

Hot Topic 3 cont'd: A Great Kitchen Project!

Part V: Designing Your Kitchen

By thediycoach

Kitchen Remodeling Basics – Part V: Designing Your Kitchen

From Jerry R. Spumberg, *The DIY Coach*: Up until now we've given our blog readers a basic foundation on which to build their expertise about kitchen cabinets. The cabinets themselves are nothing without a well thought out design. No matter how much money you spend on cabinets, appliances, lighting, furniture and flooring you will need a cooperative effort between yourself and an experienced and talented specialist, the kitchen designer. This person will combine art and science in collaboration with your input of needs and choices into the plans that will become your kitchen. There are many reasons to use an independent specialist that I've covered in other blog articles, but I can sum it up by saying this; "their only interest is doing what is best for you". By taking this direction, not only will you satisfy your needs, but substantially add value to your home by developing a functional and visually impressive center for activities. I have asked one of my favorite people, that I work with, to share with you some of her knowledge and she has graciously consented to be guest author.



Rebecca Birnhack is an independent, freelance Kitchen and Bath Designer who resides in New Jersey. Rebecca has been in the kitchen and bath industry for nine years and has worked in a New Jersey kitchen and bath showroom for seven years. Her designs have reached as far as California, although most of her work is

in the tri-state area. Below you will get a sneak peak into the planning stages of a kitchen design. Enjoy! Your Kitchen Design

Your Kitchen Design might be an interesting choice for a title. However, that is precisely the point. It's your kitchen we will be working on together and your input that is so very important and valuable.

When planning a kitchen design, there is no one size fits all. Of course there are the general design guidelines, such as the work triangle, etc... However, as I explain to my clients, there

are many different ways we can design a kitchen, (or any other room for that matter), and it's really the client's needs and wants that will determine how it's designed. With keeping this in mind, some may question your decision at a later point, or wonder why you chose to put the sink where you did, however, you will know that there was a history to that decision and the decision was made with much thought and discussion.

When a client contacts me, the first thing I like to do is get a general idea of the project size, name of the architect and builder, and

the neighborhood of discussion. If you're like some others, you may be wondering what difference will that information make to your design. I will explain. Should I have had the opportunity of working with your project group, individually or as a whole, in the past, I may have gotten to know their style and any necessary specifics that will help this project move ahead as smoothly as possible. Oftentimes, the kitchen design will be submitted to the architect, if early enough in the planning stages, for some architectural changes or suggestions. They may be minor. However,

sometimes, greater architectural changes will help facilitate a better kitchen design, which will require the architects input and ok to move ahead. The earlier on you start the design process the better. I cannot stress this enough.

The following story is definitely an extreme one, but worth repeating.

Denise called me recently on a Saturday night, and asked if I'd be available to work on her design, but she needed it right away. How soon? That Monday morning. That left us with just Sunday to get it all worked out. To put it simply, she procrastinated until the last minute. Fortunately, I was able to accommodate her and we met.

We sat for many hours working on the design. I showed her as many options as I was able to in the time that we had together. By the time she left, she had a beautiful plan. A design that worked for her.

However, had she come sooner, aside from having the option of moving doorways, closets, etc... which may have given her the option of a better design, Denise was under immense time pressure and had a difficult time focusing. The importance of discussing her options and taking the time

to think them through, were now a luxury Denise could not afford. She needed to make instant decisions and was overwhelmed. I held her hand and gave her as much guidance as I was able to offer.

By the time the day was done, I honestly felt pity for her. Pity that she was investing so much money into the house, but just one day into the kitchen. The kitchen is the heart of the home, and deserves and needs more time than that. I insisted we meet again after she submits her plans to discuss the fine details, such as design accessories, etc.. After all, I didn't want these small, but important details, to get overlooked.

There are more Denise stories, believe it or not, but thankfully they are the minority. Most homeowners are guided by their architect, builder or project manager, and call at the appropriate time.

The next step in the design process will be our first meeting.

At this first meeting, which will take place at your location of preference, we will have the opportunity to meet each other. We will sit down together and review your architectural plans. It's important that you have a scaled copy and a full set.

I've had occasions too many, where the client assured me that they have their plans, but only had an 11x17 copy. Understandably, measurements are a key factor in layout and design. The designer needs to be able to measure your plans. Oftentimes, even a photocopy of the plans, not re-sized, will measure inaccurately. If possible, an e-mailed pdf copy is also helpful.

As we review your plans, we will discuss your needs and wants for your kitchen. I like to ask my clients for a wish list. I tell them that I cannot promise everything on that wish list, but if submitted, I can at least try my best. I like to get a good feeling of the client's cooking habits, family dynamics and the like. I encourage my clients to share as much as they can, as that will enable me to create a design that will most suit their needs. Sometimes, I offer the client the option of completing a questionnaire, to better help them describe themselves and their needs.

Following are some questions I may ask my clients as we talk. Do you like to cook? Are you an elaborate cook? Do you enjoy baking? Do you entertain? How many people are in the family? What is your budget for this kitchen? What style kitchen do you have in mind? etc...etc...

Louis and Sherry are a good example of sharing their needs and lifestyle.

Louis and Sherry have four children. Louis is out of the house most of the day manning his business. Sherry is a homemaker. Louis and Sherry host and entertain a tremendous amount. Sherry has lots of family out of town that come visit several times a year. Sherry loves to cook and bake. However, understandably, Sherry resents having to be cooped up in the kitchen preparing while all her guests are having fun in the family room. It was very important to Sherry that her kitchen and family room are nice and open to each other. This way, Sherry can enjoy her company and still get her work done. We also made sure to include several bar stools in the kitchen area for this purpose as well.

I've appreciated Sherry's openness throughout the entire project. I believe it has helped her achieve a design that will work for her and her family's needs.

In addition to the above, a very important factor that is discussed, but not necessarily determined, by the first meeting is appliances. Some clients have done their research and are prepared. Others didn't know to be

prepared. Either way, we discuss their selections or options at that time. Oftentimes, the client will need to do additional research before we can continue with the design process. It's ok, and recommended, to take the time and think things thru before coming to any decisions. This will pertain to all decisions in relation to the project, and not just appliance specifications.

By the end of our first meeting, I generally have a good idea of the style and needs of my client. We have had good discussion and I've given them food for thought. I will e-mail or fax a design proposal/contract within the week. Once I receive the signed proposal and deposit, we are ready to begin moving forward.

Moving forward...

When it is determined that I've gotten all the pertinent information from the client, I can begin the actual design. Again, the discussion that we have had at our first meeting, and the information that the client has supplied thereafter, will determine how I will design this kitchen. It is important to keep in mind that there are several, and sometimes numerous, ways to design one room. The information collected will help me to determine which design will be best. Sometimes, I will propose two or even three design options at our next meeting, explain the pros and cons, get the clients feedback and take it from there.

By the end of the second meeting, we have a good idea of our design options and very often have even come to

a decision. Depending on the client, the design, and the time that we're working with, I may offer to work on the design with them on my computer at the meeting, or I will take notes of our discussion and work on the design changes on my own. Here again, the client may want to give themselves some time to think things thru before coming to any decisions. I always encourage the client to take the time they need.

Sometimes, things are a bit more complicated. The kitchen space allotted by the architect may need some tweaking. I may suggest some structural changes to the plan, or it may be something as simple as moving over the doorway. At times, we need to involve the architect at this point, for approval. We may have even discussed some of these

points at the first meeting, but were only able to make a determination after working on the plan.

From this point onward, any subsequent meetings and discussions we may have will follow the last and help us build up to our final design. As the design is customized to the clients needs, so is the time spent on the design, meetings and discussion.

Hopefully, at this point, you've acquired a better understanding of the design process and its details. Once the design is complete, you will be ready to move on to the next step in the process....shopping for your kitchen.

Until then, happy planning!

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If you have questions, comments or would like to contact Rebecca, you may do so through this blog and your requests will be forwarded to her.

The next article: Flooring and Lighting

May the Coach be with you – Coach Jerry