



Renovation News

The whirring of power drills... the wailing of chain saws... the rhythmic tapping of hammers in unison... the protesting of old wood resisting removal in order to make room for the new. These are familiar sounds being heard throughout many American neighborhoods, as homeowners opt for new roofing, freshly painted walls, replacement exterior clapboards or shingles, new windows and other improvements that not only make sense but add vitality and resale value to their homes. With this trend seemingly growing at a fever pitch, Home Plan Designs predicts these telltale sounds will reach concert levels early each spring.

With more and more consumers choosing to remodel rather than buy, the renovations/home improvement industry is going strong. Just witness the tremendous growth of home improvement stores such as Home Depot and do-it-yourself discount chains. Department stores are hastening to add home improvement/project sections to satisfy the growing population of "homeowners-turned-pros." And note the sprawling design centers, once exclusively the sanctuary of interior and architectural designers, that are now teasing and

catering to this new crowd with soup-to-nuts kitchens boasting everything from designer drawer pulls to restaurant-issue stainless steel appliances. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding.

From 1994 to 2001, US dollars spent for remodeling projects surpassed that for new construction in the Northeast, alone.¹ According to recent studies, American homeowners spent \$130.4 billion for remodeling as opposed to the recorded \$472 billion for single and multifamily home construction in 2003. Also in 2003, home improvements had increased by 7 percent, after seeing a 10 percent increase during 2002. And with an improving economy on the rise, even bigger gains are expected for 2004.²

Studies indicate that aging baby boomers are predominantly the driving force behind this push for home improvement. Many American homes – the majority, in fact -- are on record as originating back to the 1950s and '60s – and baby boomers are staying in them. Because of the age of these houses, constant updating is required and constitutes the bulk of today's rush for renovations. Empty nesters,

for example, make up a large portion of these boomers and, with the children gone, are finding more space available. Certainly, some empty nesters head for more compact, pared-down living quarters such as condominiums, community living or significantly smaller homes. But just as many in this group are choosing to renovate or remodel existing homes in order to create rooms that more fully – and efficiently -- address their changing needs and lifestyles.

Many of these wish lists include better or more light, less clutter, more heat-efficient windows, or simply the reworking of poorly configured space. And there seems to be no limit to these improvements. Walls are being knocked down and built-ins simultaneously installed for more “open” floor plans, affording homeowners better use of space and additional sources for storage. Rooms are being assigned new roles in homes, too. For example, unused formal dining rooms are frequently taking on new lives as offices or master bedroom suites with adjoining full baths.

And a new trend? Remodeling clients are paying more attention to detail in their rooms, turning to warmer, environment-enriching elements such as hardwood floors, crown moldings and, in the kitchen, granite countertops and maple cabinets. With the economy on the upswing, baby boomers are not afraid to spend top dollar on elements such as granite countertops (now, practically the norm), stainless steel refrigerators, restaurant-style stoves and custom upgrades such as built-ins for home offices.

The dual-professional couple with children is another growing segment of home renovators. These are the clients initiating the kitchen-with-adjacent-family-room craze. In the quest of satisfying a need to just hang out with family in more comfortable, informal “social” areas, this arrangement is fast making the original dining room obsolete.

On the other end of the spectrum, baby boomers are increasingly finding themselves faced with the prospect of caring for ailing or elderly parents in their

homes. Our population is living longer, so eldercare is another issue that must be dealt with, often with expanded living space -- such as the "in-law" suite or apartment - - or new assignments for existing rooms. In addition, designs and custom re-do's that cater to the disabled or newly physically challenged, such as wider hallways for wheelchairs and doorways that more easily accommodate walkers, are a must in renovation plans.

Popular home improvements currently include:

- Once-cramped ranch houses suddenly expanding with attached garages being converted to additional living spaces, such as second bedrooms or larger family or great rooms
- Additions to house a great room or master suite
- Oversized garages that are heated and plumbed to host hobby vehicles, such as motorcycles or antique cars
- Winterized indoor porches or sunrooms resulting in more usable, year-round space and lower heating bills
- Room "dividers," other than walls, that define spaces without closing them off from each other. Examples are a single row of waist-high cabinets that also provides extra storage and additional work space, open shelving, cleverly arranged furniture and beautiful, folding screens
- Foyers that can "double-function" as additional rooms or places for displaying art or collectibles
- Walk-in pantries and closets in or near kitchens for much-needed storage
- Exterior additions that create more architectural balance for houses whose original designs were bulky and aesthetically confusing.
- Newly created floor plans resulting in:
 - better room-to-room flow with improved access to each, complete with functional "borders" that divide unobtrusively
 - more open space that allows for more natural light
 - functional elements such as a custom breakfast nook that connects a kitchen visually to an adjoining family room.

- Rooms being created (or recreated) for different functions:
 - craft rooms
 - computer rooms
 - home theaters
 - home offices
 - additional bedrooms
 - guest rooms
 - teenage retreats
- Upgrades, “extras” and amenities that include:
 - family studios*
 - extra staircases
 - huge wine cellars
 - whirlpool tubs
 - recessed lighting
 - in-ceiling audio systems
 - central air conditioning
 - wine coolers (built in beneath granite kitchen countertops)
 - moldings
 - chair rails
 - wainscoting
 - French doors
 - built-in coffee and cappuccino makers
- * High-tech laundry rooms

Beyond the Ordinary

Some folks have a knack for seeing beyond the predictable when it comes to creating a home for themselves -- almost anything is possible! Once unheard of, it is becoming more common to read about people taking the old, the decrepit and the unused and transforming it into something beautiful, useful, fresh and new. And “it” can be anything. Just as developers are reinventing abandoned mills and factories and marketing them as contemporary, high-end condominiums, individuals are becoming equally creative. Abandoned schools, municipal buildings, historical churches... just about any kind of structure is being embraced by dynamic-thinking home buyers as possessing valuable potential for comfortable home living. With a consciousness for the environment and a commitment to preserving the original character of these buildings, this unorthodox breed of savvy recyclers is breathing new life into the previously unthinkable, and creating attractive living quarters with distinctive personalities and, more often, a wealth of history.

For instance, a couple in a small, Southeastern Massachusetts suburb purchased a 100-year old, 11,000 square foot school which the town had decided to sell in 2001. The work entailed much more than mere renovations. Years of neglect resulted in the necessity of a massive clean-up involving unused, damaged materials and debris. What's more, an invasion of bats, numbering in the hundreds, had to be dealt with before any kind of "real" renovations could begin. With the clean-ups out of the way, workers were then able to re-side the building with clapboard and reupholster the walls. Over 1,000 hours of refinishing went into the preservation of the school's original southern yellow pine floors. A tooled tin ceiling and double staircases were also retained for "character."

In a suburb located North of Boston, a couple and their business partner took on the monumental task of rescuing – and reinventing -- a large church, which now proudly houses two condominiums and a beautiful courtyard, exquisitely enhanced by flowering shrubs and gardens. The condos

boast contemporary styling and highly-desirable features: two bedrooms, one full bath, glistening hardwood floors, Berber carpeting and, in the kitchen, luxurious touches such as cherry cabinets, granite countertops and trendy stainless steel appliances. Just as with the school, as much as possible of the original features were preserved; steeples, gold crosses, stained glass, and the church's name plaque are just a few. Eyebrow windows, loft storage and extra rooms are valuable additions that add to the home's resale value.

Another enterprising Massachusetts couple adopted an old stone church, which retains not only its original cathedral ceilings and polished beams, but also a set of pews that serve as "seating" for a contemporary dining nook. And the most remarkable "reinvention"? The church basement - - now very much in use as a high-tech, soundproofed recording studio!

Playing "Pygmalion" with unused buildings is not limited to the creative homebuyers, however. Salvage companies are actively

cashing in on this trend by buying, moving and/or disassembling structures and, rescuing for re-use, elements such as trim, fixtures, doors, moldings and more. With old barns beginning to top the most-wanted list for country-cozy abodes, salvage experts are profiting wildly, re-selling rural charm – piece meal or as a package. In this business, it is definitely a seller's market.

To Renovate or Not?

There are many aspects to the decision on whether or not to renovate. Emotional reasons as well as practical ones often come into play, making this expensive decision all the more complicated. Sentimentality can drive the decision for repairs, re-do's and upgrades to an older structure, for example. Some work makes good sense, actually, especially if they save the owner money. Insulating, replacement windows, new wiring and heating systems and siding are good investments -- some of which actually improve the looks of the property as well as maintain it. How long the consumer plans on living in the home is another guide: if the property is being

resold, many renovations and upgrades make sense, increasing curb appeal and resale value. Another consideration might revolve around very young children living in the home... practicality and aesthetics cannot always coexist under one roof.

When contemplating renovations for your home, Home Plan Designs recommends you consider the following three guidelines, based on the advice of realtors:

- Total kitchen makeovers. Although they immediately increase ease of living, recouping the value of your investment can take years. So unless you've got money to burn, we recommend that you find and dedicate space for additional bathrooms or even convert space into another bedroom. These are hot items on a buyer's checklist, today.³
- Location, location, location! Watch where you build what. Adding a family room on a first floor definitely means added value; re-doing a basement for the same purpose is iffy, at best.⁴
- Over-customization. Industry experts cite too many custom projects as defeating

if you are going to sell your home in the future. Details such as additional fireplaces may increase a home's allure, but do nothing to bring a higher value to a dwelling.⁴

The future of remodeling is a strong and growing one, especially in the United States. With an expected increase at an annual rate of 5 percent throughout the next ten years, demand for remodeling may actually exceed the market for new units.⁵ One of the reasons it will continue to grow is because projects and work will cater to consumers of all ages, not just the baby boomers. From young parents and career couples, to the middle-aged empty nesters, to homeowners sharing space with ailing or elderly relatives, needs will be vast and perhaps more demanding than ever before. As a result, it is predicted that the trend will lean toward "universal design," or designing for all age groups and circumstances.⁶ In other words... design that will provide "something for everyone."

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