

Getting Started with Kitchen and Bath Remodeling

BY THOMAS BUCKBOROUGH

Deciding to remodel a kitchen or bathroom can be a major life decision since these rooms are so central to your day-to-day life. And because kitchens and baths are also the most dense and complicated rooms in your home, the required investment can be significant, not just in money terms, but also in time and energy.

Good design and project planning can often make the difference between a good and a great remodel. Doing your homework up-front will help you, your designer, and/or your contractor zero in on what will deliver the best value to you and your family. By understanding what your functional needs are for comfortable day-to-day living and your aesthetic tastes, you will have the foundation for creating new rooms.

As you begin to think seriously about remodeling a kitchen or a bath, you should ask yourself questions like:

WHAT ARE MY GOALS?

Are you primarily interested in enhancing your lifestyle or in increasing the resale value of your home? Today's lifestyles have changed dramatically from even 15 years ago. Kitchens are now the center of the home's social life; it is command central where everything comes and goes. Bathrooms have become retreats of quiet elegance while family baths and powder rooms have been transformed into efficient, yet beautiful spaces.

HOW LONG DO I PLAN TO STAY IN THIS HOME?

If you plan to be there a long time, you should think mostly about the value the project will deliver to you and your family. If you plan to be in the house less than 3 years, then you should think of the project both in terms of what it will mean to you as well as how it will affect resale value.

WILL REMODELING INCREASE RESALE VALUE OF MY HOUSE?

Though remodeling will generally increase the value of your home, many projects do not actually yield a positive return on investment (unless your kitchen and baths are in really awful shape). So, you must look carefully at your own situation to determine whether it's a good idea in your case. To

do that, you might want to consult a local real estate agent who can give you an accurate assessment of your local market.

DO I KNOW WHAT I'D LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Producing an outstanding remodeling result depends on being clear about what you want to accomplish. Especially if you are doing the project to affect resale value, you should think not just about your own needs, but also about your potential buyer's needs. To help you along, you should get ideas from wherever you can and you should think carefully about your family's specific day-to-day needs. Overall, you'll want to strike a good balance between form (what it looks like) and function (how it works).

DO I HAVE THE TIME AND MONEY TO DEVOTE TO A "LABOR OF LOVE"?

Remodeling requires commitment. Be ready to spend time envisioning your life in the future and making dozens of choices (e.g., about design and layout, and for tiles, appliances, paint colors, etc.). You must also be ready to fork over some serious cash to get the job done right because, square foot-by-square foot, kitchens and baths are the highest value rooms in your home.

WILL REMODELING BE TOO DISRUPTIVE?

If you are living in your home now, you'll either need to do without the room(s) for a while or you'll need to find another place to live. Either way, be prepared for the disruption that ensues from losing access to one (or more) of the key rooms in your house.

CLARIFY YOUR NEEDS

If you are sure that remodeling is right for you, the next step is to outline your needs both functionally and aesthetically. There are several steps you can take to help you along:

WRITE A "VISION STATEMENT"

Your vision of what your new space should be is important. A good vision statement will capture the essence of what you need to accomplish and serve as a guiding framework for design. When writing your vision, use sweeping, general concepts and terms like these:

- *"I would like my kitchen to be a gracious and warm family gathering place where frequent holiday get togethers will function well and 2 or 3 people can cook at the same time".*
- *"My bath should be a soothing, peaceful, spa-like retreat where I can relax and pamper myself"*

- "Our family's bath should be playfully decorated and functional so that our three kids can use it at the same time"

Try to stay away from defining exactly what your space should look like so your designer can do their job.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIVE

Understand where and how you live now. What do you wish you had? What is frustrating? Knowing both how you currently use your kitchen or bath and how you want to be able to use them is critical to a successful project. If you are really able to specify your needs, your new spaces can be designed from the ground up to meet them.

- Typical kitchen problems: Not enough clearance between appliances and cabinets. Not enough storage. Bad circulation and traffic flow. Not enough counter space to cook on. Gets too crowded when guests are visiting.
- Typical bathroom problems: Outdated materials; not enough storage; a single sink; not enough room or separate spaces for multiple people to use at once.

As well as the specific kitchen or bath, it is also often helpful to think about the adjoining spaces. You'll want to make sure your new spaces are well integrated with these rooms, so the entire remodeling solution yields the best outcome.

WRITE TWO LISTS

Homeowners often want more than they can realistically get. To help you prioritize, you should create two lists: a Need-to-Have list that contains those things you simply can't live without, and a Nice-to-Have list that includes things that you might exclude if the budget or other factors are limitations. Prioritizing can often facilitate illuminating discussions with other household members as well as help your designer sort out what's important. Be pre-



pared to give up some things and/or to make trade-offs to stay within your target investment range.

CREATE A CLIPPING FILE

Look everywhere to get ideas about form and function. Keep your eyes open when you are at other people's homes – check out their kitchens and baths. Buy lots of magazines and home design books and highlight the things that look good (and even some that don't). Write comments on pictures you like – including anything from a faucet to a whole room that you love the look of.

Working through these several steps will get you off to a great start on your remodeling project. There's a lot more planning to be done, like developing a solid budget and identifying a designer and/or contractor to assist you, but with this information in hand, you'll be well prepared to tackle these steps. 🏠

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