



INVEST IN THE BEST

Design pros tell you how to maximize your makeover dollars.

Renovated kitchens and baths can make all the difference when it comes time to sell a home.

“Most people want a move-in-ready home,” says Diane Ebeling, certified kitchen designer (CKD) and co-owner of Studio3 in Boulder. “They typically can’t visualize how a kitchen or bath might look, or they don’t have the time to deal with the remodel. When you can move in your furniture and love your environment, life is good. People will pay a little more for that luxury.”

Likewise, Brian Miller, CKD, encourages homeowners to “stick with what’s popular and what will stay around for a while” when making product selections. “Most prospective buyers are looking primarily for great kitchens and baths,” says Miller, a designer with Excel Interior Concepts and Construction in Lemoyne, Pennsylvania. “Try not to cut back too much when remodeling these rooms unless you’re planning to stay for quite some time.”

Even so, at least one designer cautions homeowners not to stake every remodeling decision on resale only.

“A real estate agent might recommend you install new kitchen countertops before you sell,” says Nancy Kaiser, CKD, kitchen and bath specialist with TDS Custom Construction in Madison, Wisconsin. “But if you still have crummy cabinets, it won’t matter that the countertops are granite. You need to do it right.”

IS IT IN THE BUDGET?

Kaiser begins by educating her clients on the base costs of a project. For instance, an average bath remodel in the Madison area runs \$18,000 to \$24,000.

“So when a client starts talking about wanting glass tile everywhere in the bath, she needs to know that doesn’t fit into her budget,” Kaiser says. “Instead, perhaps we’ll use glass tiles as accent pieces, surrounded by less expensive, but still attractive, tiles. Without that guidance, lots of costly mistakes can be made.”

Likewise, Miller tries to debunk home renovation myths before a tool has been lifted. “Most people don’t understand, for instance, how much labor is involved when remodeling a bathroom,” he says.

“They assume it’s much less expensive than a kitchen, when the cost is often the same, if not more,” he says. “Showers and tub areas are the most expensive; tilework is costly, especially if you have fun with the design. And then there’s plumbing involved with sprays, jets, and showerheads. Even though you’re working in a much smaller space, you could end up paying a much higher price.”

STRETCH THOSE RENOVATION DOLLARS.

Here’s what the pros suggest for quality design at affordable prices:



BUDGET TIP

Keep expenses down by keeping your tub and toilet. New tile and countertops spruce up a bath quickly.

Meet in the middle. Head for midprice cabinets and appliances, the two most costly kitchen purchases. For cabinets, that price tag should be around \$15,000; for appliances, plan on spending about \$10,000 for a range, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher, and built-in oven. Miller reminds homeowners that lower-price, good-quality appliances leave more money for significant touches such as undercabinet lighting and tile backsplashes.

ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE ON COUNTERS.

Ebeling considers laminate the best value, and Miller says some laminates now even bear the look of granite. Ebeling predicts solid-surfacing options will rise in popularity on the kitchen design scene soon—at a good price. Granite has come down in price in recent years and may be less expensive than manufactured stone.

WORK FROM THE FLOOR UP.

Though 98 percent of Ebeling’s clients choose wood floors for their kitchens, she says linoleum will make a comeback in the next year or two and will be a budget-friendly option. Miller suggests fiber flooring. It looks like tile but boasts the softness and durability of vinyl.

CONSIDER CLEVER DESIGN IDEAS.

Incorporate design to create a look that really pops and detracts from less expensive cabinets or appliances. Here’s what Ebeling suggests:

- Paint the island one color and the perimeter of the kitchen another color.
- Remove cabinet doors, or install glass doors on the cabinets.
- Buy less expensive cabinets and add design elements, such as hardware, to upgrade the look.
- Use different cabinet styles.
- Move in furniture pieces, such as a freestanding desk or work table.
- Leave room for a piece of art.

ASK FOR HELP.

The best way to guarantee you reap the most for your remodeling dollar is to hire a professional designer.

“Yes, there are certain products you can find at a big box store that you can change out yourself, like a vanity,” Kaiser says. “But when you get into leaky plumbing, or structural or mechanical issues, then those do-it-yourself projects can become problematic.” ^{kb}

HOW YOUR REMODEL CAN GO GREEN

Consider these ideas from designers Nancy Kaiser and Brian Miller:

* **SHOP RESALE.** Habitat for Humanity ReStores sell donated goods, including building materials. The items are all reusable. Proceeds go toward Habitat construction projects.

* **BUY REPURPOSED ITEMS.** Recycled glass can be used as tiles. Look for deals, and feel good about keeping the glass out of landfills.

* **CHECK THE SCRAP PILE.** Remnant pieces of granite or quartz are less expensive countertop options than new slabs and would otherwise get pitched.

* **READ UP ON THE COMPANY.** When you buy hardwood cabinets, make sure the company plants trees to replace the ones harvested.

* **CONSIDER CORK.** This material is environmentally friendly and is considered a renewable and sustainable natural resource.

* **GET CREATIVE WITH ISLANDS.** Some of the most creative islands are made from reused items. Bring in an antique chest, top it with a countertop, and add towel bars. Presto! You’ve got an island. Or find an old table that’s about 36 inches tall and add a couple of stools.