturers introduce black stainless steel for kitchen appliances," she says.

Jarrett indicates black metal is making itself felt beyond the kitchen, too; for example, in interior window frames and shower surrounds.

Mixing metals is another popular current idea. For the moment, though, copper seems to have passed its peak. "It's retreating," Cain says. "Where it's being used now, it's more as a background."

"The all-white kitchen is adjusting to new trends," Mackenzie says. "We're seeing two-tone kitchen cabinets, darker below and lighter above. That treatment also extends to the central kitchen island."

She also says clear Lucite is hot for furnishings. "You see it on the legs of benches or sofas; also, for whole chairs or tables. This is a crisp, clean look that helps give a light, airy feeling to a room."

Though vintage Lucite pieces from the '70s may turn up in antique stores or thrift shops, she says buyers might want to pass them up. Often they look somewhat worn, as this material always has been somewhat prone to scratching.

In the bedroom, Cain says, custom headboards are moving up. "This is a way to make the most of your old bed — you don't have to replace it. You can apply fabric to the headboard and create a whole new look."

Making artwork the centerpiece of a wall or room, Mackenzie says, is a strong approach that's likely to continue. But the "message" artwork that had been popular — the kind featuring graphically developed words or a quotation — seems to be fading away, she says.

What else is new?

Every interior designer sees things from a personal perspective, and none of those interviewed mentioned certain ideas that Internet sites say will be hot next year. Here's a trio of forecasts culled from online searches:

Minimalist bathrooms. In the pinched space of the urban bath, designing small and practical often amounts to making necessity a virtue. But some observers say small mirrors, modest fixtures and right-sized tubs or showers will be popular choices regardless of how much room is available.

Hard-working fabrics. In what people want from fabrics, great looks are near the head of the list. Fabrics made to maintain their beautiful appearance are trending, too. Examples: Stain-resistant specialties and velvet-like material containing 40 percent polyester so it won't wrinkle.

Reading nooks. This fits with a broader trend toward building escapist detail into living spaces, especially in small apartments. The idea is to set aside a corner, niche or alcove as a modest getaway spot, often near shelving and equipped with upholstered seating and a surface on which to set a coffee cup.

Taking a broad view, Jarrett sees things moving away from the traditional and into the transitional. "But I find beauty in almost everything that's well done," she says. "Anything can work if it's done well and in the

right setting."

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December 10

Mudroom makeovers



Mudrooms can be convenient places to keep things needed by the family on a daily basis. (Shutterstock)

By Jack Romig,

Special to The Morning Call

NOVEMBER 28, 2014, 12:54 PM

Hear the word "mudroom," and you might picture a dark and grimy space filled with dirt-encrusted farm boots and moldy jackets and hats. But, in fact, early mudrooms did serve a practical purpose. They provided a spot for family members to strip off soiled or soaked garments without tracking mud, snow, or even manure, into kitchens or other living areas.

Today, the mudroom idea is alive and well — only organization experts have expanded its range. The notion now is to create a place at a busy entrance not only for shedding grubby togs, but where necessities for everyday use can be arranged for the in-a-hurry, coming-and-going family crowd.

Kid-friendly and more

While mudrooms are often promoted as a design-for-living solution for families with children, organization experts see their usefulness as much broader. "Really, this is an idea that can work well for just about anybody," says Robin Stankowski of RLN Organizing, Bethlehem.

"Keeping things together is very important to active families," adds Jill Jarrett, owner of Jarrett Design LLC in Emmaus. She says the space that makes this possible might be handled in many different ways.

"Some people might need something like a mini-locker room; others might need a laundry chute in the space," Jarrett says. "A mudroom might include something like a message center, with a place to drop one's keys, a mail-organizing setup, a calendar or message board, and maybe a file drawer for school materials."

An even more basic part of the scheme is accommodations for all the clothing that's coming through the door.

"Your house can become a dumping ground for clutter and dirt," says Stankowski. "If you set up a designated zone for items and retrain each person to use it" things can improve. She suggests having hooks and shelves for jackets, book bags, purses and other belongings of each person. These conveniences may be color-coded to identify to whom they belong and set at the perfect height for each one.

Logically, a mudroom should be easy to clean, so tile or stone can be good surfaces for floors and walls. Baskets can accommodate wet clothes, while a stand for umbrellas is a handy accessory.

When mudrooms are discussed, the focus is often on what happens when people arrive at home. In reality, says Diane Albright, a certified professional organizer whose Emmaus-based business is called All Bright Ideas, a mudroom can be a staging area that helps you put your day together in advance — as much a takeoff point as a landing pad.

"You can set up what you'll need to walk out the door," Albright says. "Children can have everything ready so they're not forgetting things."

Whatever way a mudroom is put together, it's wise to keep it as open and bright as possible. In old row houses, features like vestibules might mark off an entry space — but sometimes they were dark and constricted, which reduced their usefulness. Mudroom advocates generally advise illuminating the space well and decorating it in light colors that support good visibility.

Where to put it

Relatively few homes with mudrooms have them located inside the front door. The mudroom isn't necessarily the first thing families want their guests to see. The front of the house may also not be the most useful place to put one.

"Often a side entrance or something off the garage works best," says Albright. "The front door is not usually where the family enters. The side may be better than the back, because everyone won't have to go as far" — and if the family isn't regularly entering at the point of this specialized room, its purpose is negated.

Designers point out that leaving a front-entryway foyer clear has some extra benefits when callers arrive. The space that guests first encounter is free of clutter, obstructions and distractions. Ideally, the mudroom has moved such tangles elsewhere and perhaps helped tame them. Also, that tidy front closet can offer an embarrassment-free spot to deposit visitors' coats and accessories.

Making it stick

Many people who have attempted the mudroom idea soon learn that there's a reinforcement aspect. Kids and grownups alike may push back against the everything-in-its-place goal. Unless their resistance is overcome, the mudroom may become just another disorganized place in the house.

"You really need to work with the habits of the household," says Stankowski. "If you're sure kids won't use a rack, then putting in a bench really won't work."

"Remember that it takes 21 days to form a habit," Albright maintains. "If you can keep after them for that long, the mudroom idea can sink in for good."

And you won't sink into the dumping-ground doldrums once more.

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Open floor designs remain a favorite with Valley residents

June 21, 2013

People at a house party tend to gather in the kitchen like African wildlife at a water hole, and it was no different at interior designer Susan M. Buss' [home](#). Visiting aunts, uncles and cousins seemed oblivious to the space in the living room and sunroom.

"Everybody was in the kitchen," she says. The Buss' kitchen was boxy, compartmentalized and enclosed with four walls.

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It was crowded.

The day after the party, Susan and Bryan Buss took a crowbar and a hammer to the walls, working around a support beam. She and Brian had been playing around with a computer-design program for layout ideas. Now it was time to create some open space. Taking out the two walls that separated the kitchen from the L-shaped living room, they created an open [design](#).

An open design is "the big thing" in the Lehigh Valley, says Bill Shafer, owner of Shafer [Construction](#) LLC of Bethlehem.

"The [living room](#), dining room, kitchen — it's all one huge wide open space," he said. The design allows the cook to watch over the kids at play or converse with party guests.

Doug MacGeorge, a certified kitchen designer with Mac Kitchens Inc. of Allentown, says [clients](#) are receptive to opening up space.

"If I can, I will eliminate walls," he says, "to make rooms bigger."

Interior [designer](#) Jill Jarrett of Jarrett Design LLC of Emmaus, expands on the idea, offering a vision to make the extra space extra special: open part of the kitchen to an area with comfortable seating around a fireplace where people can sit with a cup of coffee or check recipes on an iPad while waiting for the water to boil.

The Busses replaced one of the demolished walls with a breakfast bar and stools that face into the kitchen space.

"It creates a wall between kitchen and living room, so you do break up the space," Buss says. It has become a handy tabletop: Buss sits there to work on client [projects](#). It also provides space under the granite countertop for a cabinet where Buss stores casserole dishes and bowls.

In the Buss house, the breakfast bar is of elbow height, but elsewhere in the Lehigh Valley banquettes with traditional-height tables are appearing, Jarrett says. A banquette is a kitchen nook open on two or more sides. Although it can [feature](#) a slide-in, cushioned bench for seating like a nook, the other side is open and there people sit on traditional kitchen chairs. Jarrett says, "They come in all shapes and sizes."

"Breakfast nooks were very popular in the '90s," Shaffer says. "We still have them to deal with in remodeling."

One of Buss' priorities was to create more counter space, and a kitchen island allowed that to happen. Tucked beneath the island's countertop are a dishwasher, a drawer microwave and one of the cabinets that had been on a wall. The top

extends enough at one end to accommodate a stool that matches the breakfast bar stools.

Their island has a flat counter top, but it's not unusual for a kitchen island to include a sink for the traditional work triangle that allows the cook to move unimpeded between the sink, stove and refrigerator.

1 Week Kitchens Allentown



1-week-kitchens.com/Allentown

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In the Lehigh Valley, Shafer says, "islands are hugely popular." Jarrett agrees, saying kitchen islands with seating are popular.

If the space is too small for an island, a peninsula shape — an island attached to a wall at one end — will do, says MacGeorge.

On the remaining walls, the Buss kitchen cabinets remained unchanged, except they put new door handles on them.

Some people in the Lehigh Valley are taking cabinets out and installing shelving, either open or with glass-door fronts. Jarrett says it can really transform the space.

Buss approached her design decisions with function in mind.

"I'm not a trendy type of person." For instance, for the backsplash, she didn't choose the little mosaic tiles that are popular now.

"I like to use it with clients," she says, "but in smaller areas."

Lehigh Valley residents vary in the type of design they like. Jarrett often sees a mix of traditional and new.

"You might see contemporary style with something more eclectic, a piece that might look Old World," Jarrett says.

MacGeorge is installing more ornate cabinetry, with layers of crown molding adorning the top of cabinets.

Across the Northeast, the design preference might be called transitional, such as cabinet doors that have a frame and flat center rather than raised panels, Jarrett says. And at a recent seminar, she heard about European contemporary, a sleek style using high-gloss acrylics, exotic woods and frameless cabinetry that is making its way to the United States.

Buss is an interior decorator, but at times in redoing her own kitchen, she found herself being more of a [homeowner](#) than a designer. She says one of the harder decisions for her and Brian was agreeing on the island and breakfast bar lighting. A favorite technique of Buss is to buy three styles of an item in question and let the client choose, then return the unwanted products. They tried several light fixtures, eventually finding the right one, but not before Brian joked, "maybe we should hire a decorator."

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December 10

Words on Walls: Pithy sayings, quotes can punch up any drab décor



A quote or saying can add a visual element to a plain wall. (Shutterstock)

DECEMBER 5, 2014, 2:03 PM

Many people know Pam Parker, an Emmaus entrepreneur, for her winning ways in a kitchen, although she sold her most recent store, Baked, three years ago and is now an independent baker. But Parker leavens her life with another passion.

"I love words," she says, so much so that on her kitchen wall she has inscribed the following quote from 20th-century poet W.H. Auden:

Among those whom I like or admire, I can find no common denominator; but among those whom I love, I can: all of them

make me laugh.

The beloved quote serves as a decor accessory in Parker's home. People who stop by enjoy the poet's insight and it starts conversations, she says, adding, "I love to laugh and have fun."

Parker is taking part in a little-used but distinctive option in home decor — putting words on walls. Although not widely seen, the technique has been gaining in popularity for about a decade, designers say. Some people like to be surrounded by words that express thoughts to guide them through the day, says Jill Jarrett, owner of Jarrett Design LLC of Emmaus.

Such an inscription can be a sentence:

Eat, drink and

be merry

Or used as a graphic element:

EAT drink be merry

eat DRINK be merry

eat drink BE MERRY

Lehigh Valley designers say the choice of what to say is highly individualized, but tends to be inspirational. Parker, who has inscribed sayings on walls of more than one house, agrees. "I usually pick something that is special to me, that I feel personally." For her daughter's bedroom a few years back, she chose the following:

What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?

If a phrase is going to be on the wall for a while, it should be meaningful for you and your family, Jarrett says. For instance, she and other designers say that messages important enough to be painted on a wall might be words of wisdom that you heard your grandmother say. "Choose something that makes you feel a warmth inside," says Susan Buss, owner of Susan M. Buss Interiors of Upper Milford Township.

What makes for a warm, happy feeling varies from one person to the next, as

evidenced by this kitchen-wall quote from an online decal retailer:

Dinner

CHOICES:

1. Take it

2. Leave it

But that is the beauty of using typeface as a design element. "I would stress its level of versatility," says Joanne Titcomb, owner of Cherry Mint Designs of Breinigsville. Words can be used in just about any space, she says, from living room to kitchen to bedroom. She adds that a range of materials can be used, from paints to vinyl appliques to plaster.

Finally, stencils for different type fonts and letter sizes exist to tickle any design fancy from modern to retro. And they can be used to large or small effect. For instance, Buss suggests putting a very small quote in a bathroom. It might be

as simple as:

Good morning, Sunshine

Also, people have been marking the growth of children with a ladder of lines up a wall for generations. Putting short anecdotes on walls instead to mark the stages of a child's life can be a touching reminder for parents.

Facilitating the range of choices is the rise of companies offering custom or off-the-shelf slogans for the walls of eager do-it-yourselfers who want to spend as little money as possible. Among the DIY crowd are people who are, Titcomb says, open to "going online, researching the field, finding something they like, ordering it and installing it."

Titcomb notes that a designer would consider proportion, color, font and form, and those are design elements do-it-yourselfers can also employ. Make sure it all ties together, Jarrett advises. For instance, "Use vintage fonts in more rustic settings," she says.

Don't be tied to basic black by custom or ready-made vinyl lettering, Buss cautions. For instance, she suggests setting one key word in gold. "Make it look artsy," she says. "Have fun with the color."

After all, what's the worst that could happen? You'd have to paint over the wall. For people loath to take on even that risk, the designers note, canvas or wood accessories are for sale that feature graphic elements. "One word, like 'Coffee,' can do it all," Buss says.

But Parker prefers a bolder approach. Another words-on-the-wall choice of hers is an ancient proverb popularized in Latin and English by 20th-century psychiatrist Carl Jung:

Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit.

Bidden or not bidden, God is present.

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Dance hall days in Catasauqua



Ryan Kneller

THE MORNING CALL

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OCTOBER 12, 2013, 6:25 PM

The new dance hall is located at 311 Front St. in Catasauqua

Unless you're a C-list celebrity or a washed-up professional athlete, gracing the stage of "Dancing with the Stars" probably isn't in the cards for you. This doesn't mean you can't learn the moves though.

The Gas House Dance Hall in Catasauqua, which opened Sept. 7, offers weekly classes in swing, salsa, mambo and belly dance. The business at 311 Front St. (near **Blondie's Cupcakes**) also offers instruction in yoga and drumming.

"We want to be the Lehigh Valley's go-to destination for people wanting to learn dance styles that are not typically found in one dance school," said artistic director and co-owner Hannah Nour, a Bethlehem Catholic High School and Muhlenberg College graduate. "A ballet school, for example, probably wouldn't offer other styles. We also hope to include African and Indian dance in the future."

Nour and managing director and co-owner Robynn Shannon, both residents of Catasauqua, named the dance hall after a gas station that operated out of the building in the 1930s. They also pay homage by displaying original oil cans, and plan to showcase two antique gas pumps when they are restored.

According to the duo, the most recent occupant before their arrival, **Blocker's Service and Hardware**, closed a few years ago. Wall shelving that once housed tools and parts now holds shoes, yoga mats and dancing accessories.

Work, which began in January, included the removal of drop ceiling, installation of wall mirrors and construction of a spring dance floor, which consists of a moisture seal, high-density foam, two layers of plywood and hardwood on top.

"It was very important that we have a proper dance floor — one that absorbs shock and is kind to the body," said Nour, who briefly attended New York's The Juilliard School before an injury.

Nour, who has toured with Miles Copeland's Bellydance Superstars and taught at Jacques d'Amboise's National Dance Institute and Ballet Tech, stresses that classes are meant for people of every age, size and level of fitness.

In addition to getting a workout, she sees other benefits to dance, including an increase in confidence and the promotion of positive self-body image.

"Belly dancing, in particular, is a way for women to express femininity in a very empowering way," she explained. "It also helps your posture, so we want people to leave here standing taller — literally and figuratively."

Belly-dance classes, taught by Nour and Shannon, are only open to women, but men are welcome to participate in all other classes.

Con Gallagher, a well-known dance instructor and choreographer in the Lehigh Valley, teaches beginner salsa, mambo and East Coast swing while Rami El Aasser, a Brooklyn-based tabla player and percussionist offers bimonthly drumming workshops.

Yoga classes are taught by three instructors: Ruth Huron, Amber Colson and Ram Gopalakrishnan.

Class fees are \$45 to \$65 for six weeks or \$15 for a drop-in. The next six-week session begins Oct. 28.

The business also sells dancing apparel, jewelry and accessories. Info: 610-443-0707 or The Gas House Dance Hall on Facebook.

Next door to The Gas House, another female-owned business opened its doors June 6. **Flawless Designs**, a full-service hair salon, is owned by Breann Galgon.

The salon offers the following services: men's, women's and children's haircuts; color; highlights; updos; waxing; perms and chemical straightening; extensions; and bridal and children's parties.

Info: 484-245-0300 or flawlessdesignssalon.com.

West of Catasauqua, a business selling antiques and vintage-inspired decor and gifts opened Oct. 2 at 2895 Township Line Road in Orefield.

Barn Swallow, housed in the former **Country Barn** restored barn, sells everything from wreaths and jewelry to furniture and kids' toys. Owner Kate Hydro of Schuylkill Haven decided to open the store after outgrowing her Etsy shop online.

"I had an overwhelming amount of items and needed a local storefront," she explained.

Info: 610-530-2276.

In Emmaus, two new businesses plan to hold grand openings in the coming weeks.

First, Allentown native and award-winning kitchen and bath designer Jill Jarrett will cut the ribbon of her new

studio, **Jarrett Design LLC**, with Emmaus Mayor Winfield Iobst at 2 p.m. Friday.

The studio, on the first floor of a circa-1900 building at 312 Main St., is suggestive of her talents, much of which center on the redesign and renovation of historic buildings. It houses an array of cabinet and design choices.

As part of the grand opening festivities, Jarrett Design, in conjunction with **Re/Max Real Estate** will hold a tour of eight Jarrett-designed kitchens in the area, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday beginning at the studio.

Tickets, \$45, include a harvest lunch at Shaggy Bark Farm in Haycock Township. All proceeds benefit Charity for Children. Info on Jarrett: jarrettdesignllc.com. Info on tour: 610-770-9000.

Second, **Klassy-Kidz Boutique** at 420 Chestnut St. will hold a grand-opening celebration featuring giveaways, face painting and light refreshments, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Nov. 1 and 2.

The store will specialize in the consignment and resale of gently used and new children's clothing, sizes 0-14. It will also sell kids' toys, books, DVDs, baby gear and accessories.

"I am a mother of four, and I see how fast children grow out of their clothes," said owner Michaelle Etienne, a resident of Allentown. "I decided to do consignment/resale because it is a great way to find children's clothes at an affordable price."

Info: 610-515-5482.

Many Retail Watchers, including Sherry Mengel of Nazareth and Dan McConnell of Easton, have inquired about the abrupt closure of **Northwood Deli & Café** at 3601 Nazareth Road (Route 248) in Palmer Township.

"Wondering if you knew why?" Mengel wrote in an email. "Our family has gone there for many years."

"Many customers are holding gift certificates to this business," McConnell added.

Unfortunately, I don't have any answers. I called the business' same disconnected phone number, failed to locate the owner's home phone number and garnered no clues on a recent visit.

Just south of the shuttered deli and cafe, a new **Sheetz** gas station and convenience store is scheduled to open Thursday at 3501 Nazareth Road in Palmer Township.

The business will supplement other area Sheetz locations on Schoenersville Road in Bethlehem, MacArthur Road in Whitehall Township, and Kutztown Road in Fleetwood. Info: 610-559-5511 or sheetz.com.

I'll finish with two happenings that are sure to get your mouth watering.

First, **Kasey Lynn's Sweets & Catering** opened a couple of weeks ago in the space recently vacated by **Warm Sugar** in Hellertown.

According to the business' president and chef, Russell Lebkuecher, the 18-seat shop at 1308 Main St. (next to **Pondelek's Florist and Gifts**) will offer a wide variety of food items, including breakfast and lunch sandwiches, panini wraps, eight flavors of Nelson's ice cream (milkshakes available) and a wide selection of baked goods and desserts, including muffins, cookies, pastries, cakes and pies.

"Our goal is to offer delicious food at a price everyone can afford," said Lebkuecher, who also co-owns **The Meadows Banquet Hall** in Lower Saucon Township.

A grand-opening celebration, featuring music, free hot dogs and children's activities, will be held 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday. Info: 610-838-1928

Finally, **Pies to Die For Cafe** opened Friday in the former **Black's Luncheonette** building at 2 E. Pennsylvania Ave. in Pen Argyl.

The 40-seat eatery serves breakfast sandwiches and a vast selection of baked goods, including "pies in a jar," "push-up cakes," traditional pies and cakes, muffins and danishes. Beverages include soda, coffee, lattes, cappuccino, espresso, macchiato and 40 different flavors of tea.

"We also plan to make homemade soups and simple sandwiches in the future," said co-owner Jennifer Brocato, who operates the business with her husband, Anthony. Info: 610-340-4756.

*Retail Watch keeps track of new store, restaurant and bank development in the Lehigh Valley. Have a question about a retail construction project, a store opening or a chain you'd like to see come to the area? Call features reporter **Ryan Kneller** at 610-820-6597 or email retailwatch@mcall.com. Retail Watch appears every Sunday.*

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