

Remodeling Realities Make Home Makeovers Easier

If you're like most homeowners who have lived in their home for several years, you're likely to catch the "home remodeling itch." Or, perhaps you've recently purchased a home and the avocado countertops and pink tile aren't exactly what you had in mind in your dream kitchen. As the years go by, tackling a home remodeling project is an inevitable part of homeownership that you're sure to consider. Whether making simple updates each year for budget reasons or undertaking a large project in one fell swoop, keeping your home on-trend and in-style can be a rewarding experience and increase the value of your home, no matter how long you decide to stay put.

Remodeling projects can be very overwhelming to most homeowners. Even with a clear vision in mind, just walking in to your local home improvement retailer can make your head spin. From cabinetry to patio doors and everything in between, styles, finishes, colors and sizes abound.

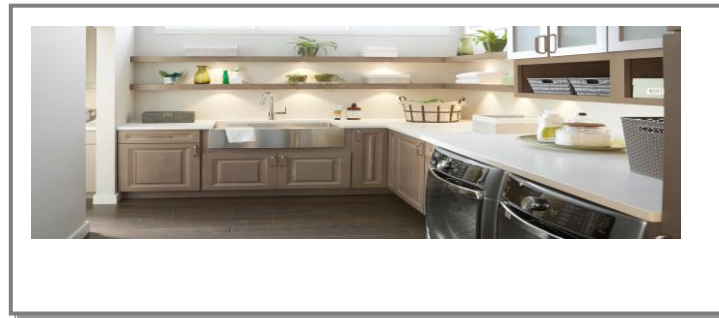
Here are some tips for making the remodeling process more enjoyable so you can complete the project with ease and peace of mind:

Let Your Design Dreams Take You Away

Like most of us, you probably already have a vision for your dream remodel. For example, perhaps gleaming granite countertops, a custom glass tile backsplash in your favorite shade of blue, endless cherry cabinetry and a built-in wine refrigerator top your list for kitchen must-haves. Or, maybe you have always dreamed of a Jacuzzi tub and bamboo floors in your master bathroom. Wherever your design dreams take you, make note of it. Peruse home and fashion magazines, design blogs and Web sites and home improvement television shows to see which styles strike you. Keep a file folder with images and swatches for inspiration. The sky's the limit, so for now don't let budget and specifications squash your design dreams.

But Keep Your Budget Grounded

Eventually you will need to set a budget for your remodeling project. Staying on budget may be more challenging, however, since many projects tend to fall victim to "creep" and you end up adding more on than originally planned.

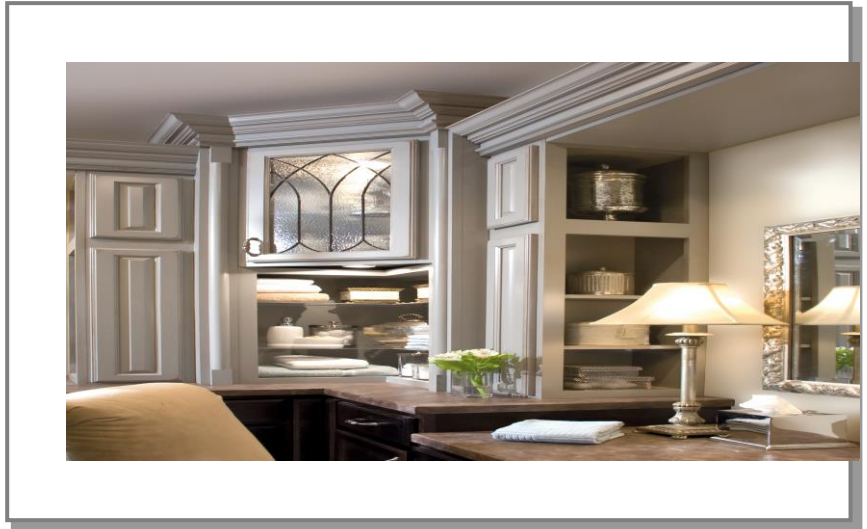


Throughout the entire process, you should keep accurate records of estimates, costs and agreements and review where you are at frequently so there aren't budget surprises. Sometimes you may have to compromise on your dreams for budget realities, but with proper planning you can achieve the right balance without leaving a hole in your wallet. Tapping a professional can help you determine where to splurge and where to save.

For example, if you are planning a typical kitchen remodel you should budget 10-to-15 percent of your home's market value. Most of the cost of remodeling a kitchen typically can be recouped by increased market value should you sell your home even in a sluggish real estate market.

Think Futuristically

The longer we stay in our homes, the older we get, too. And over time, both homes and people tend to need a little more help. As long as you're remodeling, plan ahead for changes in mobility, physical strength or eyesight. It's especially important to keep the future in mind when shopping for cabinetry, plumbing fixtures and lighting.



Pick a Professional

Once you have a good idea of what you hope to achieve and how much you're able to invest, be careful in choosing a competent design professional to assist you. A knowledgeable expert who can steer your choices and help guide the decisions will be invaluable in helping you achieve your remodeling goals within the budget you need to stick to. Take your inspiration folder with you so they can share in your vision.

To find a trustworthy expert, check with your friends and neighbors for recommendations. They may have worked with a professional or company and had a good experience. Organizations such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (www.nari.org) or the National Kitchen & Bath Associations (www.nkba.org) are helpful resources in navigating common remodeling pitfalls and identifying reputable professionals near you.

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