



How To Plan and Work with Designers and Contractors to Achieve a Successful Remodel Project

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Getting your remodel off to a good start

Are you itching to breathe new life into an outdated or poorly functioning kitchen? Hold on. Put down the phone. Before contacting a remodeling professional, you'll need to do a little soul-searching and research first.

Planning, planning, and more planning

This is the first phase of any remodeling project, and sometimes it's the phase that's ignored. The more pre-planning you can do the better off you are.

Create a style book

If you're even thinking about a kitchen remodel, odds are you have been leafing through design magazines and watching home improvement shows. Both are great ways to jumpstart the process, but to get the most out of this step, you'll need to do more than turn pages and program your DVR.

While looking through magazines, tear out photos of kitchens and bathrooms that appeal to you and write what you like about the room in the margin. Then slip the pages into a clear sheet protector and insert that into a three ring binder to create your style book. As your style book grows, a clear picture of your desired style of kitchen will begin to emerge. That's helpful for you, but it is also helpful for the remodeling professional you will eventually hire.

Define your goal

There's obviously a reason you want to remodel your kitchen or bathrooms or closets. What is it? Perhaps you want a kitchen that will help with resale in a few years. Maybe you desire a kitchen built for entertaining or one that allows several people to cook at once. This is the time to assess your needs and wants. Make notes and include this information in your stylebook.

Create a budget

Set a palatable budget and try to stick to it. You know what your financial resources are you know what you are comfortable spending; hence that is your budget number. However, keep in mind a general rule of thumb – try not to spend more than 15 percent of the market value of your home on a kitchen project. By setting a realistic budget, you and your designer or remodeling professional can put together a rational materials list that not only fits your needs but

also your budget. Without a budget, you are likely to go around in circles with all the different options until you are ready to throw your hands up quit.

Set a time budget

When most people hear the word budget, they automatically think of money. However, when remodeling it is also important to budget time. Is there an event on the calendar that would be affected if your kitchen was under construction? Do you have overnight guests coming that will need that bathroom? Discuss your time budget when interviewing potential remodelers.

Have realistic expectations

Above all else make sure you have realistic expectations when it comes to your kitchen remodel. Talk to friends and neighbors that have been through a remodeling process before.

Sit down with your family and talk about what you're about to embark on. It's going to take a certain amount of time. It's going to have a certain amount of mess. It's going to be a financial stress. And if you don't know all this ahead of time and you go into this with rose colored glasses, then that takes all the fun out of it. And, you know, it should be fun.

Common Mistakes:

Avoid These Pitfalls as You Plan Your Remodel

Gearing up to remodel? Don't start before reading our list below of common kitchen mistakes.

- **Mistake: Your kitchen is an island.** Be sure to consider the way your kitchen's look will gel with the rest of your home. An ultra-modern kitchen in a 19th-century farmhouse will stick out like a sore thumb. Keep architectural integrity in mind.
- **Mistake: You're a skin-deep thinker.** Remember that selecting beautiful cabinets is only half the battle, and in a lot of ways, the less important half. Make sure you have enough storage for all those plates and pots, and the accessories like tray dividers and pull-out shelves that will make them a snap to find.
- **Mistake: You think orange cabinets could be fun.** While personality is important, the cabinets aren't the best place to go hog-wild. Choose fun pulls, colorful countertop appliances and unique accessories, and other easily replaced items for fun, but select a cabinet that you—and your family—can live with for the next 15 years. And if resale is in your future, be sure to favor the sound choice over the sizzling one.
- **Mistake: You playing head honcho.** A kitchen remodel is a massive undertaking. Unless your daytime job is as a general contractor, you may want to leave this one up to the pros. Assistance from kitchen designers, bath designers, closet designers, contractors and architects is invaluable. Be sure to partner with licensed and insured professionals you get along well with.
- **Mistake: You forget that tomorrow is another day.** Sure, lowered countertop seating may be the perfect play space for your kids...but in 10 years that petite spot will be worthless. Design with the future in mind. Grab bars put in the shower now that match the rest of the bath hardware will be “handy” down the road. Ergonomic choices like raised dishwashers will keep you kitchen functional as you grow older.

- Mistake: You pooh-pooh lighting. It may not be the most thrilling part of the project, but invest some time and money in coming up with a solid lighting plan (earmark about 10 percent of your budget for it). It'll keep your kitchen or bathroom safe, set the appropriate mood and keep creepy shadows from turning your honey-colored cabinets a stale shade of brown.
- Mistake: "It's My Prerogative" is your theme song. Go ahead, change your mind in the middle of the process—just be ready to handle the additional charges and delays that making that that slightly larger pantry incurs. And if your changes means other carefully measured things (like countertops or appliance panels) are altered, then the cost goes way up.
- Mistake: You don't budge an inch. Sure, remodeling is about replacing that countertop and sink—but it's also the best (and only time) when you can truly play with the room's layout. If you're tired of always walking across your kitchen to get to the refrigerator then move it!
- Mistake: You've watched too much Extreme Home Makeover. Going at your old kitchen with a sledgehammer may sound like fun, but your space may not need to be entirely gutted. Do a thorough inventory to decide if anything—from your appliances to your cabinets frames, can be saved, saving you money in turn.
- Mistake: You actually believe Extreme Home Makeover. On the TV show they make it look like you can do a complete home remodel in a week, and do a kitchen in a couple of days. It's not going to happen that way. It's going to take far longer than may seem reasonable, and you and your family need to prepare for that.
- Mistake: Not keeping those Martha Stewart dreams in check. If you've never baked a soufflé, made a plum-stuffed pork tenderloin or tackled Spanish paella, don't expect that an \$8,000 range is just the thing you need to go from microwave queen to gourmand. Be realistic about your needs—professional appliances may pack more power than you need.

What to Expect: Kitchen Remodel Time Frame

One of your motivations for a remodeled kitchen surely must be the chance to bring the family closer together during the remodel. Doing dishes in the bathtub and warming up soup on the hot plate—fun! It'll be just like a campout!

On the way to your bright and shining new kitchen or bath, your house will indeed be turned upside down. You'll be wiping dust off the kids for weeks. There will be delays and other frustrations. Your family ties will be tested – no matter how wonderful your relationship, you will fight like never before.

But before you decide to really pitch a tent, take some defensive measures. Know what to expect and how to prepare.

You may have spent months, if not years, contemplating and mapping out your new kitchen. Gratification, however, will be far from instant once you finally do order your new products and materials. Some products and materials may require lead times of up to nine months. Custom cabinets typically arrive in 12 to 16 weeks; semi-custom in eight to 10 weeks; and stock in four weeks or less.

Once the products do arrive, expect their installation to take anywhere from two to 12 weeks, depending on how ambitious your project is and on how many setbacks you encounter.

Here's a typical installation schedule:

| Work To Be Done | Time To Complete |
|---|---|
| Structural changes (i.e. knocking out a wall or adding a barrel ceiling) | Depends on extent of changes and building type |
| Cabinets and appliances delivered and placed in a garage, dining room, manufacturers' warehouse, storage facility, or other temporary holding space | 1 day |
| Old kitchen's cabinets, appliances, and other features removed | 1 day minimum |
| Mechanical changes (i.e. electrical wiring and plumbing) | 2-3 days minimum |
| Painting or other wall decorating | 2 days minimum |
| Flooring | Depends on material |
| Cabinets | 2-10 days |
| Appliances | 1-2 days |
| Countertop fabricator measures space and orders material to fit new specifications | 1 day; expect delivery about a month after order placed by fabricator |
| Lighting | 2 days |
| Countertops | Depends on material: laminate, 1-3 weeks; solid surface, 2-4 weeks; stone 2-5 weeks |
| Wall faucet(s) | 1 day |
| Backsplash | 1-2 days |
| Sink(s) | 1 day |
| Cook-top | 1 day |

How to Prepare:

Understanding the Challenges of a Kitchen Remodel

When it comes to remodeling, Murphy's Law often applies: Whatever can go wrong, will.

Brace yourself for typical problems such as:

- Products delivered late, dented or with missing parts

- The wrong products delivered
- Miscommunication
- More dust than you expected
- Termites or carpenter ants in the walls, floor, or windows
- Mold or moisture in the walls from leaky plumbing or poor flashing
- Structural problems that need to be repaired
- Asbestos or lead paint removal

Knowing is half the battle. By preparing for the dust, foot traffic, missing toilet and absentee kitchen sink, you'll find yourself ahead of the game.

Before Construction Begins

- Ask your designer or contractor for a timeline. Knowing what will be happening when—and which strangers to expect in your home— will give you peace of mind.
- Clarify whether your contractor will wait until the new products have arrived before starting demolition. Although you may be impatient to start construction, in the long run you'll appreciate having your kitchen or bath torn up for less time.
- Clarify whose job it is—the designer's, the contractor's or yours—to pull the necessary permits for doing any electrical, mechanical, building or remodeling work. This must be done before construction starts.
- Products need to be stored someplace until they're installed. Find out if your contractor or designer has a warehouse or staging area to which products can be delivered.
- Get clean, sturdy boxes well ahead of time to ensure that you can pack up items that won't be used during the renovation period to protect them from dust and damage.
- Move any pictures, mirrors, furniture, and other items in neighboring rooms away from walls adjacent to the kitchen or bath. You don't want vibrations from the construction to break them.
- A week before renovation begins, start packing up the contents of your cabinets, beginning with the least-used items. By the day before tear-out begins, you should be down to basics that will be kept in the most accessible boxes. Unpack in reverse order for a streamlined process.
- If you live in a high-rise, be sure to reserve the freight elevator for delivery days.
- Interested in sending your old cabinets and fixtures somewhere other than the junk heap? If you don't have the finances for laundry or garage cabinets, consider installing your old cabinetry there.
- You can also investigate donating products to salvage centers or to non-profit companies for use in rehab projects.

Managing Dust

- Protect what you can't remove; floors should be covered, dust curtains hung and a pathway defined for workmen to enter and exit the workspace. Use plastic sheeting and tape to seal off doorways into other rooms and to cover bookshelves, furniture, and electronic equipment. Some contractors will do this for you.
- Turn off the central air or heat when the workers are sanding. Keep extra air filters on hand.

- Ask that the construction area be broom-cleaned at the end of every day to minimize the mess.
- If necessary, prepare a storage area in the garage or in another room near the kitchen for holding appliances, cabinets, and other items until it's time to install them. Or rent a storage space for a month or two during the construction phase.

Cooking and Eating

- Keep essential items handy: microwave meals and non-perishables like soup, condiments, cereal, microwave-safe dishes and utensils, dishcloths, dishwasher soap, paper plates and cups, coffee, coffee pot and sugar/creamer, paper towels, napkins, and garbage bags. This is one time when you can feel less guilty about using paper and plastic!
- You'll be without water in the kitchen for a time, so plan to do the dishes in another sink or the bathtub. Or stock up on disposable plates and cups, paper towels and a disinfectant cleanser.
- Plan a temporary kitchen by moving your old refrigerator or a small mini-frig to a convenient space close to a water source. Add a table with a microwave above and a trash can below.
- Invest in a hot plate if you fear you'll quickly tire of microwave-prepared meals, and an electric skillet is very versatile for cooking many meals.
- Stockpile restaurant coupons to use on nights when you need to get away from it all.
- Meals cooked in advance and frozen can be easily reheated for a family dinner that's a little more normal than the state of your home.

Communication

- Inform the workers about children and pets so they know to be extra careful with doors and gates and to watch underfoot.
- Designate an entrance for kitchen material deliveries and traffic.
- If the workers are not bringing a portable toilet, decide which bathrooms are off-limits and let them know.
- Keep your cell phone charged.
- Post a list of contractors' cell phone numbers on the wall.
- Pick an area to serve as a message center. Leave a notebook and paper there so you can leave messages for the contractor (and vice versa) when you aren't in the house.

Working with designers and contractors to achieve a successful remodeling project is not all that difficult, as outlined above, but it does require pre-planning, strong communication skills, and patience. Proper planning and detailed follow-through will achieve a much better result, and give you the new kitchen, closets, or bath of your dreams.