



Monday, Jul 12th, 2010

Daily Real Estate News

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For Your Clients: Kitchen Remodels on the Comeback Trail

By Jean Patteson

RISMEDIA, July 12, 2010--(MCT)--The explosion of remodeling shows on TV and makeover spreads in magazines has whetted America's appetite for glamorous rooms brimming with the latest furnishings, appliances and color schemes.

Kitchen remodels are among the most popular, according to a report in the just-published August issue of Consumer Reports and online at consumerreports.org. And the economic slowdown means there are outstanding deals on everything from cooktops to countertops. It also means kitchen designers and building contractors are eager for work and willing to negotiate.

But bargain prices and good looks aren't everything, said Celia Kupersmzid Lehrman, Consumer Reports' deputy home editor.

"When remodeling a kitchen, functionality is every bit as important as style. Fortunately there are many products that look good and work well," she said.

The design of your kitchen is every bit as important as what goes into it, said Jim Spence of Spence & Vaughn Fine Kitchen and Bath in Maitland, Fla.

The most functional design is based on the "work triangle" — the relationship between the prep area, the cooking area and the sink, he said. Ideally, the distance between them should never be less than four feet or more than nine feet. Of the three areas, the most-used is the sink.

When planning a remodel, determining your budget is one of the first steps. The National Kitchen & Bath Association calculates the average kitchen remodel costs between 10 percent and 20 percent of the home's value. But obviously, the extent of the makeover determines its cost. In its latest issue, Consumer Reports takes top-performing products and creates three design schemes: a do-it-yourself makeover for \$5,000; a plan that costs \$15,000 (the average spent on a kitchen remodel); and a full-scale renovation for \$50,000.

Determining your priorities is another key step, said Phil Johnson, a partner at Spence & Vaughn and a certified kitchen designer.

"Do you love to cook? If so, now might be the time to consider professional-style appliances," he said. "Do you have a large family? Consider how best to accommodate them in your new space. Think about the things you love in your old kitchen — and the things you dislike."

In addition, Johnson recommends the following steps for a successful remodel:

—Do your homework. Watch TV remodeling programs, clip appealing pictures and articles from magazines, attend remodeling seminars, visit home shows and parades of homes. Consult with a kitchen designer who is a member of the NKBA, who has the training and experience to avoid many of the things that can go wrong with a remodeling project.

—Visit a showroom. Examine the options in cabinets, countertops, appliances, flooring, plumbing and lighting. Decide what you want — and can afford.

—Schedule a home visit. The designer/installer need to measure the kitchen and adjacent rooms, and make a note of existing walls, doors and windows, electrical supplies, ceiling height, attic access, type of wall construction, plumbing details, etc.

—Finalize the project. The design is refined, construction plans are completed,

appliances and supplies are ordered — and the initial deposit is paid.

—Survive the dust, noise and workers. With proper supervision, the disruption can be kept to a minimum. Make sure materials are ordered and on the way before beginning the tear-out. Clear a space in the garage for workers' tools and supplies and items removed from the old kitchen. And communicate regularly with the designer/installer.

The August issue of Consumer Reports identifies these four rules for a successful kitchen remodel:

Don't rush. There are many kitchen products that combine value, performance and good looks. Take time to meet with professionals, browse the Internet and visit showrooms and home centers. Haste can be costly. Changing your mind after the project is started typically adds about \$1,500 to the cost of a kitchen project.

Size matters. In addition to being expensive, oversized kitchens can be exhausting to work in and keep tidy. A more compact kitchen often functions better. The National Kitchen & Bath Association website, nkba.org, provides guidelines for optimal space between appliances, cabinets and islands.

Beware of budget busters. Leave a 10 percent to 15 percent cushion for surprises, such as unexpected structural repairs. Avoid settling for a cheap option, thinking someday you will replace it with something you really want. Chances are that will never happen.

Get it in writing. When using a professional for a remodel, the written contract should list each phase of the project; every product, including the model number; and copies of each contractor's license, and workers compensation and liability insurance to confirm they are current. Call references and, if possible, visit them.

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