

THINKING ABOUT REMODELING?

START HERE

If you own a home, no matter what its age, sooner or later you may join the millions of people who remodel their homes each year. Perhaps it was that moment when you realized that avocado green and harvest gold are no longer the "in" colors for today's trendy kitchens. Or maybe you had an epiphany one day as you stood in line to use your own bathroom. Whatever the impetus, the thought has crossed your mind: Maybe it's time to remodel. The reasons for remodeling are as varied as the projects we undertake.

Some of these include:

- Adding more space.
- Upgrading cabinets, counters, appliances, and fixtures. Creating a floor plan that's customized for your lifestyle.
- Improving energy efficiency with new windows, doors, insulation, and climate control systems.
- Increasing the resale value of your home.

Where to Begin

The first step is to develop an idea of what you want to do. Write a prioritized list of your needs and wants. Look at magazines and Web sites and collect pictures of what you like. The more clearly you can envision the project and describe it on paper, the better prepared you'll be in making your decision.

Think about traffic patterns, furniture size and placement, colors, lighting and how you expect to use the remodeled space. If your decision to remodel involves creating better access for someone with limited mobility, you may want to consider contacting a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist. A Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist has received special training to understand the needs of the physically challenged. (For more information go to www.nahb.org or contact your local Home Builders Association.)

Figure out how much money you have to spend on the remodeling job, furnishings, landscaping or any other cost you might incur.

Choose Your Options

Once you have created a list of what you would like out of your home, the next step is deciding how to accomplish your vision.

Hire a Professional. The best way to ensure your home dreams become reality is through the work of a professional. These remodelers are of the highest integrity and standards in the industry.

Can you do it yourself? For the handyman or woman, a do-it-yourself project is both rewarding and cost-effective. However, more than 30% of all jobs remodelers perform come from failed do-it-yourselfers.

Should you move instead? Your needs may exceed what you can or want to do with your existing home.

If you've decided you want to hire a remodeler, make certain he is properly licensed or registered with Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors. Ask for references and check those references. Do your homework to avoid contractor fraud, and make your dream home a reality.

WHY HIRE A PROFESSIONAL

If you are considering a remodeling project, the most important decision you can make is selecting a professional remodeler to do the job. Your home is too important to entrust to anyone but a professional who can:

- Save you money by doing your job right the first time.
- Ensure that your dreams are accurately translated into reality by offering design services in-house or through an arrangement with a professional architect or designer.

- Understand that your comfort during the project and its successful completion depend on effective communication and follow-through.
- Maintain a safe and neat jobsite to prevent damage to your home or injury to household members and pets.
- Provide the best possible materials within your budget and assist you in making selections through the vendors they work with.
- Ensure that your job meets or exceeds applicable building codes and regulations.
- Guarantee the quality of their work with a warranty.
- Respond promptly to service calls and inquiries.

SHOULD I HIRE A PROFESSIONAL?

Do-it-yourself (DIY) projects have skyrocketed in popularity in recent years on the heels of Martha Stewart Living, HGTV, and other popular home improvement shows and publications. And, for certain small projects, a DIY project can be rewarding and fun - if you are prepared and have the proper skills. But before you start knocking down walls and taking out wiring, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have a clear idea of what you want your project to look like?
- Do you have the time to complete this project (be realistic!)?
- Have you ever undertaken a project like this before?
- Do you know everything you will need (materials, tools, etc.) to complete the project?
- Are you familiar with the applicable building codes and permits?
- Do you enjoy physical labor?
- Do you have the necessary skills for this project?
- If not, do you have the time and resources to learn these skills?
- Where will you obtain the necessary materials?
- If you cannot complete the project according to your original schedule, are you (and your family) prepared to handle the resulting inconvenience?
- Will you need assistance with this project? If so, who will assist you? Do they have the time and skills required for this project?
- Do you understand all the safety issues associated with this project?
- Are you familiar with the architecture and structural makeup of your home (i.e., how knocking down one wall will affect the rest of the structure)?
- Have you considered the hidden costs associated with doing it yourself - time, tools, and the possibility that you may actually decrease the value of your house if the result isn't up to professional standards?

It is easy to look at the cost of hiring a professional remodeler and think only of labor and materials. But remember that a professional remodeler offers you an important service - years of experience, the right tools, a network of suppliers and subcontractors, and an in-depth understanding of legal regulations, cost estimating, scheduling, and the latest construction techniques.

REMODELING VS. MOVING

If you want to change your home, your other option besides remodeling is to find a new one. But more and more American families are deciding to stay put and improve their existing home. Here are some of the reasons:

- Remodeling allows you to customize your home to meet your needs and desires. The only similar, but much more costly alternative is to have a brand new custom home designed and built.
- Remodeling means that you don't have to give up a familiar neighborhood and schools.
- Remodeling is a more efficient use of your financial resources. According to the American Homeowner Foundation, selling your home and moving typically costs about 8-10% of the value of your current home. And much of this goes into moving expenses, closing costs, and broker commissions - items that have no direct impact on your home's quality.
- Remodeling can be stressful, but few experiences are more stressful than moving.

While there are many reasons that people choose to remodel, the bottom line is that remodeling makes your home a more enjoyable place to live. The intangible value of this pleasure needs to be considered, along with any resale value you hope to gain.

But there is no doubt that, as far as improving the sale of your home, all remodeling projects are not created equal. The general rule of thumb is that any remodeling project that brings your home up to the level of your neighbors' is a worthy investment. But it doesn't pay to be the most expensive house on the block - real estate experts recommend that a remodeling investment should not raise the value of your house to more than 10-15% above the median sales price in your neighborhood.

Remember that potential buyers will compare your home to ones newly built. Therefore, you'll want to look at the design trends and amenities being built into new homes. Great rooms (open kitchen/family room arrangements), master bed and bath suites, and higher ceilings are a few of the features sought by today's home buyers.

Each year, *Remodeling* magazine conducts its "Cost vs. Value" report to assess which remodeling projects create the greatest return on investment. Not surprisingly, kitchens and baths regularly come out on top. These are two of the most used rooms in the home, and they receive the most scrutiny from potential buyers.

For more information on this topic go to www.nahb.org or contact the Home Builders Association of Northeast Louisiana at 318-387-6795.