

Large-scale home remodeling requires innovative mastery

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Northern Virginians are remodeling their homes in record numbers. Permits to remodel, in fact, are up 20 percent from the same period last year. Moreover, the size and scope of a typical improvement continues to grow—not only because higher property values make it easier to finance changes, but also because the returns on home upgrades have been exceptional.

Indeed, in a recent "Cost versus Value" study published last month by Remodeling magazine, it was shown that metropolitan homeowners can typically recover more than 100 percent of their remodeling costs in a resale the day the project is completed. On average, a family room addition in Northern Virginia can fetch as much as 120-percent return; a major kitchen remodel might yield upward of 124 percent.

For all the heady calculations, though, the majority of the area's homeowners approach remodeling thoughtfully and with a budget, which is why remodeling firms are so often asked to "maximize" what can be accomplished for available dollars.

"The interesting thing to look at in evaluating a home remodel is what the contractor has been able to accomplish within their budget," said Soren Jensen, a highly regarded builder-craftsman who has served as judge for the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's Contractor of

the Year (COTY) awards for several years now.

"Often it's what's less obvious, the hidden innovation that is a project's real achievement. But every project entails compromise and planning," Jensen said.

On a large-scale remodel, challenges can run the gamut from site problems, to code restrictions, to complex space planning requirements. Often the largest obstacles present themselves early, but it's how contractors make the project work that really reflects their knowledge, management skills and creativity.

Cramped quarters

Given the smaller lots of some of the area's close-in suburbs, site access and unfriendly topography are often the first matters that need to be addressed in executing a large-scale improvement.

Hayes Construction of Fort Valley, Va., confronted this scenario recently when they were asked to more than double the living space of a 1,400-square-foot brick rambler in Arlington. The owners wanted to substantially enlarge the footprint of the existing house and add a level above for additional bedrooms as well as a master bedroom suite. Unfortunately, the existing structure was already perilously close to critical setbacks limits at the rear and restricted by a sloping terrain along the north-south axis.

"Our idea was to custom-fit a much



Courtesy Photos Hayes Construction

A ROOM WITH A VIEW: A formerly boxy dark and dated interior is now dramatically open and visually continuous with its lovely setting in view for the first time.

larger floor plan to the rather tricky terrain," said Bill Hayes, whose solution won his firm a COTY award for "Best Addition Over \$250,000."

"We found there was plenty of privacy and lovely landscaping on the east side of the existing structure, so we just exploited it," Hayes said.

Hayes' plan called for a 646-square-foot, first-floor addition that includes a curvilinear stone and glass great room that, in turn, segues to a south-facing grilling deck. The great room features cathedral ceilings, built-in furniture and an open interior in which wood, granite, slate and pebble tile provide inviting textured accents. The kitchen is substantially enlarged and upgraded. A formerly boxy dark and dated interior is now dramatically open and visually continuous with its lovely setting in view for the first time.

With the first floor thoughtfully reconfigured, Hayes added a 1,650-square-foot, second floor featuring a master bedroom suite that included spacious windows overlooking the garden from higher up.

Strategic remodeling

Even on larger homes, choices must be made. The problem with a Great Falls residence, for instance, was not so much its size as the limited usefulness of much of the floor plan to emerging family needs. To address these issues, owners asked McLean's BOWA Builders to develop and execute a strategic remodeling solution, basically a makeover that reconciles a long list of disparate considerations and creates a new larger room.

By reconfiguring the floor plan, replacing builder-grade finishes, adding custom built-ins and increasing natural light throughout, BOWA transformed living areas into well-appointed spaces that suit the family's lifestyle and enhance the unique ambiance of an elegant farmhouse.

Throughout, comparatively small,

focused alterations are made to converge as dramatic changes to the overall function and look of the residence. The result is a showcase of careful architectural elaboration, innovative space planning and finely crafted interior detailing.

Among the changes: a separate family entrance on the front elevation; reconfiguration of first-level family rooms; a redesigned and upgraded kitchen; family room makeover; master bedroom suite reconfiguration; changes to landscaping reinforcing the architectural unity of house; detached garage; and garden built environment. Last year, the project won both a COTY and a Finest for Family Living Monument award.

On a related note, the ability to conceptualize solutions others miss is what often really distinguishes a top remodeler. Nash Construction inherited a set of blueprints for a two-story addition that several local firms had declined to bid on, saying the project could not be built for the dollars allocated.

"We found it was important to simplify the drawings we'd been given," said project manager Todd Fink, "so subcontractors would have a clearer idea of what was expected of them."

In lieu of a kitchen addition with a screened-in porch above, Nash reworked plans to incorporate all the desired spaces into a one-story makeover that provides for a vastly enlarged kitchen flanked by a period-style screened-in porch and a grilling deck.

The 14-by-14 kitchen extension accommodates a food preparation island, breakfast counter and even desk space. The new indoor-outdoor components greatly enhance visual and physical connectedness to beautifully landscaped rear gardens. And the



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period-specific porch with its pyramid ceiling lends an appropriate elegance to the setting, one reason the project earned a COTY in the "Addition for \$150,000 to \$250,000" category.

Finally, there is no escaping the critical importance of craftsmanship in a contractor's service mix since a substantial enlargement invites more detailing and demands a clear understanding of architecturally appropriate elements and how to execute them.

Case in point, a 1950s Cape Cod in Vienna. In expanding the existing structure by almost 50 percent, Encompass Design Build found appropriate style parallels in craftsman-style language that were skillfully applied throughout.

The firm used a stick-built post and ridge construction style to open up the interior spaces and unify the old and new sections of the exterior. Inside, Encompass created a generous opening between the enlarged kitchen and a newly constructed great room.

To reinforce elevations, all windows and doors were replaced and trimmed in high-end craftsman detailing. A striking front-facing cross-gable roof completes a transformation that is both appealingly original, and seamless, from all vantage points.

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