

# What to Look for When Remodeling a Kitchen

The kitchen is the heart of the home. It's where the family congregates and is often Ground Zero for homework and bill-paying. It's also where individuals play host to parties and feed the crowds.

With so many uses, the kitchen sees its share of action and is often one of the rooms in the house that can use remodel to stay updated as trends change through the years. Also, as any real estate agent worth his or her salt will tell you, remodeling your kitchen can be a sound financial investment -- adding a good deal of value to your home should you ever choose to sell.

Considering the kitchen is one of the most widely used rooms of the house, choosing to remodel it is a large undertaking and one that can cause a good deal of upheaval in your life. So consider these tips before beginning.

## Determine a Budget

Kitchen remodels are expensive, there's no getting around that fact. Remodeling an average-size kitchen (10' by 10') can cost anywhere from

\$5,000 for minimal changes to the high double-digits for extensive and top-of-the-line renovations.

One of the priciest parts of a kitchen renovation is the cabinetry, followed by high-end appliances. If your cabinets are in sound shape, consider giving them a face lift instead of a complete tear-out and redo. If appliances will be a budget-breaker, consider lower-priced models. As long as all appliances are of the same finish and look cohesive, it will be fine.

Consider what homes in your area are selling for and their average value. You don't want to make improvements that exceed the value of homes in your neighborhood, which could be to your disadvantage if you sell later on.

## Plan Out Your Design

Functionality should be as much a part of your kitchen as beauty. Think about how you work in the kitchen and which drawers or cabinets will be of most use. Most designers recommend a triangular arrangement of the stove, sink and refrigerator, so you're working

efficiently and don't have to cross obstacles to get from one to the other. If you frequently entertain from your kitchen and like the hands-on approach, perhaps a center island with separate prep sink would fit the bill.

Remember to work with the scale of the room. While a design you saw in a home decorating magazine may be beautiful, it doesn't mean that commercial stove and refrigerator will fit in your space.

## Research Contractors

Horror stories of individuals being left high and dry by contractors are all too common. However, a very good majority of contractors are reliable and honest, you simply have to do your research to hire the right one.

You can call the Better Business Bureau to check up on a contractor, and asking for references before any money is exchanged with the contractor is an absolute must as well. Make sure that the contractor also has insurance and workman's comp to cover injuries for him, his staff, and any subcontractors he hires out work to.

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A contractor will become your right-hand man during the remodeling, so you want to have a good rapport with him and make sure he's listening to your suggestions and wishes.

Part of the hiring process involves getting estimates from the contractors you're considering. Try for three or four estimates and compare them to see which is the best value.

## Get Your Hands Dirty

The term "sweat equity" floats around with home improvement projects. This is a concept of doing some work yourself to be paid off in the long run. Handling some of the labor-intensive tasks, such as demolishing old cabinets or tearing out tile that will be replaced can shave off a good percentage off of your bill. While supplies are expensive, it's the contractor's labor charge that may be the highest number you see on your contract. So anything you can do to cut down his hours on the job -- from prepping a space to sweeping up after the work -- will save you cash.

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