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INTERIOR
DESIGN

a designer's dream

Making the decision to use an interior designer or architect

by patrice peterson
photo provided by
Harmonious Architecture



Main level formal dining room and living room transformed into kitchen, dining and great room.

photo: Harmonious Architecture

Any homeowner who has ever remodeled a room knows how challenging and time-consuming it can be to achieve that remarkable “dream” kitchen or bathroom. Even when building a new home, it isn’t enough to want those rooms to look great, you also have to consider functionality and usability. So many choices. So many decisions. So many limitations.

While the internet has exploded with sites that provide photographs to go along with a multitude of do-it-yourself ideas, sometimes it may be more practical and even more economical to bring in an interior designer or architect.

“I love sites like Pinterest and Houzz,” says Betty Ravnik, senior interior designer at Ravnik & Co. in Alexandria. “It’s a great place for a homeowner to start and find examples of what they like, and what they want their kitchen or bathroom to look like. What they don’t often think about, however, is whether that layout will function well in their specific space.”



Jamie Wallace, interior designer at Calla Lily Design in Fergus Falls, agrees. She also thinks the internet is wonderful for initial ideas and photos to express what clients like or don’t like.

“It’s a great way to start, but after the first or second meeting, I joke with them that I’d like to take away their internet,” she says with a laugh. “It’s possible to get

thoroughly overwhelmed with too much of that kind of information.”

One of the reasons kitchens and bathrooms are so tricky is the amount of “stuff” that is required to pack into the space, according to architect Kelli Wegscheid, owner of Harmonious Architecture in Perham.



photos: Calla Lily Designs



In addition, homeowners don't always consider the layout and function as they relate to the rest of the home, according to Ravnik, and many times it could have been a much better project if they had looked at the "big picture" more thoroughly.

Besides increasing the chances of a positive outcome, hiring a professional designer can take much of the stress out of the planning and implementation. Wallace, who is a certified kitchen designer, tells her clients that she essentially becomes the project manager – the liaison that holds it all together by coordinating with all the different providers and installers.

"In the kitchen, of course, there are a certain number of appliances and furniture that are necessary, and in the bathroom, you have a stool, a sink, a mirror, a tub, a shower, and a few cupboards to fit in a smaller space. There are also safety issues, and it can be

complicated to try and make everything work well together," she says. "Kitchens and bathrooms are the kinds of rooms that you take for granted when they function well, but you can tell immediately when they don't."

"There are so many people involved, including electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and tapers, and many homeowners can't be available 24/7," she says. "From beginning to end, I take care of the details because I truly want this project to be fun for them."



Timeline

When envisioning a new kitchen or bath, the timeline might not be something homeowners can foresee with accuracy if they're doing it on their own. Even if they aren't in a hurry to complete the project, the lack of a timeline can complicate the entire process... and lead to additional and unnecessary weeks or months of chaos.

Erica Sherwood, a designer at Hudrlik Design Studio in Brainerd, understands the frustration of an ongoing and unending kitchen or bathroom project. She estimates that most of those projects can and should take up to two months from start to finish.

"It can be quite a process to set up all the different people, equipment and products involved," Sherwood says. "Most people don't consider all the elements that go into setting up a timeline, and they also may not realize how much a professional can assist in moving that timeline along by coordinating all of the subcontractors, avoiding disruptions, and ensuring completion of a satisfactory experience."

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An effective timeline streamlines the project, saving time and money along the way.

Budget / Price Plan

Besides being the most complex rooms to build or remodel, kitchens and bathrooms can also be the most expensive projects in a home. According to Wegscheid, it's a common misconception that it's less expensive to go the do-it-yourself route.

"If you're going to spend the money and move ahead with a pricey project, you want to be sure to do it right and not cut corners along the way," Wegscheid says. "It's much more difficult and even more expensive if you start off, something goes bad, and you suffer with the added costs to fix it."

Wallace also feels that most people have the assumption that hiring a designer will cost you more, but that often times it can save you money.

"We bring the client the knowledge of how to get the best 'bang for the buck' by educating them on resources and budget available, and also by doing things in the correct order," she says. "It's not that we know more than they do, but instead of a one-time remodel, we handle projects like this all the time. We can steer them away from costly and time-consuming mistakes."

Spending costs for the designer can vary from firm to firm, depending on how much involvement the client wants from that firm, and whether it's a flat fee, hourly fee, or percentage of the project. Since budget conversations can sometimes get touchy, Wallace suggests that it's best to have them worked out early on in the process.

Precision

"Measure twice, cut once." This is an old expression and a good strategy to follow for all aspects of home improvement.

"As advocates for the homeowner, what we can bring to the table is a professional precision," says Sherwood, who is a cabinet and countertop specialist. "This is true not only in the planning and budget considerations, but also in ensuring the correct measurements. If you're not precise, the results can be disastrous and expensive."

With advanced computer programs and applications, a professional can often provide a visual picture of how initial ideas will look in the designated space. "It can be so important for a client to be able to take that picture they have in their mind and see it come to life on a computer screen," she says.

photo: Calla Lily Designs





photos: Harmonious Architecture

In this ranch style home, a dividing wall was removed and a large family island installed, to allow for the open plan concept. The gourmet kitchen is now accessible from the rest of the main level.

Experience

Like any type of design, kitchen and bathroom styles have evolved over the years. Creating, designing and implementing those rooms on a continual basis gives the professional an edge in seeing possibilities that the homeowner could miss.

Wegscheid recalls one client, a family struggling with increasing the size of a kitchen, which was located in a limited space on the home's lower level.

"It hadn't really occurred to them to move the entire kitchen to the upper level," she says. "They didn't have the experience to consider those types of options, but in making that change, they were able to get exactly what they wanted in a new expanded kitchen upstairs."

Stealing space from an adjoining room is another tactic gained from experience. Sometimes it can be as simple as taking a closet from an unused bedroom and providing the space needed when remodeling a tiny bathroom.

Ravnik says that designing is like many other artistic, creative processes—it's sort of like looking at all the pieces and then putting together a puzzle.

"The entire project needs to be eye-catching, appealing and functional in the end, but it also has to delight people along the way," says Ravnik, who is a certified kitchen and bath designer. "I often hear people say that in hindsight, they should have invested in a designer because designers can think outside the box. We can also help people realize their dreams of that perfect kitchen or bathroom." ~L&H

