

Updating Older Kitchens Increases Sales Prices

Homebuilders have long known that old, unattractive kitchens and bathrooms are the reason for many homeowners desiring a "trade-up" to a new home. However, more and more homeowners have decided to stay in their current houses and remodel obsolete areas of their living space.

Up-to-date kitchens also bring better prices when houses are put on the market. It is axiomatic in the real estate business that a modern kitchen is the one feature above all others that enhances the resale value of a property.

With enough space and a big enough bankroll, you may be tempted to pick one of everything for a kitchen remodeling, like a child in a candy shop. Figure on \$6,400 for a minimal remodeling project. Many can run a broad range from approximately \$30,000 to \$70,000.

For some time it seemed that the most original kitchen designs came from Europe, but no longer the case. One person not bothered by foreign imports is Lynn C. Conner, President of Krown Kitchens. His company's 14,000-square foot showroom, six miles from Lancaster, Pa. which is considered one of the largest of its kind and has been renovated along the lines of a mini-mall. In it are 26 model kitchens, plus a bath shop and displays of built-in cabinetry for living room, bedroom and family room.

"Europeans had a jump on us [in kitchen design] while we sat on our hands, but at present we're about even," he said. "Now Europeans are incorporating our wood fronts in their designs -- there's a tremendous amount of oak being used overseas," Conner said.

A veteran of 20 years in the business, Conner travels to Europe each year to keep an eye on what trends are occurring. He goes there to stimulate his own thinking and often comes across ideas to adapt here. "The Italians are exceptionally creative," he said.

"I think we should make use of good ideas wherever they originate, especially if we can improve upon them. I have been bringing back the best of European ideas and working them into American cabinetry."

For example, a contemporary American design makes use of wire roll-out baskets and shelves that Europeans like very much. Krown imports the fittings for cupboards and tall lockers, concealing all behind rose-patterned Formica.

Not everything found in other countries works here: a long skinny compartment for French bread or built-in meat slicers are two examples. Convenient components of American kitchens are cupboards specially fitted to hold blenders, coffee makers and other small appliances, or pull-down trays for pot-scouring pads in a panel at the front of the sink that usually goes unused.