



PHOTO COURTESY OLD TOWN KITCHEN AND BATH

Part I

# *What to Expect...*

When you are expecting a new kitchen or bath

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Remodeling a kitchen or bath can be very similar to having a baby. First you plan (hopefully), then you wait, and then your whole world is turned upside down as the fruits of your planning and waiting are brought into this world.

Don't misunderstand me, I love children and I love remodeling. In fact, I have two children and I have remodeled four of my own homes — and I can say with sincerity that remodeling runs a very close second to child rearing as a rewarding activity. However, homeowners often make assumptions about what a remodel "should" be like. This two-part article strives to help you develop the "big picture" and reap the greatest satisfaction from your next project.



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For the uninitiated, the idea of remodeling conjures up visions of peace, tranquility and style, as the sugar plums of storage, functioning fixtures/appliances and beautiful colors go dancing in their heads. However, for the seasoned, the reality of remodeling may be more akin to a Stephen King movie, with nightmare visions of cost overruns, delays, strange people in their house, and decisions, decisions, decisions and yet more decisions. Rest assured, Murphy does not lurk in the corners of every remodel and your next project does not have to be a remake of your neighbors' B-grade horror flick, it is just a matter of knowing what to expect when you are expecting... a new kitchen or bath.

Have you ever wondered why McDonald's has sold over 100 billion hamburgers? It is probably safe to say it is not because they serve the best or even cheapest hamburger on the planet. The reason is because you know exactly what to expect each time you walk into one of its restaurants regardless of where you are in the world. For many consumers, "knowing what to expect" is the key to satisfaction. This same premise can be applied to remodel projects.

There are two primary keys that unlock the door to understanding what to expect from a remodel project — the first is planning and the second is communication. Sounds just like a college term paper, simple, right? However, more often than not these seemingly elusive keys have stood between happy homeowners and contented builders/designers; worse, their absence can cast do-it-yourselfers in their own version of "The Money Pit."

The ultimate scenario for remodeling success begins with the goals and design of the project being firmly etched in the minds of both the homeowners and the people responsible for physically designing and building the project. This is followed by a well-defined but flexible construction schedule and all materials being safely delivered and stored at the job site prior to demolition. Lastly, a defined and established means of communication for all parties involved ►

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during the course of the project.

But wait, I think I may have gotten ahead of myself. Let me back up a minute.

Let's start with planning. As much an art as science, planning is actually a discipline (like flossing your teeth) that will save you time, money and stress. For the spontaneous types or homeowners with malfunctioning appliances and black mold in the shower, planning does not come easily — they just want the job done! Besides, they have been watching home improvement television programs and “know” that an entire master bathroom can be transformed in one weekend into a luxurious in-home spa.

What they don't realize is that there were months and months of planning and all the materials were ordered, delivered and inspected prior to the demolition and that there is a crew working 24/7, and

that there is ample storage available for staging materials, and, and... and what they don't know is that reality TV is so far from reality that it would be more realistic to take a walk on the moon!

A reliable rule of thumb for the complete rebuild of an average-sized kitchen (175 square feet): It will generally take nine months to plan and three months to execute. The complete rebuild of a master bath (120 square feet) will take four months to plan and two months to execute. Have I seen projects completed in less time? Yes. Have I seen projects that exceeded the rule of thumb timeline? You betcha! What was the primary difference between them? Planning.

Planning starts with defining the goals of the project. Ask yourself, what is the purpose of this project? What do I want the outcome to be — better space

utilization, better energy-efficiency or updated appearance? Once the goals have been defined, then you can move on to the design and layout of the project (and often, to securing the requisite building permits). The next step is selecting materials and retaining a contractor (or various trades people), and then you conclude with drafting a project-completion schedule.

For example, where is the fridge going? What model/size of fridge is right for the space and the homeowner's budget and lifestyle? Who will install the fridge? Will it require new electrical/plumbing service? By making all of these decisions upfront, you can be confident that you have a cohesive project plan and the materials and trades people you have selected are the right ones for you and your project.

Good planning can keep your project on budget. By making your decisions in advance of demolition, you can be fairly confident that your actual cash outlay will be close to your original budget. Making changes midstream is the leading cause of budget busting. It is also important that you remain flexible and/or have contingency plans because you never know when your remodel will throw you a curveball. I worked on a project where we found an abandoned chimney in the wall right where we had planned to put the light switches. It was not cost-effective to remove the chimney so we moved the light switches.

The second most-common budget buster is not having the requisite materials onsite when they are needed.



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Consider the fact that you may have to pay your construction crew for the time they are standing idle while missing or damaged materials are being sourced.

The timing of material deliveries can be tricky. As previously mentioned, it is best to have as much of your materials onsite, prior to demolition, as there is adequate room to store them and as your cash flow allows. This provides ample opportunity to inspect materials for damage and make adjustments or secure replacements if necessary, hence, keeping the project moving forward.

Lastly, develop a project-completion schedule. This outlines the sequencing of each step of the project, including who will perform it and what materials are needed to complete it. Along with scheduling the project timeline, consider how you are going to prepare and clean up meals while your kitchen is “out of order” and how pets and young children will be kept safe during construction. (Takeout food is another great budget buster so consider cooking a variety of meals in advance like lasagna and stews and freezing individual portions to be reheated in a microwave.) Lastly, provide yourself with a reminder as to when you need to move and pack your possessions so that construction workers are not working around them, getting dust all over them or, worse, moving them for you.

Good planning also means knowing your limits. Ask yourself, can you afford to make mistakes with their inherent impact on both your finances and your household’s mental health? When in doubt, hire an expert. Kitchen and bath designers, architects or construction project managers can assist in the planning and construction of your project, saving you both time and money. The money saved will typically exceed their fees, not to mention the benefits you will reap from working with knowledgeable professionals and the potential stress they will lift from your shoulders. ♦

*In the second installment, we will uncover the second key to success — communication.*

