



Ask The Kitchen Guy Blog

February 9, 2011

Question: *Hey Kitchen Guy, we are considering updating our kitchen but do not want to waste money. We're also not sure whether it would be a good investment especially, if we end up having to remodel the entire kitchen sometime in the future. Can you tell us how to decide whether it is better update or do a complete remodel?*

Answer: To update or remodel is a tough question and one that ultimately only you can answer. However, I can offer you some advice on the variables you will need to consider when making your decision.

There are several factors you must consider in this situation. Let us begin with the end in mind. Will the room be up to code when finished? How is it going to function and look if you update? Will it have the features and look a totally new kitchen will have? What do comparable kitchens in your area look like and how are they equipped? Look towards the future, when it comes time to sell. Will the kitchen be an asset or a liability? Should you seek the advice of a professional? Let us break it down:

Modern Guidelines and Codes:

For purposes of this article we will define “codes” as specific requirements written in to law in your local community, county or State pertaining to construction of your home. “Guidelines” are specifically outlined by the National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA) to provide designers and other industry professionals the basic direction when configuring a kitchen.

It has been my experience that the guidelines have a habit of becoming codes. You should not assume because when your home was built to existing codes years ago, that you are “grandfathered” in. Municipalities and other governing bodies dealing with increasingly older homes are becoming stricter in enforcing newer codes.

It is not uncommon for people selling existing homes over 40 years old that they must make several improvements to the electrical, plumbing or heating, and safety equipment before they can sell. Therefore, updating an older kitchen if it is still going to be out of code when finished is not advised.

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When visiting a client's home, one of the first things I like to do is quickly review the existing condition and age of the kitchen including the plumbing, electrical service, structure, flooring and lighting. Specifically, I am looking to answer two questions, are there any obvious code or guideline violations and what must go? Say goodbye to the pink tile and green or harvest gold appliances.

In older homes it is not uncommon to find a range or cook top up against a wall or tall cabinet. Modern codes and guidelines require a landing area next to any heat source. I like to see at least 15" whenever possible. Many current codes require a separate circuit for every major (not counter top) appliance and GFI outlets.

Look and Function:

There is no shortage of magazines illustrating the latest trends and innovations in a modern kitchen design. If you just update, how will your kitchen look and/or function?

Appliances:

If comparable homes in the area all have 48" – 60" ranges and 48" built in refrigeration systems and you have a standard 4 burner 30" range and an 18 cubic foot refrigerator, updating probably is not the way to go. Conversely, if comparable homes in your area have the same size appliances, updating may be viable.

Consider hiring an experienced kitchen professional to help you evaluate your situation. If you plan on selling in the next five years you may also want to consult a realtor. Whether you are updating or doing a complete remodel, you should have a plan and a budget before starting. A small upfront investment in a professional's time can save you a fortune in the long run.

Think GREEN! Updating or remodeling? If you are like most people, you will not want to do it again. Your kitchen will be one of the prime selling features of your home. It makes sense to use eco-friendly materials that become more popular in the coming years.

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