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Baker enlists help from pros to achieve Italian masterpiece

'I can't believe it's the same house,' she says after renovation

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Ginger Blazek knows how to bake. Her cakes and cookies are legendary not just among family and friends, but also among neighbors and their kids, who often follow the scent of her creations straight into her Coppell kitchen.

This year she and her husband, Rick, remodeled their kitchen so that the equipment, layout and visual appeal of the space would live up to the quality of her cooking. They employed the help of a kitchen-design company, and they ended up with a baker's paradise that feels more like an Italian hideaway than suburban Dallas. Here's how they did it.

MADE THE DECISION. Ms. Blazek lived with the narrow aisles and cluttered workspace in her kitchen for 14 years before starting the renovation.

Ginger and Rick

Blazek fantasized about an Italian-style kitchen.

"I'd been thinking about remodeling," she says. "My mom is frugal, and when she said, 'It's about time,' I knew I had to do it."

Completing a kitchen renovation can be very costly, and although real-estate experts often cite such an update as one that sellers can recoup, the commitment should not be taken lightly.

Mary Kathryn Reese is co-owner of Kitchen Design Concepts of Carrollton, the company the Blazeks hired to complete their renovation. She advises potential clients that if they plan to move within five to seven years, cosmetic changes such as refacing cabinet doors may make more financial sense than a total overhaul.

"We don't have a defined lower limit on the budgets we work with, but when people come in I will tell them it's hard to do a kitchen remodel for less than \$40,000," Ms. Reese says.

The Blazeks didn't start with a budget in mind and spent more than twice that on their project. The scope of the changes, however, extended beyond the kitchen and included reconfiguring a staircase, removing walls and changing windows and fixtures throughout the lower-level entertaining space.

"We could see ourselves being here for the next 20 years, so we thought it was worth it," Ms.

Blazek says.

CHOOSE A CONTRACTOR. The Blazeks knew they wanted to outsource the renovation. They changed their minds about whom to hire early on, realizing the importance of the contractor-homeowner relationship and suspecting their initial choice wouldn't work out.

"It takes an enormous leap of faith," Ms. Blazek says about hiring anyone to do that amount of work on a home. She recommends seeing the contractor's previous work before making a decision.

"We went with the designer to houses where they'd redone the kitchens where the owners left their keys," Ms. Blazek says.

"That was it for me. I thought, here it is three years after a project and clients would still let a stranger into their home to see their work."

IDENTIFIED WHAT THEY WANTED AND LET THE PROS DO THEIR JOB. The Blazeks had a pretty clear idea of the look and function they wanted. When it came to the details and execution, they relied upon the advice and experience of their designers, which they said is a benefit of outsourcing.

"I actually had homework," Ms. Blazek says. "They made me list everything I use so that they could make sure it had a space in the finished kitchen. It wasn't fun, but it made it so much easier to store everything when it was done."

The couple achieved the Italian look they wanted through finishes such as the cherry cabinets and countertops made from teak and St. Cecilia Extra granite. Photos taken by the Blazeks and family members on vacation in Italy are displayed.

For specific finishes, they relied on help from the designers. A narrowed set of choices for elements like wrought-iron stair balusters helps homeowners keep their sanity, the Blazeks say.

Contractors and staff managed by Kitchen Design Concepts worked on the Blazek kitchen for nine weeks. Mr. and Ms. Blazek say they would do it all again.

"I can't believe it's the same house," Ms. Blazek says. "Now it's ours."

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT OUR KITCHEN

Baking station: "The marble is great for working with ingredients. I have my mixers, cake stuff, spices and everything within reach."

Professional oven: "It's convection, and it's really stepped up my cookies."

Clean lines: "Before, there were too many visual distractions. The shutters just got in the way."

Prep sink: "This is my man sink," Mr. Blazek says. "From here I have a great view of the television."

Erin Covert is a Dallas freelance writer.

