

Kitchens and Baths – More Bang for Your Buck

Kitchens and baths have long been the most desired home improvement projects for homeowners across the country; and for good reason. They are often the most and heavily used rooms in the house, and not so coincidentally, the most expensive to renovate. Although budgets are a big concern for everyone, you have to look at these rooms as investments. Kitchens and bath renovations are some of the best investments you can make in a home. These improvements have a much higher payoff than other home renovations. These rooms also help a home show better and sell faster. Have you ever heard someone say, “You have to see this home’s bedroom”? No, but people love to gush about kitchens and baths.

When designing your kitchen or bath consider these few basic things. There are many other considerations that will have to be discussed and planned for, but a good designer will be able to help you through all of the decisions processes.

- First, think of the space itself. Make sure you are satisfied with the amount of countertop space, storage capacity and floor layout. Do you need to reconfigure the layout; move walls, the island, bathtubs, etc. to make more space? Or do you just want to give it a facelift, and update it with the latest styles and finishes?
- Do you entertain? If so, does the kitchen become the central gathering place in your home? How many cooks are in the kitchen? If more than one person will be working in the kitchen at the same time, you need to give some thought to separate prep areas and ensure you have adequate clearances for two chefs.
- Does your bathroom have all of the components you want? Separate shower and tub, dual shower heads, private toilet room?
- If you have young children, or will have them soon, how will that impact the layout and function of your kitchen? A popular trend these days is for a drawer microwave to be placed in an island, thus allowing children easy access to the microwave for warming up snacks. Others may want to avoid this very arrangement, because their children are too curious.
- Do you have enough light? If your surface mount lights are not providing enough light, consider adding task lighting. If you have even bigger lighting issues, or want to bring the outdoors in, consider adding a window or door to the exterior.
- How efficient are your old appliances? The latest appliances look great, function very well, and most importantly, consume far less energy than their old counterparts. Modern appliance insulation and materials have

- also made them much quieter. In many cases, local and federal programs are available to help offset the cost of these new appliances.
- Do you have certain plates and/or glasses you want displayed in your kitchen? What about a display cabinet for your finest towels and toiletries? If so, consider glass front cabinets in a few key locations, or some open shelves that will allow you to show off your collections. In addition to looking great, glass front cabinets and open shelves help to make your space look and feel bigger.

The key to knowing all of the various design and selection choices that are available to you and putting them together in the right way is to have the right team working with you. When it comes to architects, designer, and builders, you have to be just as careful choosing them as you do the selections in your home.

- Does your designer/architect have a good reputation? Are they willing to provide you references? How about a portfolio of work? Before and after pictures are great. This gives them an opportunity to explain their previous customer's problem and how they solved it.
- Make sure you are getting accurate drawings and detailed statements of work. Take the approach that if it's not written down, it's not getting done. Vague agreements put the burden on the homeowner, not the contractor. Understand your bid – what is included, what is not? What are the allowance amounts? How will change orders be handled? Is your contractor insured? What type of warranty are you getting? Ask detailed questions, and demand detailed answers.
- Are they good communicators? This is one of the biggest frustrations for homeowners. Although designers and contractors do this type of work every day, the customer probably has not taken on a remodel and therefore has a lot of questions. Someone who responds quickly and ensures all questions are answered is a must.

These are just a few tips that you need to consider when taking on a remodeling project. There are literally millions of choices out there for you to consider and almost as many architects, designer, and contractors to choose from. It all starts with getting the right partners, and they will then help you with the daunting task of planning out your project. Make sure you don't go with the low bid, just to go with the low bid. You will probably pay a dear price for that decision later. Remember, "You can't get something for nothing." Remodeling can be a stressful event; your everyday routine is thrown off with workers coming into your home, loud noises coming from everywhere, loss of use of certain spaces, and your straight clean home is now a construction site. All of this is manageable if you have a team that you know, trust, and communicate well with.