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“Q: Hey Kitchen Guy: Why is it that every kitchen or bath project I see done on TV seems to only take a week, yet every contractor I talk to tells me it is going to be several weeks to do my project? What gives?”

A: The contractors or dealers you are talking with are probably telling you the truth. Many, but not all of the television home improvement shows, do have a tendency to make the home improvement project they are featuring in any given episode look easier than it is. Those shows are a constant source of frustration for most remodeling professionals.

In a May 9th, 1961 speech to the National Association of Broadcasters Convention Newton Minow, then FCC Chair gave his famous and somewhat critical speech declaring television a “vast wasteland”. His speech resonates still today. Here the excerpted phrase in context. The entire speech is worth looking up if you can.

“When television is good, nothing — not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers — nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there for a day without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland.”

When I consider all the home improvement shows on TV today, there are two shows that stand out in my mind for accuracy, good advice and quality work. It’s no coincidence that they have been on the air the longest. Those shows are This Old House, Holmes on Homes and their respective spin offs. The rest have fulfilled Newton Minow’s famous description of television, a vast wasteland.

Generally speaking, people don’t want to hear the truth when it comes to the work, details, materials, and costs involved in doing a remodeling project, right? So they tell you what you want to hear. More to the point, they don’t tell you what you don’t want to hear.

Networks provide approximately 22 minutes or less of content every half hour. In the process of delivering that content, the shows must be paced fast enough to keep your attention and simple enough for the general masses to understand it while telling you what you want to hear. The end results are typically shows that give bad advice, gloss over important and costly details leaving a job so poorly done I would be surprised if they are guaranteed to last any longer than it takes the film crew to back out of your driveway.

Exacerbating this situation is the endless supply of pretty faces with empty heads and a willingness to exchange whatever integrity they may have had for a paycheck and an opportunity to develop their brand.

Here are just some of the things I had to watch so called professionals do in order to write this article.

- 1) Planning: They rarely discuss what could be done. They never discuss what should be done unless it will be seen on TV.
- 2) Material Selection: It's all about looks, pushing sponsors products and installing the product as fast as possible to stay on schedule. Durability, ease of use and maintenance are out the window.
- 3) Perceived Value: If you really think you can save \$6,000.00 by demolishing your 200 square foot kitchen yourself, I have a bridge I want to sell you.
- 4) Trying to tackle a \$30,000.00 project that typically takes 5 – 7 weeks in three days with just \$3,000.00 is going to work out well because you have a positive attitude and a how to book that was written by someone who never did.
- 5) Giving a homeowner who works in an office 40 hours a week a 6 pound sledge hammer and tell him/her to start swinging while people are working within a few feet is beyond stupid.
- 6) Demolition kicks up lots of dust, much of which can be hazardous to your health. Short term and long term. Failure to contain the dust can leave families living in a toxic dump.
- 7) If you want to act like a pro, then be smart and hire professional licensed electricians and plumbers.
- 8) A can of paint is not going to make old builder grade (not good) cabinets look like new custom ones. Paint certainly won't make your cabinetry function any better either.
- 9) Ranges or cook tops shouldn't go in front of windows.
- 10) If you are going to cover up a window (probably not a good idea) you must do it properly or run a very good risk of creating a major mold problem in your home.
- 11) No you can't install cabinets just like a pro.

Bottom line, save for Mike Holmes and This Old House, Newton Minow was right.