

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 effi-

ciently 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.

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.

Shaping Your Home's Style, Starting at the Front Door

You want a home with panache. A look that says something about you -- whether conservative, fun, classic, contemporary, or courageous.

Yes, but how?

If you're remodeling an existing home, changes should blend with your home's current look for consistency. For new homes, you have a clean slate from which to create your style.

Structural features and building products shape a home's look. Size, proportion, roof pitch and types of dormers, columns and porches are structural influences on a home's style. The shape of your windows, the profile and color of your trim, and the texture of an entry door demonstrate how building products impact a home's appearance. As an illustration, Tudor homes are frequently defined by their stucco or stone exteriors, steeply pitched roofs, banks of windows, and dark timbers that break up the facade.

There are countless choices in most building product categories. Looking at one of those categories, entry doors, you will find wood, steel, smooth fiberglass and textured fiberglass doors in a variety of sizes and panels, and with many decorative options to put your signature on the entry. Other product cate-

gories have an equal number of options, but the front door takes special consideration because it's the focal point of a home, according to Jeff Kibler of Peachtree Doors and Windows.

"Next to your home's physical design, the entry door contributes significantly to architectural style and curb appeal," Kibler says. "Manufacturers' many styles and options make it possible to create one-of-a-kind, rather than one-size-fits-all, entries that are consistent with virtually any architectural style."

Many of the latest trends in entry doors center around textured fiberglass entry doors. These doors have wood-grain textures to mimic real wood doors but they are more durable, require less maintenance and are six times more energy efficient than wood doors.

What are the choices?

Various grain patterns and textures make textured fiberglass entry doors suitable for a wide range of architecture, including:

- Victorian or other period styles can be enhanced by a Mahogany-grain door, which has a fine-to-medium texture and wavy grain. When it's finished in a dark stain, a Mahogany-textured door is timeless and traditional.

- Craftsman or Prairie styles are best

captured by doors with a consistent, vertical-grain fir texture that has clean lines and simple detail. Some manufacturers offer small dentil shelves in the door panel for consistency with these architectural styles.

- Tudor, Spanish Colonial or Pueblo architecture call on entry doors with a rustic appearance conveyed through the doors' vertical grain, uniform and coarse texture. These doors often have a plank style to resemble board-and-batten, distressed wood doors. Rustic doors with ornamental clavos highlight Post Medieval English tendencies.

If you simply want an entry door that resembles wood but offers the resiliency and energy efficiency of fiberglass, manufacturers also offer oak-textured doors, with a straight-grain and coarse texture that can be finished as you please.

"The available textures for fiberglass entry doors have expanded significantly in recent years thanks to advances in manufacturing," Kibler says. "With the number of options available, homeowners can create the entry they like, within their home's architecture but without the cost of a custom wood door. The green attributes of a fiberglass door are an added benefit."

Each of these doors' styles can be

enhanced by choosing an appropriate panel. Panels range from flush panels with no windows to panels with full-length windows. Six- or eight-panel doors are indicative of the Colonial-period houses, whereas the top of the door panel in a Craftsman home will often have a window with stained or geometric-patterned glass.

Your entry will take on a look of its own when you combine the door's texture and panel with one of many decorative glass choices, whether intricate floral or geometric patterns, faux and true wrought iron grille work, or stained glass. The patterns in decorative glass are formed by using different types of glass, glass chips and coming, which provides the distinctive outline to the patterns in brass, antique copper, zinc or black patina.

Entry doors are generally sold through lumberyards, home centers and window and door dealers. The installation of a new door, especially a door with sidelites, transoms and complementary fixed windows, can be quite involved. Installation should be left to a professional contractor or a skilled do-it-yourselfer. To help you shape your home's architectural style, visit peachtreedor.com to request free literature and preview the available styles.