

Chapter 1

Envisioning the Big Picture

In This Chapter

- ▶ Planning the job
- ▶ Figuring out how much you can handle
- ▶ Evaluating your kitchen needs and wants

Let me start by asking you a question: What's the busiest room in your house? You guessed it: the kitchen! This room is fast becoming the number one place for family, friends, and neighbors to gather to talk, grab a cool beverage in a casual setting, and even entertain larger dinner parties without dragging out the fine china and crowding into the formal dining room. Maybe all this activity explains why the kitchen is the room that seems to be in constant need of upgrading.

Take heart: According to real estate, building, and remodeling surveys, the one project that is likely to give you a 100 percent return on the dollars invested is a kitchen remodel. And whether the project is as involved as gutting things back to the wall studs or as simple as applying a fresh coat of paint, each freshening up or upgrade is an investment in your home's value. And ultimately in your enjoyment of using the space.

In this chapter, I introduce you to all aspects of a kitchen remodel. I guide you in establishing your budget and through the various levels and types of work that are included in most kitchen remodels.

Establishing a Plan: Builders Do It, So Should You!

If you've ever visited an area where new homes are being built, you probably saw houses in various states of construction. Some have only the foundation walls or slab in place, others have the bare wood wall studs and maybe the roof trusses in place, whereas others appear to be fairly far along on the outside. The same is true for the interiors, too. Some have ductwork in place, others have the electrical wiring and plumbing roughed in, and the ones in a

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Taking the pro's kitchen quiz

If you want to dig into just about every area of your kitchen to see whether its current design works or if things really need to change, then contact The National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA) and request a copy of their *Kitchen and Bath Workbook*. Find the section "Rate-Your-Present-Kitchen," which is a one-page quiz that asks all the right questions

to find out just how well your existing kitchen functions (or doesn't function). This quiz is a great companion to have when you begin your quest for the perfect kitchen design. You can contact the NKBA by phone at 1-877-NKBA-PRO (1-877-652-2776) or on the Web at www.nkba.org.

more completed state have drywall installed over the wall studs and maybe even some flooring and paint. Remember that none of this progress happens by chance. A plan is in place to keep all of the tradespeople busy at the right time, and to keep them from working and tripping over each other.

Assessing your kitchen's potential

You're probably considering remodeling your kitchen for a few reasons. Remember to note and write down what those reasons are, so that you can correct the things that you don't like. You also need to evaluate your current kitchen, and to evaluate it honestly.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ How do you use your kitchen? Start by evaluating your lifestyle and what part the kitchen plays in it. For example, do you only cook small meals, or do you cook large meals for a large family or lots of friends on a regular basis? Does your family have more than one cook? If so, how many? Who is the primary cook, and how tall is he, does he have any special physical needs, does he like certain types of cooking such as baking or grilling? If you entertain often, do you want family and guests to be able to socialize and eat in the kitchen? What other activities (such as homework or bill paying) do you or your family members do in the kitchen? Do you need space for a desk or a computer?
- ✓ How does your existing kitchen meet your needs and how does it fall short?
 - Size: Is the size of the kitchen acceptable, or do you need more floor space, more counter space, more storage space, or more anything?

- **Layout:** What about the current layout works and doesn't work? (See Chapter 2 for more information about kitchen layouts.) For example, if several family members enjoy cooking, do you need additional work areas? Do you need a new layout for better traffic flow? Do you want the sink in a better location?
- **Major appliances:** Take note of the items you have in your existing kitchen that you really want (and need) in your new kitchen. I know, for example, that I would definitely include a dishwasher and an over-the-stove microwave oven in a new kitchen. Why? I'm so accustomed to using these two appliances on a regular basis that if they weren't in my new kitchen, I'd think the kitchen was incomplete in the design and function. And don't stop with the appliances: If you're used to having dimmer switches on the light fixtures, then you're probably going to want them in the new kitchen.
- **Storage needs:** If you buy food in large quantities, like from one of the club type warehouse stores, make sure your new kitchen has adequate storage capacity.

✓ What extras do you want to add to your new kitchen? Now you can have some fun and make an ultimate wish list for your new kitchen. Also take some time to find out what's new in kitchen trends such as design, material, and equipment (see Chapter 23). Some of your wants may include things as simple as better-quality hardware or rotating shelves in the cabinets. Other nice perks include commercial-grade appliances, glass-front cabinets, an in-house recycling center, pot racks, a second microwave oven, a pull-out faucet/sprayer, an extra deep sink, and even some of the new technology or "smart" appliances.

Lots of ideas to consider, I know. Of course, the level of remodel you undertake depends on the time and money you can devote to the project. Now that you've assessed your current kitchen and how you want to upgrade it in the near future, you're better prepared to decide whether your kitchen simply needs a fresh coat of paint, a complete makeover, or something in between to improve appearance and functionality. The following section helps you evaluate just how much of a remodeling project you're prepared to undertake.

Deciding how much you can afford to change

Kitchen remodels come in four different levels and each level comes with different and wide-ranging price tags. You can spend a few hundred dollars or thousands to simply freshen things up, or you can spend tens of thousands

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to move walls and put in new cabinets and appliances. Take a look at each price group to see what's included. Note, too, that each increased level of upgrade includes what's involved in the previous categories.

- ✓ **Makeover:** Most folks spring for a makeover every few years, just to keep things looking nice and stay current with colors and design trends. Some might simply refer to this task as a freshening up; it usually doesn't cost a lot, often only a couple hundred dollars (or less). But the refreshed look is often just what a kitchen needs to perk it back up! A makeover that includes upgrades such as painting or wallpapering walls, refurbishing cabinets, and replacing old cabinet and drawer hardware (knobs and hinges) can be accomplished for less than \$1,000.
- ✓ **Upgrade:** If you plan to paint and refurbish cabinets, install a new floor and countertops, replace light fixtures, and buy new appliances, be prepared to pay anywhere from \$1,000 to \$6,000 in upgrading expenses.
- ✓ **Minor remodel:** A minor remodel will set you back roughly \$5,000 to \$15,000, and this price often includes the upgrade items plus replacing a sink and faucet, repositioning drain and supply lines, adding or replacing cabinets, and making at least one structural change such as closing or opening up a wall or doorway. A portion of the cost of a minor remodel is for hiring professionals to help with major parts of the remodel that you feel more comfortable leaving in a pro's hands. Some of you are probably wondering how spending \$10,000, \$12,000, or even \$15,000 on your kitchen could be considered a minor remodel. You'll see how when you start to price appliances, cabinets, and countertops. Start adding these items together and you'll reach a five-figure price tag pretty quickly.
- ✓ **Major remodel:** You'll spend a lot of money (\$15,000 and up) for a major kitchen remodel, but you won't recognize the place when you're finished. The layout is often changed, the size of the room is larger, you get new electrical circuits throughout the kitchen, and maybe even more windows or even a skylight (in addition to new cabinets, flooring, and so on). Talk about major changes!

All these numbers can seem a bit mind boggling right now. But don't worry. I go into more detail in several later chapters, covering everything from establishing a budget to looking at the prices ranges for all levels of kitchen remodeling to what you can expect to get for your dollars.

Getting your city's blessing

Your city building department has to like what you're doing or else you're in for a boatload of headaches. I've had people tell me that inspections are only good for two things: slowing down the pace of a project, and keeping city

Working with Mother Nature's schedule

Ask most homeowners and they'll tell you that there's no good time for remodeling. It takes time and disrupts your home life. However, if you plan to do a little, some, or a lot of the project yourself, then you need to decide what is the best time of year for your project. Here are some guidelines to remember:

- ✔ If you're going to paint walls or refinish cabinets, you need to do it in the spring or summer when warm temperatures allow for open windows and good ventilation. If you live in a cold winter region, starting such projects just before the winter snows begin flying probably isn't a wise decision. On the downside of summer painting, however, is higher humidity, which means you need to allow a few extra days of drying time between coats of paint, stain, and varnish.
- ✔ If new windows are in the picture, choose the time of year in your area where you can leave the hole from the old window open for

a while. In some areas, rain and cold could be a problem, and extreme heat could be an issue in the southern or southwest states. And don't forget about bugs!

- ✔ If you live in a northern tier state where winter temps can be well below freezing, allow enough time for materials to warm up and acclimate to the interior environment. You don't want to try to install sheet flooring that's just been delivered in an unheated truck in the middle of January without giving the flooring time to soften up. If you rush it, you could crack the flooring and ruin it!
- ✔ On the plus side of doing major projects in winter, most folks have more free time especially on weekends. There's less opportunity for weekend distractions, such as going to the lake or cabin or having a weekend barbeque or party.

employees busy. Well, these comments couldn't be further from the truth. Inspections ensure that projects are constructed properly and that products are installed correctly to make your home as safe as possible. Believe me, I'm happy to have the inspectors check out my work. Their job is to understand and be current on the building and mechanical codes. All I can say is that I want an inspector to catch a problem that might damage my house or injure my family.

Take your plan to City Hall and have it reviewed *and* approved by your city inspectors before you begin. Getting approval will take several days to three weeks, depending on how much building is going on in your area. After your plan is approved, you need to purchase the necessary permits for the various parts of the project. Most cities base their permit fees on a percentage of the total estimated cost of the project. Don't try to fool the inspectors or permit officials, either. They know, for example, that a complete kitchen remodel is not going to cost only \$3,000. And maybe most importantly, treat the inspectors with respect. It will make your life a whole lot easier. Remember: Inspectors are your friends, looking out for your best interest.

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After your plans are approved, you still have a lot of red tape to go through, and the number of inspections required for a kitchen remodeling project may seem a bit over the top, but remember they're for your safety. After you apply for your permit, you'll receive an actual written (typed) permit, sometimes called a *permit card*. This card lists what inspections are needed as well as when they should be done. Most permits are good for one year. If your project falls behind, call the inspector and tell her as soon as you know that the project won't be completed before the permit expires. Most cities will give you an extension.

Call the inspectors well in advance (usually a week to ten days is sufficient) to set up inspection times and be prepared for multiple inspections at various stages of the project. The construction portion, for example, may require a *rough-in* inspection (the wood wall framing and other structural changes, left visible without other materials installed — the rough stage of construction), an insulation inspection, and a finished inspection. The plumbing phase usually requires a rough in and a finished inspection, as do most electrical installations. (I list each permit you may need on the handy Cheat Sheet at the front of this book.)



You probably won't get an approved finished inspection if a rough-in inspection is required and wasn't completed, so make sure you get all of the inspections completed. I have an acquaintance that forgot to call and schedule a rough-in electrical inspection and boy was he sorry! The inspector who came out to do the final inspection noticed that the rough-in inspection hadn't been completed. My friend had to open up sections of the finished walls so that the inspector could see how the installation was done before he approved the installation. A lot of extra work, frustration, and anger? You bet! Will my friend ever forget to call for a rough-in inspection again? I doubt it.



The best way to know what you need to do is to check with the appropriate inspector before the project is started. Get their input about your design, and ask them what's new and current in your area. They can also give you an abridged, yet accurate, version of what must be done in a kitchen remodel to meet codes.

Putting yourself into a remodeling state of mind

Now that you've had your plan approved, you need to start thinking "remodeling." And believe me, you do need to put yourself in a remodeling mindset. For most folks it will be easy because you're excited about the project and can't wait to begin using your new kitchen. But for a small few, it's still easy to let other things come first. When this happens, and the kitchen remains

torn up for longer than expected periods, don't get upset. Just get your priorities back in line and get at the remodeling!

Okay, my lecture on attitude is over. Here are some tips on what to do to make getting started more orderly:

- ✓ Get firm delivery dates on all custom and special-order items. You can't plan your construction schedule if you don't know when to expect special materials.
- ✓ Start packing up the kitchen. Packing always takes longer than you think, plus you want to take your time so that you know what's in each box. Remember, even if your kitchen isn't working, you still need to eat.
- ✓ Begin acclimating to living out of boxes. Sounds simple, huh? Be prepared to be frustrated when the utensils you used to grab without thinking are nowhere to be found.
- ✓ Practice patience! Tolerate change and unexpected surprises. If you're having a bad day, just remember to envision the beautiful kitchen you'll have after you work through this mess!

Let the games begin! Tearing out and putting in

Get out your safety glasses and gloves 'cause it's time to get down and dirty. The demolition process is one area that many homeowners can handle, and you save some money if you tackle this process yourself. If you plan to do some or much of the installation yourself, you'll also see significant savings. Here's a list of what to expect, both on the removal and installation-side of things:

1. Go ahead and make some dust! Tear out all of the old stuff and get rid of whatever is not going to be reused (Chapter 6 provides advice on the demolition process).
2. After the demolition is complete, start doing the rough-in work, which includes any framing, plumbing, or electrical changes (see Chapter 7).

Don't be in a rush to get beyond the rough-in stage until you've had the first inspection, called the *rough-in* inspection.

3. Have all of the work inspected.

If you've followed your codes, you should pass the inspection. If not, or if you didn't understand the code clearly (believe me, many people make errors!), make the necessary changes and have the work reinspected and approved.

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4. After you're approved, start by finishing the walls.

In most cases, you'll be hanging, taping, and finishing drywall. Don't forget you need to prime the drywall, too; now's a good time to prime it even though you won't be painting for a while. (Priming drywall involves applying a coat of primer paint, which is like a thinned version of white paint. The primer seals the drywall's facing paper.)

5. Install the doors and windows.

You need these items installed and have the trim installed, too, so that you'll work with "finished" dimensions from the edge of the door and window trim and not from the rough opening in the walls when installing the cabinets.

6. Next install the cabinets (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Hang the wall cabinets first and then install the base cabinets. You can hang the wall cabinets more easily when you're not reaching over the base cabinets.

7. Install the countertops (see Chapters 10 and 11), sink, and faucet (discussed in Chapters 12 and 13).

8. Install the new appliances (see Chapters 14 and 15).

9. Now it's time to shed some light on the subject and install new light fixtures, if they're part of the plan (see Chapters 16 and 17).

10. Finally, you can put down the new floor (see Chapters 20 and 21).

Don't install the floor, no matter what material you're using, before you install the cabinets.

Living with dust, rubble, and constant change

Dealing with all the disruption around you may be a test for your sanity. Just go in remembering that dust, dirt, and debris will end up being moved or tracked well beyond the kitchen. Your heating and cooling ductwork will also distribute dust throughout your house. Plan on doing a top-to-bottom cleaning of your house after the project is finished, or you'll find dust and dirt for months. (Sort of like when you find pine needles from last year's Christmas tree around the house the following July!)

Here are a couple more hints to help you keep a grip on your project and your peace of mind:

- ✓ Allot enough time at the end of each workday for cleaning up. Don't just set down your tools and knock off for the night. Be sure to get the debris and other trash collected and put in the appropriate place (a dumpster or garbage can).
- ✓ Always restack or organize the materials you didn't use that day; this not only keeps the jobsite neater, but also lets you see exactly what you have left and what you may need to purchase before continuing the job.

Levels of work

You'll find various types and levels of work throughout a kitchen remodel. Each one is critical. Here's a quick overview of the types or levels of work you're likely to encounter:

- ✓ **Electrical:** Changes in the electrical design of your kitchen could be as simple as upgrading all old receptacles, or as involved as removing old wire and cable and installing new wire and cable throughout the kitchen. New circuits are also a strong possibility, especially if you're adding appliances. Don't forget about changes or upgrades to lighting, too.
- ✓ **Plumbing:** Adding a second sink or relocating an existing sink requires that you move or install new drain lines. Either way, plumbing must be completed during the rough-in stage of the project, then inspected and approved before you can close up walls and begin finishing things off. Early on is

also a good time to check any changes made to water supply lines, especially if you had some soldering to do. Repairing a leaky solder joint is much cheaper and easier to do while the wall is still open. (I explain how to solder a joint in Chapter 7.)

- ✓ **Carpentry:** If you're moving doorways, adding windows, or simply changing an existing window's location, then carpentry comes early in the process. You want to be sure that all new framing is in place before you pull new electrical cables or install plumbing pipes.
- ✓ **Finish work:** Finishing includes installing all of the new stuff in your kitchen including cabinets, flooring, and appliances. Don't start finishing until all of the rough-in work has been completed, inspected, and approved.

Heading down the home stretch: Adding the final touches

Your kitchen may still seem far from being finished, but you should actually be seeing that old light at the end of the tunnel. A few final touchups and the all-important final inspection and sign-off, and you're ready to enjoy your new kitchen.

1. Make the final hookups and connections for the appliances.

Or have the subcontractors come back and finish the job if you've hired out (see Chapter 4 for advice on hiring a professional).

2. Add the finishing touches to bring everything together.

Touch up the paint, take care of any little nicks or scratches, and so on (more on finishing up in Chapters 18 and 19).

3. Schedule the final inspection.

This baby verifies that your new kitchen is ready for everyday use. If you've followed this schedule and obeyed the codes, you should be cookin' now! (Literally.)

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What's Your Forte? Determining Your Skill and Comfort Level

So, how much of the project do you plan or want to do? When answering this question, you must be truly honest. If you try to take on more than you're qualified to do, be prepared for problems.

Determining your skill level

We all want to think we're the next Al Borland from *Home Improvement*: The person who can take on any problem or task and fix it the first time. In reality, however, we're more likely to be like Tim "the Toolman" Taylor — in over our heads but too proud to admit it. If you're uncomfortable handling certain parts or maybe even all of this type of project, admit it up front. You'll save time, money, and possibly your marriage!

If you've already mastered projects such as installing a prehung door or window (one that's already on a frame and you simply install it into a framed opening), then a kitchen remodel may be a project you could handle. But even if you have installed a door, that doesn't mean you'll be comfortable working with electricity or installing plumbing lines and fittings. On the other hand, if you have trouble just driving screws, you'd better plan on hiring someone to do just about everything for your kitchen remodel. (I help you get in touch with remodeling professionals in Chapter 4.)

Determining your comfort level

Most folks fall somewhere in the middle of a DIY (do-it-yourself) skills level rating or grading. However, if you're uncomfortable operating certain types of power tools or working on a specific area of your home, hire someone to do that part of the work. I, for example, usually hire an electrician when it's time to get into the main service panel. I know I could do the work, but I'm just not comfortable working around high voltage. I'd rather let a professional handle it. (Yes, seasoned DIY professionals know when to call in the pros!)

And speaking of calling in the pros, recognize when you need to ask for help. A good resource in this process is working with your city inspectors. Their job is to make sure things are built following the current building codes and they're usually happy to answer your questions. Just don't abuse them by phoning every other hour. If you find you're running to their aid more than once or twice a day, consider bringing in a professional — you're probably in over your head, at least on this part of the project.



If you decide to call a pro, be sure to get bids (three is the recommended minimum for price comparison) before you hire someone. Chapter 4 gives you more advice on finding and hiring professionals.

Shopping Tips before You Even Spend a Dime!

Whether you're shopping for cabinets and countertops or sinks, faucets, and appliances, prices are going to range widely. You need to understand that different manufacturers make different models and one company's top-of-the-line product may be equivalent to a mid-priced version from another company. Remember to compare apples to apples to get a clear and even comparison between like category products.



If you want a good, honest and unbiased evaluation of many of the items you need, check out *Consumer Reports* magazine. You can visit their Web site (www.consumerreports.org) and pay a fee to search for advice, or you probably can find back issues of the magazine at your local library.

Choosing cabinets and countertops

New cabinets and countertops are among the most expensive items in any kitchen remodel. However, they're also very visible and you'll probably only replace them once while you own your home. Cabinets vary widely in quality and the amount of work you have to put into them. You can purchase ready-to-assemble cabinets with all the components disassembled and flat in individual boxes. Cabinets can also be site-built, although this is very expensive and generally only seen on high-end remodels. The most popular type of cabinets is custom made to fit your kitchen layout but consists of the standard sized cabinets used in today's housing industry. This type of cabinet is sold at home centers and even some cabinet stores.

Countertops also vary in quality and price, ranging from preformed plastic laminate to custom-made ceramic tile, granite, and composite materials. I discuss cabinets and countertops in Chapters 8 and 10 respectively.

Selecting sinks, faucets, and appliances

Most homeowners can find an attractive and functional sink and faucet fairly easily. Just take a trip to your local home center; sometimes referred to as a big-box store. You can find several major brands of sinks and dozens of

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faucets. And if you don't find exactly what you want, you can look through the manufacturer's catalog and special order just about anything to fit your needs. Chapter 12 helps you explore your options.

As for appliances, home centers know they need to provide everything a homeowner needs. You can find all of the traditional major appliances for the kitchen, as well as some that aren't in every kitchen; for example, a trash compactor or maybe a wine refrigerator (see Chapter 14). However, if you plan to upgrade to commercial- or restaurant-grade appliances, plan to look beyond the home centers. High-end appliances are sold through a limited number of outlets around the country that typically sell to contractors. In many cases, however, you can purchase the high-end appliances even if you're not a contractor.

Finishing touches: Lights, flooring, and wall treatments

A complete kitchen remodel includes new equipment and fixtures from top to bottom. You get new lights (see Chapter 16), wall treatments (see Chapter 18), and flooring (see Chapter 20). Once again, you can find all of these products at home centers. I'd recommend, however, that you try to find a lighting showroom when shopping for light fixtures. These showrooms are designed to show off lights in their best form, often in actual room settings. Surprisingly, lighting showroom prices are not that much more than the home center prices. And if you do pay more, you're generally getting a better quality fixture.

If you're coordinating wall treatments and window treatments, then find a good paint and wallpaper store. These professionals are in the color and design business and know exactly who to talk to and where to go to find you the designs that you desire. They also often work with or know whom you can contact regarding fabrics and furniture coverings, if you're trying to match and coordinate pieces of furniture as well. Check out more than one of these stores, too. Visiting multiple stores and locations allows you to get the expertise and advice from more than one design person. Remember, you're looking for all the ideas you can get to help you focus in on and realize your dream kitchen.

You can't beat a home center's price and selection when it comes to flooring, however. Most home centers offer a wide selection of brands, styles, and designs, and the store's large purchasing volume really helps keep prices down, which means less money spent on flooring and more money available for other parts of the project. And you can find just about any type of flooring you desire. They offer wood (both real and man-made), sheet vinyl, vinyl tiles, and ceramic tile; some carry slate and even granite.