

# How To Design Your Kitchen

By Curt Hagedorn

If you've dipped your toes into the housing market over the last six months or so -- either to buy a home or sell your current home -- or both, you've probably run into that dreaded word "update." What "update" means in real estate parlance are improvements to the home that reflect current tastes and, thus, add to the attractiveness (and the value) of the home. "Six panel doors" are considered "updates." Bathrooms in current colors and with modern fixtures are considered "updates." And at the top of the list of most desired and most often "updated" is the kitchen. Now this doesn't necessarily mean you have to gut the entire room and start from scratch (though that's perhaps the best option if you want to invest the money.) There are many incremental steps you can take to freshen, revitalize and yes, "update" your kitchen either to increase the value of your home, or simply make it a more attractive and functional place to work. Here are few ideas:

- 1) Find a professional eye. Whether you choose an independent kitchen designer or architect, the professional at your local home or kitchen store, you'll find that to get the most out of your kitchen you don't just want to jump in with a non-coordinated solution. Professionals can show you how to do everything from maximizing your storage (and use all that dead space you have now in corners and from your standard size cabinets up to the ceiling) as well as how to arrange appliances, work and storage areas for maximum efficiency. A kitchen professional can also advise you on any actual expansion or demolition you may be thinking of, from cutting a pass through between kitchen and dining areas to knocking out walls to turn your 70's kitchen/dining room/family room configuration into a big, modern great room with the kitchen as the focal point. A word to the wise: get some books and magazines and mark the kitchens or kitchen features you like: this will give your professional something to go on and save some of their valuable (and expensive) time.

If you basically like your kitchen in terms of size and layout, you might want to consider freshening up the room with a change in color scheme and design accomplished with paint, furniture and hardware.

- 2) Many older kitchens can benefit both in appearance and functionality merely by upgrading old Formica countertops and backsplashes to something more contemporary. Your home or kitchen emporium will have choices galore from marble and granite to new solid surfaces like Corian to soapstone and custom colored concrete, even new and retro

Formica and other laminate choices. A mix of choices, including marble or other stone for the baker, combined with butcher block and other surfaces, is popular now even in homes without an aspiring chef.

- 3) Of course the major “furniture” in your kitchen is the cabinets, and whether you decide to refinish, re-face (add new doors and drawer fronts) or replace them completely, you’ll find a wide variety of choices in both configuration and style: look at a combination of solid and glass cabinet fronts and definitely look into some of the new space saving configurations which can make even off-the-rack cabinets seem custom. Extremely popular now are cabinets and islands, which, though built in, mimic furniture with different heights, fronts and finishes.
- 4) Flooring is also an excellent way to update a tired kitchen, whether you’re simply replacing old-fashioned linoleum, or upgrading to real or laminate wood flooring (extremely popular now) or to unique configurations of ceramic or quarry tile or stone. Again, if you’re planning something unique, involving a professional is a good way of getting the job done right the first time.

Remember, no matter what you decide, you don’t have to accomplish your kitchen renovation all at once. Again, a professional can help you plan in stages to fit both your personal schedule and your pocketbook – perhaps a new color scheme and appliances first, then cabinets, then countertops, then flooring, or any combination thereof. And speaking of appliances, remember to check out some of the latest trends, including refrigerated drawers, two dishwashers and “commercial” style ranges and hoods.