

Kitchen makeovers span range of choices

By JOHN BYRD
Special to The Times

Kitchens are Northern Virginia's most frequently remodeled rooms. Last year, the number of kitchen remodels out-paced bathrooms (the second most frequently remodeled room) by 10 percent, a somewhat surprising differential since kitchens of almost any size are always pricier.

One theory is that (given today's hot market) one can no longer indefinitely ignore the need to keep a kitchen up-to-date, highly functional, even beautiful.

"Northern Virginians expect a lot from their kitchens these days," said Tom Hazzard, an architect and Arlington native who directs design/build operations for Natelli Homes. "It used to be that a kitchen that hadn't been upgraded for 15 or 20 years was commonplace. Today, an older kitchen is more frequently perceived as a real eyesore and a valuation liability."

Then, too, the returns on investing in a kitchen upgrade locally have been notably exceptional in the recent past. Last year, a minor kitchen remodel in the Washington area returned 124 percent in a resale; even a major upscale makeover with top-of-the-line accessories recouped 105 percent. Small wonder so many pondering the situation have been inspired to simply follow their bliss.

In size, budget and style, kitchens emerging design schools.

"In the kitchen, you will see not only how the owners wish to be perceived but also how they think, how they plan their day—who they are," Hazzard said. "This is what makes designing a kitchen so compelling."

By way of example, Hazzard pointed to a kitchen his firm completed on a Falls Church home last year.

"Stylistically, we were interested in balancing modern functionality with old world warmth. The choice of Shaker-style cabinets was especially benign, since the clean simple lines are very compatible with high-tech materials and finishes."

A pastiche of textures and colors, the makeover features natural ash flooring, cherry cabinet faces and traditional molding in combination with black granite countertops and stainless steel surfaces for the oven and refrigerator. Drop lights add a mid-room, third-dimensional aesthetic (and needed light) to the food preparation island. The space links to a family room with cathedral interior and floor-to-ceiling built-ins.

In short, a big step up from its builder-grade predecessor.

Adding space to tight spaces

Added space, natural light and function, on the other hand, were the primary owner program to a recently redone Reston kitchen executed by Sun Design Remodeling Specialists of Burke. Working with tight spaces and budgets,



This kitchen from a Falls Church residence was dramatically renovated by Natelli Homes by combining Shaker-style elements with stainless steel and other post-modern materials.

the Sun Design team bumped out a rear wall and added a triple casement window. Relocating a door also dramatically improved traffic patterns.

The newly reconfigured floorplan—angling around a multi-function island—creates an array of specialized work-spaces, access to designated storage and a more sensible use of space throughout.

Cabinetry was custom-designed following owner interviews and a thorough inventory appraisal. The plan also includes baseboard and toe-kick heaters for added comfort in chilly months. The project recently won a Contractor of the Year award from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry for "Best Kitchen" in the \$60,001 to \$100,000 range.

Wood-fired hearth captures hearts

A year-old COTY award-winner in Falls Church also illustrates something about homeowner demand for unique specialty features and the pressures on contractors to accommodate. In this case, owners belatedly sought to integrate a 4,000-pound commercial grade wood-fired oven into a kitchen plan entering its final phases.

Confronted with the change-order, builder John Schmitt of Kingston Custom Builders knew immediately that the floor

beneath the oven would have to be reinforced. But even after attaching steel-strength micro-laminate beams to the regular floor joists—and laying those on a newly poured concrete slab—he realized more was needed.

"Although the frame was built by the stove manufacturer, we decided to reinforce it at the bottom with angle irons," Schmitt said. "This distributes the weight evenly on the legs and solved our problem."

On another note, a top-of-the-line Mugnaini oven will heat up to more than 1,200 degrees. Dissipating that much heat requires a chimney with triple-lined tubing and a commercial ventilation system.

"The adjacent garage saved us," Schmitt said. "We put the ventilation unit in the attic, which contained the noise and saved space. And we built the chimney behind it, hidden from the road."

Chateau, early American

In the upscale market, one finds a demand for precisely articulated architectural languages. To complete a newly constructed French chateau in Great Falls, BOWA Builder borrowed details from a classic French country kitchen in building a warmly nostalgic interior that masks the thoughtful floorplan and high-tech functionality.

Here, a cooktop hearth with crown

molding, a score-supported mantle and embossed panels obscure the requisite vents but gives visual definition to the one side of the large room without windows.

Finally, Wentworth Inc.'s carefully researched addition to a colonial in Arlington won several honors for its crisply early American elevations, although the interior kitchen/family room complex finds clever compromises to achieve both period ambiance and comfort.

The new kitchen is spacious yet cogently designed with separate areas for cooking and cleanup. The new breakfast room, a diamond-shaped bump-out between the new family room and kitchen, faces east toward the morning sun.

With such lovely spaces, it's a marvel anyone leaves home.

ON THE COVER

The radically eclectic design scheme executed by Kingston Custom Builders integrates a 4,000-pound wood-fired stove into a kitchen otherwise replete with the latest gadgetry.