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## Kitchen Design 101

Tips from pros on how to make your remodel a clean sweep

By Paige Phelps



The Kellys wanted extra storage for kid items, places where they could hang their backpacks, and a chalkboard so the family could communicate with one another. But even with the kid-friendly flair, the kitchen is still sophisticated and grown-up.

By Paige Phelps  
Real Estate Editor

The kitchen, as they say, is the heart of the home. It's also one of the biggest selling points. Keller Williams Elite Realtor Cheryl Carter said a bad kitchen can immediately knock \$20,000 off your home's value.

"People look at it like, 'I've got to redo the kitchen.' And you can spend \$20,000 on the appliances alone. So \$20,000 would be a moderate redo price," she said.

Kitchen Design Concepts co-founder Mary Kathryn Reese said that after it's all said and done, there are 125 choices that need to be made for a new kitchen. Flooring alone can have a homeowner fretting over the type of



material they'll use: the style, size, layout, and grout.

“And floors are kind of nothing,” said Reese.

So when you're considering a total revamp of the space, how do you avoid design mistakes? And with all the choices out there today, where do you start?

Relax, said Reese. If you're working with a professional, they will lead you toward cohesive design decisions.

“We would say here are three door styles we feel would be appropriate for your home and here are one or two colors to choose from. It's all about culling it down; it's overwhelming for people otherwise,” she said.

When Reese starts a redesign, she asks clients to fill out a six-page lifestyle assessment form that can give her a handle on the type of layout the client might like. For instance, do they have children with crazy schedules and curious fingers, or are they baby boomers whose kids are off at college and they now like to stay in at night?

“We'll design something that's thought-provoking and say, ‘Here are the reasons we made these choices.’ And I'll tell you, 98 out of 100 people are like, ‘Yeah!’” Reese said.

Then Reese advises that her clients make a list of all their dinnerware and silverware sets, countertop appliances, cooking utensils, pots, pans — everything the homeowners keep in their kitchen — so that she can adequately design storage.

She'll then ask for a walk-through scenario asking things like, when her client gets home from the grocery store, where does she lay her keys? Place the bags? If she's cooking a meal for eight, where does she prep? Is the wine stored someplace that would be in the way of the cook? It's only after those details have been worked out that Reese even broaches the subject of finish out and interior design.

“We let [clients] make the decisions as they go through instead of having all this angst in the beginning if you make all the decisions upfront,” Reese said. “It's an evolution. Our clients smile

Staff photo: Christina Barany  
Kitchen Design Concepts remodeled the Kelly family home, redesigning it so that mom could keep an eye on the kids while cooking dinner.



Courtesy photos  
This raised dishwasher is indicative of the type of custom finish out empty-nesters like.



Even in this retro kitchen, Mary Kathryn Reese of Kitchen Design Concepts says, ‘Good design is timeless.’



You don't have to have a big kitchen to make it modern; this island has been scaled down to add counter space in the right proportions.

all the time and are not wiggled out.”

Brentwood Kitchens designer Bill Algier agreed.

## **Updates Without All the Mess**

*Mary Kathryn  
Reese's ideas  
for those who want a  
change  
but don't want a full  
remodel*

- **Ask yourself**  
if you're

someone who  
likes to cook  
or bake or the  
kind of  
person who  
wouldn't  
cook if your  
life depended  
on it.

- If you're  
someone who  
likes to cook,  
**upgrade  
your  
appliances.**

“Appliances  
today perform  
so much  
better than 15  
years ago,”  
Reese said.  
“You're not  
necessarily  
changing the  
overall look,  
but you're  
improving  
function by

“It's our job as design professionals to propose realistic designs to meet all the client's needs and wants and not create things that, when the job is done, somebody finds is not a workable solution,” he said.

Over at Brentwood, Algier said the company takes two to four weeks to plan a kitchen remodel; it sends a designer to spend time with a client, do preliminary planning, make a presentation, incorporate the client's ideas for changes, then pin down details like door style, wood type, and interior design.

Since Brentwood makes its own furniture-grade custom cabinets, there is a 10- to 12-week lead time on cabinets, which can factor into how long the actual remodel can take.

But let's say you're choosing your materials on your own or are about to go into a remodel without a pro. What are the new trends for design that will sell your house fast? Or should you avoid trends all together?

“I see people looking for something unique. They don't want what everybody else has,” Algier said. “I do see a trend away from heavily distressed projects, and there's more interest in soft contemporary.”

Realtor Mary Beth Harrison with The Harrison Group said her clients are still looking for stainless and granite and like to see wine coolers or wine storage, but it's the pantry she feels is key.

“Pantry, pantry, pantry. If you don't have a good pantry, you might as well not have a master closet; it's that important,” she said.

For Carter, spending the dough on custom cabinets, countertops, and appliances is worth a second look. Low quality, she said, can make or break a redo. “You'll walk into a million dollar home and the first thing you say is, ‘Oh, that's too bad.’”

100 percent.”

- Casual cooks should **focus on the aesthetics.**

Simple things that give a big bang: the backsplash; ugly cabinets can be refaced for less than replacing them; if you're in a single-story home, think about adding a skylight; and upgrading your windows always changes the feel of a room.

But no matter what you do to your kitchen, whether it's on your own or with a design professional, Harrison says you'd better do something.

“You know, the appraisers tell us that every 10 years you need to update [the kitchen] ... the paint, the colors, the wallpaper, everything. It has become old and you need to change it.”

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