

BOULDER COUNTY BUSINESS REPORT

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Makeover magic

By Keely Brown

Local architects and design specialists agree - this is a great time to do that planned kitchen or bathroom makeover, in spite of the recession.

"When times are stressful, people want to make their home a retreat, and homes have held their value better than a lot of investments," said **Larry Parrish** of Boulder-based **Parrish Construction**.

"People are feeling better about the economy, and now is the best time to buy, because prices are great and interest rates are low."

At Studio 3 Kitchen and Bath Design in Boulder, designer Andrew Williams agrees. "People aren't getting away as often, so they want to create bastions of serenity and peace within their home," he said. "Good builders and remodelers are looking for work and willing to do it, so prices have softened across the board."

Designers agree that, in today's home, kitchens are now the place for family and friends to congregate. Instead of expensive furniture, modern kitchens offer the luxury of stone countertops, such as the ever-popular granite. For an elegant look, Studio 3 designer Beth Joseph advocates antiqued and leathered finishes.

But for the ultimate luxury countertop - albeit too fragile for kitchen use and durable enough only for bathrooms - Joseph advocates using onyx.

"It's a very beautiful stone - you can light it from underneath so it's a gorgeous option," she said. "But it's so expensive, most people wouldn't think of using it."

For elegant yet durable kitchen use, Williams recommends either engineered stone or concrete. "Designers can do some nice custom applications in concrete, such as little shells and fossils pressed inside," he said.

According to Moros Fabrication in Boulder, countertop materials such as marble and granite run from \$70 to \$80 per square foot, while concrete and soapstone run \$100 per square foot. On the luxury side, onyx runs an average of \$120 per square foot.

Kitchen tiles can be customized as well. Parrish said fused glass makes an elegant design statement, and Boulder-based Adagio creates tiles with beautiful glass embellishments - such as raised oak leaves, or even, in a recent project, the rings of Saturn - which can be used for backsplashes, floors and even medicine cabinets.

One item not yet on the market, but incorporated by Boulder-based Piccadilly Construction, is a heated granite countertop. According to Piccadilly owner Michael Dille, the stone has a thermostat switch to cool off the countertop for pastry mixing.

Dille said another countertop innovation is a special gear, installed flush with the counter, which automatically operates whatever appliance is put on top, whether it's a blender or food processor. Dille said that this nifty gadget actually only costs a few hundred dollars, including cutting the gear into the granite.

Perhaps because of the current popularity of the Food Network, today's luxury kitchen owners want to show off their appliances rather than hide them - and industrial strength, commercial "trophy appliances" are all the rage. Studio 3 designers said appliance packages can cost from \$8,000 to \$20,000 and up.

Today's dream kitchen may have built in coffee stations, four-level dishwashers, and commercial-grade industrial, stainless steel six-burner ranges. While there is a trend toward gas rather than electric in the kitchen, Parrish cited induction cook tops, which use radio waves to heat and cool instantly while the range top never gets hot. Steam ovens, using moist heat, are also becoming popular, as are the small-size 240-volt electric speed ovens, which don't need preheating.

While the kitchen is the area to congregate, the bathroom has become a home's new getaway retreat with walk-in closets and luxury spa steam showers.

"People want a spa experience at home," Williams said. "They've discovered that not every tub experience is about boiling yourself in a caldron of hot water."

A spa bathroom may include a serenity tub with color therapy lighting and underwater audio speakers - and of course, a television in your whirlpool. But a more practical - yet still luxurious - spin to the bathroom may include installing a "car wash" style shower, with key pad temperature and pulsating control, and high-velocity pulsating features for the ultimate all over shower experience.

Parrish said those who don't require a violent output of water might opt for super showers with steam units, frameless hinged European glass doors, and inside fold-down benches. To aid in drying you can install a bathroom fireplace - such as a see-through model which does double duty for the adjoining room as well.

Outside the shower, perhaps the ultimate in over-the-top bathroom luxury is a super toilet, which includes a spray wash-and-dry feature as well as a seat warmer.

Today's bathrooms can be built with heated floors for warm feet, as well as heated mirrors and medicine cabinets that don't fog up. Putting in a heated flooring system for a standard bathroom, **Parrish** said, can run \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Decorating touches can include a floating vanity cabinet suspended off the floor (which makes for more room for cleaning) and vessel style sinks, with bowls of glass or stone raised above the counter.

According to **Parrish**, while some of these items may seem over-the-top, a luxurious kitchen and bath makeover is still within reach of today's budget-minded homeowner.

"We recognize the realities of the economy, and while the 'latest and greatest' can be exciting, they're not necessary if you're working on a budget," he said.

Dille said the community has been especially supportive of its local contractors during these tough economic times.

"There's a lot of goodwill out there, and we appreciate the amazing, helpful spirit of the people of Boulder County," he said. "They realize that a lot of folks - local carpenters and plumbers and dry wall installers and painters - are trying to make their mortgage payments, and they've created work for us by going ahead with their remodeling projects during these hard times."

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