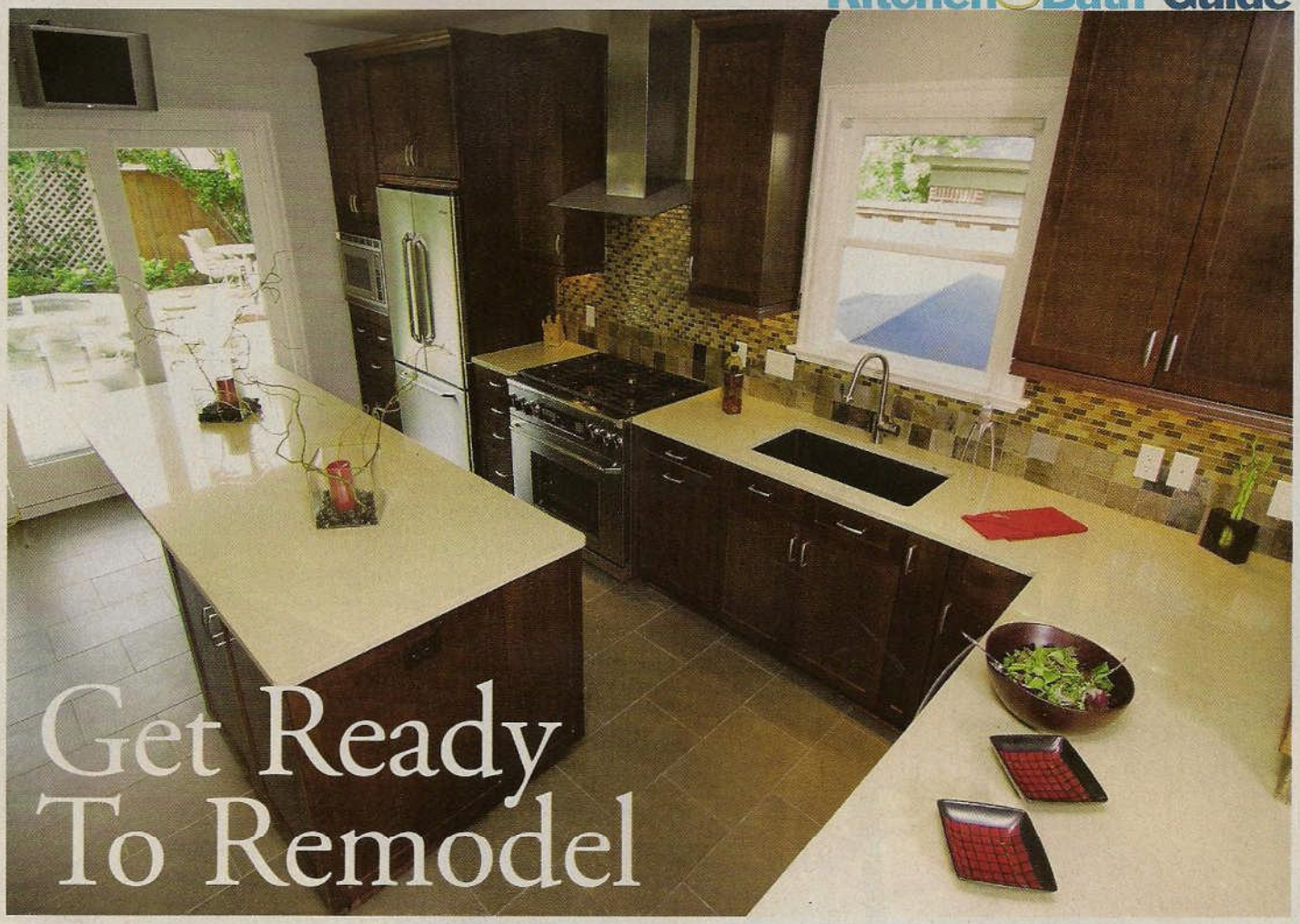


Get Ready To Remodel

ABOVE: Kitchen Design Concepts transformed a tired M Streets kitchen with a closed floor plan into an open, inviting space. Ceasarstone Champagne Limestone countertops complement KitchenCraft Salem Maple cabinets with a Cappuccino stain. The backsplash includes shimmering glass tiles and tumbled slate.

Take Everything Into Consideration — Cost, Foundation, Details And Desired Outcome — Before You Take On A Kitchen Or Bath Redo

BY LEIGH BELL AND AMANDA FLATTEN

Your Formica kitchen countertops scream 1982, and the bathroom hasn't changed since you sang REO Speedwagon in the shower. Perhaps it's time for a remodel.

Don't just dive in. Outside of adding on, revamping a kitchen or bath is one of the most expensive yet valuable changes you can make to your home. In the Dallas area, a mid-range kitchen remodel runs about $21,000 if it's minor and about $57,000 if it's major, and a bath remodel costs about $16,000, according to *Remodeling* magazine. It's not cheap, but roughly 78 percent of that money is recouped in increased resale value, says the publication's 2008-09 "Cost vs. Resale" report.

The right choices are essential to such an important investment. Here are the questions you should ask before remodeling a kitchen or bath.

SELF-REFLECTION

Before delving too deeply into a remodel, ask yourself a few questions that will better define the job.

1. WHAT DO I WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Do you want to improve your home because you plan to spend plenty more years there or because you plan to sell it soon? Are you an empty nester needing a fresh start? Are you simply looking to update your home?

2. HOW MUCH AM I WILLING TO INVEST?

Prices vary drastically depending on materials, products and depth of remodel that you choose. An upscale, major kitchen remodel costs more than $100,000, or about twice the price of a mid-range one. "Kitchen size is the biggest cost driver," says Mary Kathryn Reese, co-owner of Kitchen Design Concepts.

ABOVE: D&D Remodeling opened up this previously closed off Flower Mound kitchen to the living and dining rooms. Highlights include granite countertops and knotty alder cabinetry. The 8-foot ceiling was replaced with a vaulted, beamed ceiling. Photography by Ken Vaughan.

"The larger the space, the more cabinetry, countertops, backsplash, flooring and walls to paint there are. The second factor is what substantive changes are being made. Does a load-bearing wall have to be moved? Are you moving work areas, like a sink, from a wall to an island?"

3. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

After design plans are complete, expect a kitchen or bath remodel to take three to six months.

4. AM I WILLING TO INVEST MY MONEY IN WHAT MATTERS?

It's not the sexiest part of a kitchen or bath, but cabinets are the most important aspect of a remodel. This is the foundation upon which everything else lies. High-dollar granite countertops won't last on a cheap foundation.

"Semi-custom cabinets are more affordable than full custom cabinetry," Reese says. "Painted finishes are more expensive than stain, and glazes add to cost, too."

These remodels take time and thought. You must be willing to spend the effort and the money.

WHERE TO BEGIN

You're ready for a remodel, now get prepared.

1. WHERE SHOULD I CONCENTRATE ALL THAT EFFORT AND MONEY?

Kitchen, master bath and powder room — secondary baths and laundry rooms are not as important as these three areas to buyers. "If you don't have the budget to remodel the entire bath, you can freshen up the room with new plumbing fixtures or a new toilet," says Kathy Richardson, sales manager at Pierce Decorative Hardware and Plumbing, adding that convenience items are a hit in the kitchen. "Homeowners are going for stainless steel one bowl sinks, pot fillers over the cooktop, instant hot water systems and water filtration systems."

2. HOW DO I START?

Seek professional help, but make sure it's the right kind of help. Ask contractors if they are licensed, can provide references and are registered with the Better Business Bureau. Certified kitchen and bath designers know that certain details are germane to these rooms. The work triangle, traffic flow, heights of countertops and tables make a huge difference in the way a kitchen functions. Designers certified by the National Kitchen and Bath Association have been independently evaluated and tested and improve their skills through ongoing education and professional development.

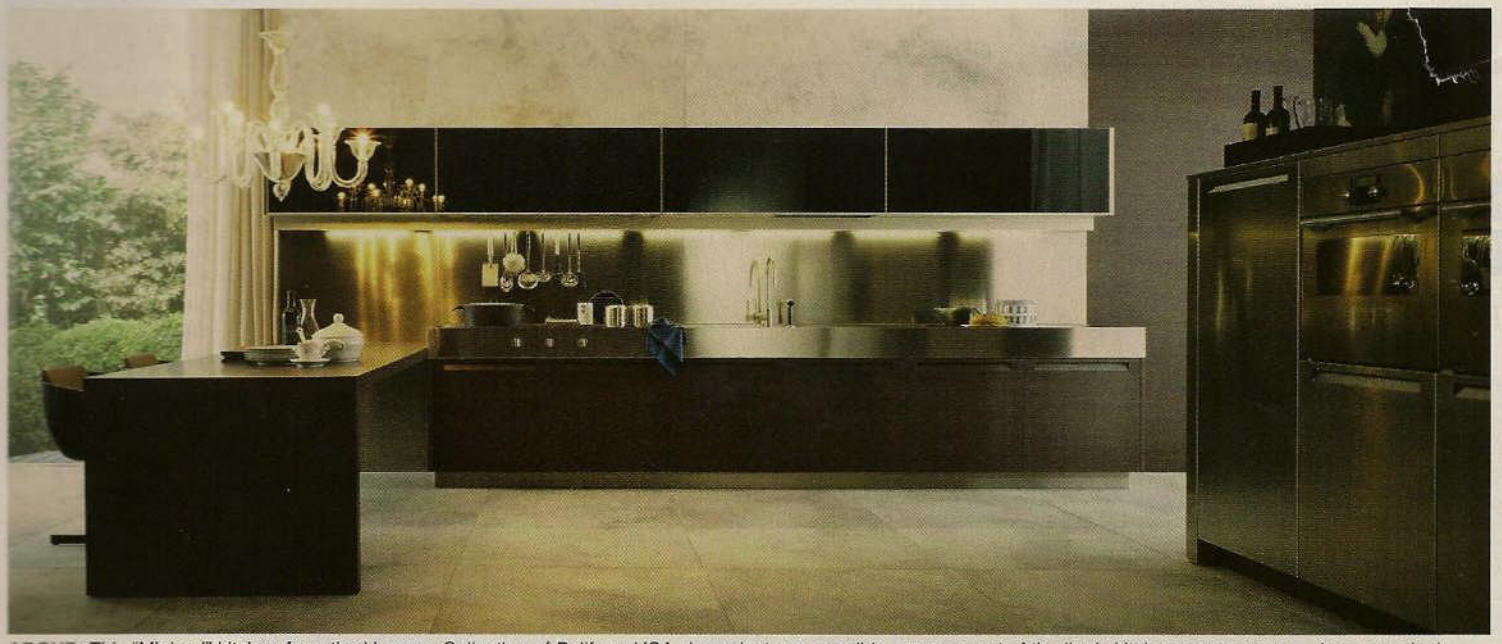
3. CAN I HAVE MY NEW KITCHEN TOMORROW?

In a word, no. Have you ever done a remodel before? "It's important to establish the expectations of the buyer," says Kitty Decareaux, vice president of cabinet sales at Factory Builder Stores. "Remodels usually create a bigger mess and take longer than most people expect."

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

It's time to make decisions and dig into details.

1. WHAT DO I LIKE/DISLIKE ABOUT MY CURRENT KITCHEN OR BATH?



ABOVE: This "Minimal" kitchen from the Varenna Collection of Poliform USA shows just one possible arrangement of the line's kitchen components — in a very sleek way. Scott + Cooner is Poliform USA dealer.

Part of the Country Kitchen Collection, the ROHL Wall Mounted Country Kitchen Swing Arm Pot Filler with Cross Handle extends for use over front and rear burners and neatly folds away when not in use. It retails for $845 and is available at Pierce Decorative Hardware and Plumbing.

Factory Builder Stores' transitional bath includes his and her sinks and vanities in a painted white finish, along with plenty of storage space in tall matching cabinets. The contrasting dark-framed mirrors are flanked by soft-light sconces.

Narrow down the qualities you'd like to throw out and those you want to keep and/or enhance. "This enables a designer to realize the client's expectations and meet or exceed them," Decareaux says.

2. WHAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE AM I SEEKING IN MY NEW BATH OR KITCHEN?

Will the kitchen be used mostly for entertaining or gathering the family while cooking a meal? Do you bake or cook regularly? In the bath, do you want an invigorating shower or a relaxing soaking bath? These answers will determine everything from design to product choice and placement.

3. WHAT'S ALL THIS TERMINOLOGY MEAN?

You'll hear a lot of phrases thrown out, and it's important to familiarize yourself with some of them to be aware of choices, says Paul Horne, director of product and marketing at Grand Hall USA Inc.

He suggests studying up on types of water heaters: tank, tankless and hybrid. Types of piping: copper or the popular PEX piping. Recirculation: a retrofit system that provides hot water instantly, but has some setbacks. And finally, thermostatic mixing valves (TMX): blend hot and cold water at user-specified location to provide consistent temperatures so the shower doesn't go hot when someone flushes the toilet.

4. DO I WANT TO SPEND MONEY ON HIGH-END PRODUCTS AND MATERIALS?

Again, first invest in the foundation of a room, and the rest depends on your budget. "If you're going to stay in a house for more than 5 years, then you can justify spending more on the look or functionality you want because you'll have the benefit of living with and enjoying your investment," Reese says. "If you don't spend much time in the kitchen, then there's no need to spend extra. Just do the basics."

GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK

Kitchens and bathrooms make more waste and use more energy than any other room in the house, so it's important to consider the environment during a remodel. Sanjay Ahuja, vice president at PF Waterworks, helps with eco-conscious questions.

1. WHAT TECHNIQUES WILL HELP ME CONSUME LESS?

Daylight harvesting (sensors determine daylight and adjust artificial light accordingly), thermostats, dimmers and tankless water heaters.

2. WHAT SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS CAN I USE IN MY REMODEL?

Recycled paper countertops, any recycled content like antique tiles, cork flooring, PermaFLOW self-cleaning drains and bamboo cabinets.

3. HOW DO I KNOW THAT I'M BUYING "GREEN" PRODUCTS?

Look for the following labels: natural/nontoxic, low-embodied energy, sustainably harvested, recyclable/biodegradable, recycled content, locally harvested and durable.