

HOME

Architecture & Remodeling

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Notes from our Team:

It's been quite a busy period for us at Commonwealth Home Remodelers. We've moved to a larger office space, expanded our staff to 19, added another award to our collection, and are in the process of remodeling our Web site.

Among our newest staff members is Jerry Mannix, our "client champion," or otherwise known as our sales manager. Jerry will work directly with each homeowner throughout the remodeling process, from the initial feasibility meeting through the final walk-through. Jerry's mission is to lessen the stress that is natural to any change, and to make the experience as enjoyable as possible. Jerry's 10 years of experience in the construction industry serves him well in his new position.

A recent project garnered the 2002 Contractor of the Year Award from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) for Residential Additions in the \$100,000 to \$250,000 category.

And as a renewed effort to keep in touch with our clients and vendors, we're publishing our newsletter again. Please feel free to share it with family and friends; we hope you find it interesting and helpful.



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The perfect kitchen

When your past includes being an executive chef for one of America's leading hoteliers, not any kitchen will do. When Jim Allenchey, owner of Dominion Deli, and his wife Liz, a prominent Northern VA dentist, decided to remodel their Annandale home, likewise, not just any remodeler would do. The professional couple needed not only a design-build

firm with impeccable credentials, but one that would listen. Susan Pierce, partner and chief architect for Commonwealth Home Remodelers, and Jonathan Hodge, intern architect, fit the bill perfectly.

In general, Jim and Liz wanted the kitchen space open to breakfast area, and didn't want a traditional dining

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room. Susan's design eliminated walls, established arches, raised ceilings to nine feet in the kitchen and 10 feet in the dining room area and adjacent living room, and created a single, large kitchen from the original kitchen—previously a tiny 10 x 10 foot working space with 8-foot ceilings.

"Jim drove the design for this kitchen," Susan said. "His years of experience in restaurants and personal taste are evident in every inch of the space. It has all the professional amenities of a commercial kitchen, but still in a home setting."

"I wanted a kitchen I could work in," Jim explained, "and that means lots of counter space. Like a commercial kitchen, I also wanted two sinks, one for prep and one for clean up. We like to entertain, and when our guests show up for dinner, they are welcome to pitch in and help with the preparation—that might be stirring a pot, or mincing fresh herbs.

"We have also done away with the traditional 'overhead' cabinets save for one on either side of the stove, one for coffee makin's, and one for spices," Jim added. "We aren't lacking storage: we have a large china closet adjacent to the dishwasher and auxiliary sink, and a spacious pantry at the other end of the kitchen. Everything is wide-open, clean, and there's easy access to everything.

"What you won't see in our kitchen is a freezer," Jim said. "Because we only use fresh ingredients, we have very little waste from freezer burn or spoilage.

"Entertaining is important to us, and being comfortable in your surroundings is the most important part. Guests can relax and feel like their part of what's going on," Jim said.

And when asked what made the project a success, he's quick to answer: "Having an architecture team that *listens* to you. Susan certainly listens! We talked about what we wanted to achieve, and what the minimum we would accept. We got our six-burner stove, double oven, double sinks, lot of counter space, and much, much more."

So, Jim...what's for dinner? ■



gracious

Coping with a remodel

Remodeling is exciting. It's fun to make design choices. It's creative and absorbing. It's rewarding to make a dream a reality, but it's also chaotic, messy, and challenging.

CommonWealth Home Remodelers never let a homeowner operate under the illusion that a remodeling project is a "walk in the park."

"It's a major disruption in our clients' lives," Kelvin Pierce said. "Strangers are going to be in their home for weeks or months at a time. That's why we take precautions, to minimize our clients' stress."

On the remodeler's side, cleaning up every single day makes a enormous impact.

"All our jobs stop before the day is done to allow for enough time to clean the site," Kelvin said.

Communication between the homeowner and the remodeler is also critical to a smooth, less stressful experience. CommonWealth uses a number of communication methods including an on-site communication board that allows for immediate daily correspondence between the lead carpenter and the homeowner. An internal, sophisticated information management system, which includes a shared file system of checklists, project specific documents, and detailed design, management and hand off meetings, improves efficiency, which in turn keeps projects on target.

Home remodeling taxes homeowners' emotions. Here are a few of CommonWealth's favorite tips for reducing the stress level.

- During a remodel, your home, your nest, is disturbed. Gone is the refuge at the end of a long day. Instead, you have disorder. It's stressful to go for long periods of time without a respite of peace and quiet. Jonathan Hodge, intern architect, suggests "getting away" for a bit. Go for a walk, go to the gym, take a class. Go on long weekend or a vacation during a remodel. And always maintain a sense of humor and be helpful in solving problems. The unexpected can turn into a good story to tell

over a glass of wine in your new family room. And, above all, keep in mind, that all the disorder will be transformed into a home that you'll enjoy and an investment that will be returned over and over again.

- Schedules can break down during a remodeling project. The cabinets you fell in love with are back-ordered due to a strike in South Carolina. The plumber's wife just gave birth to triplets and he took the afternoon off to be with her, setting back the hook-up of kitchen sink and garbage disposal. The snowstorm in Minnesota delayed the delivery of the counter-tops... It can go on and on sometimes. So the feeling that you've lost control sneaks up on you. Intellectually, you understand. (After all, if you were in the hospital with triplets, your husband had better show up!) But emotionally, it's tough to stay calm.

What to do? The CommonWealth way is to take positive, decisive actions. At the start of the project, communicate your needs openly and honestly with our team. You have the right to question or challenge any decision made.

- Dreams versus reality is a great stress inducer. Don't romanticize the project. Try to set realistic expectations within your budget. Be sure you are extremely candid with your contractor about spending limits so that the first set of designs doesn't have to be scaled back after you've fallen in love with those French doors.

Remodeling doesn't have to be an emotional roller coaster. With a good contractor who's sensitive to your expectations and needs, and is adept at communicating before and during the process, remodeling can be exciting, fun and very rewarding, not only rewarding in the process, but also rewarding in terms of improving your long term investment. ■



Living

Wall Street: Zip, Homeowners: 10

The stock market may have just had its worst period in 15 years," said Kelvin Pierce, "but long-term mortgage rates are below six percent, so appreciation rates are driving the investment potential of homeownership."

Supporting Kelvin's position, David Seiders, National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) chief economist recently said, "The Federal Reserve's most recent move to lower short-term interest rates appears to be helping to support consumer sentiment." In fact, the housing sector is currently, and will continue to bolster the economy well into next year."

Equity conversion and refinancing have made remodeling, worth \$330 billion dollars by June of last year, a realistic option for many homeowners. The largest segment of the remodeling market was in high-end specialty projects of \$20,000 or more, and these dollars were spent to improve an existing kitchen or bathroom, or on an addition to the home. Housing has performed much better than many other investments in the last several years, making remodeling an ever more popular way for Americans to not just add space and comfort to their lifestyle, but add value to the family portfolio.

"We're truly excited about what we have to offer our clients today," Kelvin said. "Its an exciting time in our industry, and the clear winners are those who place their trust in us."

And never has there been more, or better quality materials from which to choose. Today's remodeler can install windows that really don't leak the cold breath of winter, and they can make available tile selections from the finest sources in Italy and Spain, as well as marble cut to fit in China, and assemble in place at value points unheard of 10, or even five years ago.

"We've come a long way in one decade," Kelvin said. "Imagine what the next decade will bring." ■



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