

# Surviving a Kitchen Remodel



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from start to ‘New Kitchen Party’

Renovating a kitchen is an exciting and wonderful experience but it can be an expensive, complicated and time-consuming process. Every detail must be planned and executed for it to be successful.

Everything should be in discussed and put in writing. But realize even the best laid plans can go awry. As much as we try perfection is impossible. A kitchen involves many specialized trades: carpenters, plumbers, electricians, heating and cooling specialists, tile and flooring designers and installers and painters just to name a few.

By following these few, relatively simple steps, you can get exactly what you want.

## **Assess Your Kitchen**

**Use a tape measure and a notepad; measure everything and take notes.**

Draw a sketch of your kitchen as it is now. Take the time to note the location of each component. Note the height and depth of your cabinetry. Are there cabinets you cannot use or items use cannot reach? Today, there are standards and codes that must

**Warning:** These are guidelines and by no means a complete step by step process. Each project is unique and will have special requirements. Also, never plan your kitchen remodel around a major family event or holiday, delays are inevitable. You do not want to rush the completion of the most important and expensive room in your house.

be adhered to. A professional contractor and kitchen designer will know those codes and standards.

Pay close attention to how you work in your kitchen, where you store everything in your kitchen, what do you like or dislike in your present kitchen and discuss this with your kitchen designer.

## **Know What You Want**

### **Focus.**

Saying you want a new kitchen is like standing in the library and saying you want a book. Do research, buy magazines, clip photos and add notes about what appeals to you in each photo. Create a folder and a wish list. Photos used in magazines are generally of large kitchens with large budgets.

Sometimes the items on your wish list are not feasible in your home's present condition; your kitchen may not be wide enough to accommodate an island or the floor joists may not be strong enough to support a commercial range without additional support. More importantly, the present electrical panel may not be adequate for today's modern kitchen demands.

The kitchen specialist will take all this into consideration during the design process. Ask anyone who has remodeled a kitchen what has worked and, what didn't. Go online and search the web for ideas.

## **Budget**

### **Create a budget.**

Cabinetry, appliances, lighting, everything you might need for a new kitchen is available in many price points.

### **What should the new kitchen cost?**

Findings show that successful kitchen remodels fall between the ranges of 8 - 12% of the homes current value.

Set a budget and share it with the designer. It is not fair to the designer to make it a guessing game. Professional designers carry a multitude of products in many price ranges and can design with the right products to fit your budget. You're getting ready to make a large investment.

Remember to consider all aspects when setting the budget. Plumbing, electrical, heating/ cooling even structural considerations must be resolved when setting a budget.

Do not forget the small items; you'll need cabinet hardware, paint, (grout) and lighting to name a few. Make sure your budget has room for the finishing touches. Plan on spending 10 percent more money than you estimated.

### **Interview Designers**

#### **Interview designers before you get quotes.**

The interview will tell you how the job will ultimately turn out. Ask for and check references. Remember, this is a long process and you have to communicate if you are unhappy or have questions so you will need a good rapport with your designer.

A good designer will ask you the right questions to help you create your dream kitchen. Check out the showroom: a good showroom will have up to date displays and samples that will provide you with the chance to “test drive” your kitchen to see how the various parts will relate to each other.

**The biggest recommendation we can give** is to work with an NKBA (National Kitchen & Bath Association) member firm. NKBA members are professionals that attend ongoing training, and adhere to a specific code of conduct that results in a quality finished product and a satisfied client.

There are some who say to get multiple quotes on everything and don't feel obligated to buy all the pieces from one place.

**This is a recipe for disaster.**

Instead, conduct multiple interviews and select and work with a responsible firm that you are comfortable with to coordinate your project. When comparing quotes make sure you are comparing apples to apples. Not all quotes are created equal be sure of what is included in each. Staying with one firm keeps it simple and organized. You don't have to worry who is responsible.

**If you do buy from multiple locations,** expect to have the responsibility of coordinating these items and handling the inevitable problems that will crop up during the design and installation process.

Kitchen remodeling is very personal, take the time, develop a relationship and then stick to it. Going back and forth to numerous locations can cause confusion and a less than desirable design.

Many NKBA member firms look at the total project. They make sure all the details are covered before the job begins. It is a lot more than placing cabinets. Consider locating lighting fixtures, electrical outlets, ventilation requirements and even tile patterns.

**Hiring professionals gets professional results.**

## **Design**

**Once you sign a contract with a dealer, get a printed copy of the design of your kitchen that you have signed and agreed to.**

This will include an overview of the floor layout and pictures of each wall. It may look confusing but the drawings should include dimensions, elevations and details of everything.

A good designer will carefully walk you through the plan and point out what will work best. Their profession is designing kitchens that work, trust is important. Ask the designer for copies of all the warranties so you will have a complete understanding of what to expect from the products you are buying.

This is the time to have your designer explain the variations in the wood and exactly where the seams will be in your countertop. They should explain to you that if you select cabinets with painted wood doors that you should expect to see hairline cracks in the paint where the wood is joined and that newly delivered doors might warp slightly while they acclimatize in your home and these are not defects.

**Do not expect the designers to release the plans** until you have signed a contract and have paid a deposit. When the design is finalized and contracts signed and deposit paid you should get multiple copies of the

plan and retain one master set with your contract to keep. If your project involves more than simple cabinet replacement a detailed scope of work should be part of the contract documents. You will want to have one specific plan for each trade that will be working on the job.

## **Interview contractors**

### **Installing kitchen cabinetry is a specialized trade.**

It is different from finish or trim carpentry and requires a special understanding of working with cabinetry. Cabinet installation also requires specialized tools in order to produce a quality product.

**Remember; most kitchen installers are good carpenters but not all carpenters are good kitchen installers.**

You may need to have permits from your local building authority. Determine who will secure the permits (and who will pay for them) up front. Permits are designed to protect the public. Expect the installation process to take between 4 and 6 weeks before you return to a normal life.

Hiring a full-service firm has advantages. They will coordinate everything and eliminate the finger pointing when something goes wrong, and something inevitably will go wrong.

Many excellent kitchen dealers do not have in- house installers but work regularly with a group of professional installers who they recommend and will take special care of their customers. This is an excellent way to have your kitchen remodeled and may save you a little money as the installers overhead is not being carried by the design firm.

**If you plan on doing the kitchen remodel yourself** or with family and friends be aware there are hundreds of details that you will encounter and that you will be responsible for. If you make a mistake it can add unexpected expense and delay the project. Also remember your neighbor who helped build your deck last summer has a life and family and may not want to give up their weekends to helping you finish your kitchen.

It is unfair to expect the designer to talk you thru the installation if you haven't contracted them for full service, they design, then the installer puts it in.

- There are many adjustments and touch-ups that are the responsibility of the installer.
- Expecting cabinetry that has just traveled hundreds of miles by truck to be perfectly adjusted right out of the box is unreasonable.
- There are also inevitable nicks and scratches that occur during the installation that should be touched-up by the installer.
- Most quality cabinet manufacturers are able to provide touch-up kits with the cabinetry.

The stains and paints used by cabinet manufacturers are especially formulated for the finishing process used at the cabinet factory. While the factory may offer stain or paint for purchase, it is highly recommended you take a sample to your local paint supplier for a color match. It is almost impossible to match finishes on interior woodwork in your home with the finish of the cabinets.

# Considerations for Hiring a Kitchen Firm or Contractor

## References

**Get them, and make the calls.**

- If their prior clients will let you, call and visit to find out what their experience was.
- Get referrals for kitchen firms and contractors if you are hiring an outside contractor.
- This is the contractor's chance to shine; he gets to pick his best customers to show off his work. If he can't, move on.
- Also make sure the contractor is properly insured or you could be held liable if he is injured while working on your house.
- Don't forget to check if the installer carries liability insurance.
- Ask them to present their insurance papers before they start.

## Getting the quote

**Your installation quote should be detailed writing and signed by both parties.**

You should be able to read the quote and know exactly what's going to be done, down to fitting the appliances and the installation of the last handle. Make sure the installer knows they are going to need to cut-out for appliances if not factory done and other custom-fit items.

## **Compatibility**

**You're going to have these people in your home for weeks or longer, you will need to have a good relationship with them.**

If you do not get along in the quoting process it is not going to get easier as the project progresses. There are many contractors out there; find one with whom you can communicate. Also set the ground rules on eating, smoking, daily clean- up, tool storage and make sure you tell the contractor which bathroom to use.

## **Schedule**

**Cabinetry can take anywhere from four to ten weeks to arrive.**

Set the schedule with your outside contractors (installers, electricians, plumbers) as soon as the cabinets are ordered. Give tentative dates so they can work your job into their schedules.

Make sure all your selections are made; countertops, sinks, faucets, hardware and any other products you are responsible for are ordered and on site so that when the project starts there are no delays.

Call your contractor and give him the date when the cabinets are due in. Get a firm date the job will start.

The full service dealer will coordinate the schedule and save you this chore.

**Again, do not plan your renovation around a major family event.**

You want this job to be perfect, and setting deadlines is a sure way to create undue stress. Do not put a completion clause (with penalties) in your contract; reputable firms will never accept those terms.

You have waited years to remodel your kitchen. Take the time to get the job right.

## **Space**

**Dedicate a space to the contractors for them to do their job.**

You cannot expect anyone to work outside in the winter or in an unheated shed out in the back yard. The work space needs to be close and access needs to be totally clear.

Also remember, that cabinetry reacts to heat, cold and dampness. Treat cabinetry like furniture.

## **Prepare**

**A new kitchen means taking out the old kitchen that means packing up everything in your existing kitchen.**

It may take several days or more to do this.

- Also segregate the items you must have to continue to function during the remodeling project. You're in for the long haul.
- You will need to set up a temporary kitchen during the remodel.
- Relocate the refrigerator, microwave, coffee maker and toaster into an accessible area.
- Don't forget children's special items and the dog's food dish.
- Make sure to have clear access to your electrical panel and plumbing shutoffs.

- Make space in the garage to store materials and allow the installer to “set up shop” will speed the remodeling process.
- Keep cars out of the garage.
- If the remodel requires a dumpster designate a space and have some boards or plywood on hand to minimize damage to lawn or driveway (watch out for sprinkler heads).
- Make sure kitchen ductwork is covered before the job begins to prevent dust from covering the rest of the house.

## **Check**

**When the cabinets arrive, make sure the installer checks that every cabinet is the correct size and finish against the plan.**

Also check for damage. If anything is incorrect or damaged contact your dealer immediately and reorder.

The time to find out a critical part is missing or damaged is not when your kitchen has been torn apart for three weeks and you find you cannot continue until the replacements arrive.

This is also the best time to remove the cabinet doors and drawers and store them in a safe place in your house.

Remember that cabinets are built-in furniture. Would you store a new dining room set in a cold damp garage?

## **Recycle**

**Today, many people re-purpose their old cabinetry to other locations in their house.**

If you have the spaces consider reusing cabinets in the laundry, basement or garage. There are also a number of firms who will come in and remove existing cabinets and appliances for free and resell them to people in need.

## **Get out of the way**

**You're paying your contractor a pile of money.**

Let him work. He has the plan and the materials. The less you interrupt him, the more time he has to finish your job.

Make sure he can work uninterrupted; pets, children (and their toys can delay and distract the contractors and prevent them doing their best work.

Make sure there is a safe, dry area to store the cabinetry. Your installer should remove the cabinet doors, drawers and shelves prior to installing the cabinets. This reduces the cabinets' weight and minimizes the chance for damage. Having an out of the way space in your house to store these "finished" items is critical.

**Kitchen cabinets are the largest piece of built-in furniture in your home.**

Treat them like furniture. It is not unusual for cabinet doors to warp slightly after being stored in an unheated or damp space. Allow the doors to acclimatize for several weeks before asking for replacement.

## **Communicate**

**Schedule specific meetings with the designer and contractors at least on a weekly basis (or more if necessary) to go over changes and discuss issues if any before they go too far.**

Don't be afraid to ask what the schedule is that week of who will be coming in and what days so you can plan accordingly. The more everyone communicates the better the project.

- Have an in-house meeting before ordering materials, before tear-out begins, especially if there are structural changes.
- For example, if there are new lights and switches to be installed make sure you know and agree to the placement.
- Know where the new plumbing shutoffs will be located.
- Ask where the seams will be located in the countertop.
- Ask for the details in writing or make notes on the plans.

## **Inspect**

**Don't be too critical of the job during the installation process.**

There are lots of adjustments and touch-ups that a good installer will do; it's just like detailing a new car before delivery.

**If you see something disturbing make a note and get the answer in writing.**

Remember many times you are dealing with wood products so there may be some blemishes or touch ups. Typically the designer will go through the kitchen with you and see if it is within industry standards or should be replaced. Warranty items are usually no-charge and should not hold up the final payment to the contractor.

## Enjoy!!

Finally, move back into your beautiful completed kitchen and toss out the old Cool Whip bowls and enjoy, you've done it! It's a good time to apologize to the neighbors for the dumpster and invite them to a "New Kitchen Party".

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