

## When Remodeling – Why not Design for Easier Living? 3-23-2012

What are the most compelling reasons why you have decided to renovate your kitchen or bathroom? Before you begin a major project, carefully consider what is motivating you to start this - why now and not later? List all of these points in order of priority in the research phase of your remodel. They will then be firmly formulated in your mind and easily transmitted to the professionals when you are ready to hire a kitchen and bath designer and contractor. Your designer can then translate your ideas, problems, pain and dreams into a design for easier living, or Universal Design, to not only give you great functional value in the new plan but also an aesthetic, easier to use space that meets the needs of your whole family and lifestyle.

Reasons may be broken down into immediate needs and aesthetic/functional. Immediate needs usually will top the priority list and may encompass problems such as unsafe or broken appliances, cabinetry, flooring, and fixtures (tubs and toilets); a sudden traumatic injury or illness of a family member; or a natural disaster. Aesthetic/functional include a desire to update or change finishes, such as countertops, cabinet color, or backsplash; change the space planning (configuration or layout of the major elements); traffic flow and functionality of work zones; or to knock down walls and open up the space. Since you've made the leap, redo it for ease of use.

Here's where it is advantageous to think beyond what's usually done. Wouldn't it make sense to renovate the space for your whole family so your children can reach the light switches (48" high), sit at the island helping grandparents prepare meals, or do homework while keeping the chef company? Add different height countertops. How about installing cabinet options that don't require getting on hands and knees to reach items in cabinets? Utilize pull-outs, additional drawers and spice pull-outs next to the cooktop.

Install flooring with some texture to reduce slipperiness when wet. Wouldn't it be safer for the kids (and you) to prepare their popcorn in a microwave drawer right under the countertop rather than trying to lift hot containers over their heads from the microwave above a cooktop? How does the idea of an induction cooktop sound that won't burn your fingers on its surface or catch Mom's sleeve on fire reaching to the rear burner?

The bathroom is the number one room in which falls occur. If bathing isn't of great import in the Master Bath, consider removing the tub and enlarging the space into a curbless shower with no threshold to trip over. This is then a truly European-style bath!

Wouldn't it be easier for your parent, grandparent or good friend in a wheelchair to visit if you installed a no-threshold entry, widened the hallway, and added a half bath on the first floor with a 32"- 36" wide door at the same time you are taking down walls and replacing floors?

Why not mount towel bars that double as grab bars, creating a safe, aesthetic bath without an institutional feel.

These are all Universal Design solutions that are helpful for everyone – young or old, tall or short, large or small, able-bodied or slightly disabled. There are hundreds more. The benefits are immediate and yet also long-term. In the future, if you want to age-in-place, that is, stay in the comfort and safety of your own home as long as possible, it would be well worth a little extra thought and investment now.

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