

Quality Matters

WHAT'S HOT — AND WHAT'S NOT — IN HOME REMODELING

BY JEN HUNHOLZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE DE MAIO

When discussing trends in home remodeling, industry experts agree — quality is trumping quantity. “In the past, the most important thing was, ‘How big can I afford to make it?’” says Chris Egner, a member of the Milwaukee/National Association of the Remodeling Industry board of directors and owner of Design-Build-Remodel in New Berlin. “Now, it seems like people are conscious of the space, but they’re willing to spend their dollars on higher quality and better finishes — more detail, rather than just a larger, empty box.”

Kristine Hillmer, executive director of the Metropolitan Builders Association, says there are five primary trends surfacing in home remodeling. They include: aging in place (remodeling a home to meet both current and future needs); flex spaces (spaces you can easily modify as needs change); in-home offices; overall consumer savviness; and home automation. She says it’s important to consider your current stage of life when remodeling a home (Is your family expanding and in need of more space? Or will you and your spouse be empty nesters within a few years?) but agrees that “quality is really important over the quantity of square footage.”

Here, the experts weigh in on what’s hot — and what’s not — in home remodeling.



Kitchens

Transitional kitchens — spaces that blend a functional kitchen space with a casual, sit-down dining area — are an emerging trend, and one Hillmer believes is here to stay. “Kitchens continue to be the heart of the home,” she says. “We’re seeing fewer formal dining areas and more of an open-concept feel that has either an eat-in kitchen with a large island that kids can sit at or an adjacent kitchen table that isn’t in a separate room.”

White was undoubtedly the leading cabinet color in 2015, but according to Egner, boldly colored cabinetry is starting to hold its own. “White is still the most popular, but people are looking at more bold colors for the cabinetry,” he says. “There are people willing to put blue or red or yellow cabinets in. In the past, nobody was that brave.” Hillmer says consumers are also beginning to forgo stainless steel appliances in favor of custom covered, built-in appliances, which resemble the surrounding cabinetry. “It looks seamless yet it’s still functional,” she adds.

With practicality still occasionally top of mind, many consumers with small children (or even avid chefs) are choosing quartz counters, which are nonporous and resistant to heat, over granite or marble. “Quartz manufacturers have done a great job in mimicking natural stone, especially Carrara marble,” says Leslie Dohr, a member of the American Society of Interior Designers and a design principal at Milwaukee-based Deep River Partners, Ltd. “People love Carrara marble — it’s a classic material for countertops. It’s very Old World and very traditional, but it stains easily and is hard to maintain. People are picking quartz for its durability.”

◀ Bedrooms

Like the bathroom, the bedroom is morphing into a place to relax and recharge. Fostering a serene escape is top priority, and unlike other areas of the home, square footage is increasing to accommodate designated seating areas or flex spaces. “We’ve been seeing a lot of interest in master sitting rooms or master areas off of master bedrooms,” says Dohr. “I think they provide a nice retreat or a place to reconnect that is separate from children’s areas.”

Technology is also making its presence known in the bedroom, and installing a theater-type level of audiovisual equipment can transform a room into a mini in-home theater, further reinforcing the room's stance as much more than just a place to sleep. "When you're remodeling or opening up any walls, that's your opportunity to put in extra wiring for home automation or security technology, even if you don't use it right away" notes Hillmer. Other home automation features, like the ability to control heating, lighting and even drapery with an iPad or iPhone, are also popular, she says.



▲ Bathrooms

Spa-like features are more popular than ever before, and luxurious accents like steam or digital system showers and heated tile floors are the new norm when remodeling home bathrooms. "The general trend that I'm seeing is that people are looking at their bathrooms as more of a spa and retreat area than just a functional, get in and get out, type of thing," says Egner.

This trend has led many homeowners to replace their traditional tubs with walk-in showers. "We're seeing less of the whirlpool tubs and bathtubs and more of the large, walk-in showers with multiple shower heads," Egner adds. And for those not wanting to eliminate a tub from the bathroom just yet, Dohr says consumers are instead installing freestanding tubs cast in statement-making materials like steel, bronze or copper. "In general, I think people are going away from shower over tub, instead focusing on a freestanding tub and making that an element of focus," she says. **M**

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