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**KITCHENS BATHROOMS FURNITURE & BUILT-INS**

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## How to work with a kitchen designer

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### Introduction

This will take you through the process of renovating a kitchen. If you are purchasing cabinets for a new home you will also find much of the advice helpful.

You will be shopping around to find the lowest price in the quality level that best suits your budget. Due to the wide variety of styles, options and workmanship standards this is an extremely complex process. Although we all search for that great bargain it is still as true as ever that you will only get exactly what you pay for.

The way to get the best value for money is to purchase when trade is less busy. If you are renovating you can set your schedule more flexibly than the new home builder. The busiest times of year are the Spring and Fall. In between will be quieter. November to February is quietest.

It is always best to deal with a professional organization. Although there is a perception of higher cost this is often due to comparing items of different quality. Even if you pay a little more this is cheap insurance to ensure that the job will be completed on time and that the company will be around in later years to provide after sales service. Kitchens last a long time and no company will be interested in fixing someone else's bad work.

You can start your renovation planning now, by visiting showrooms and looking through magazines. This process will help you to form ideas of the style that you like and the type of kitchen that will suit your lifestyle. Take notes and keep lists of likes and dislikes.

### Steps to take

1. Write down what is important to you in your new kitchen.
2. Visit showrooms and study styles and accessories and interview the sales people.
3. Carefully research the companies you plan to do business with and look for membership in professional organizations.
4. Select no more than three companies that you feel most comfortable with that can provide all the services that you require.
5. From these companies obtain plans & price estimates in writing.
6. For any satisfactory proposal refine the design and obtain a final price.
7. Obtain references and interview these customers.
8. Do not proceed without a complete written contract including plans and specifications. Do not be rushed.

Not carrying out these steps will probably result in making the wrong decision. While the current economic climate suggests that there are bargains to be had, remember that poor workmanship is forever. The company that exhibits bad practices quickly disappears leaving you with a major unresolved problem.

### Planning & preparation

Before visiting showrooms and designers write down what is important to you. You should be asked these questions by a good designer but it is easier if you have thought about them in advance. Rate your priority of the following items:

1. Colour scheme. This will influence door colour & style and appliance colour. A good kitchen designer will help you with this aspect.
  2. New appliances -- are existing units over 8 years old. Will the colour suit your plans.
  3. New sink, faucet & spray, and built in dishwasher.
  4. Work surface length. A large sink, pantry or wall oven will each reduce usable countertop.
  5. Types of storage -- food, utensils, glassware & china, linens, cleaning materials and garbage/recycling.
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6. Open shelves and glass doors, or hide everything away.
7. Keep space above upper cabinets for display, or take cabinets up to ceiling.
8. Eat-in table or nook will cut down on storage.
9. Multiple cooks will require additional task areas and fixtures.

### **The Showroom Visit**

The following are important points to cover during a showroom visit:

1. Review styles and materials available for doors & cabinets.
2. Ask about relative price levels for various styles.
3. Consider what accessories you might want.
4. What decorative hardware choices are there?
5. Is there a good selection of countertop colours & styles?.
6. What design services are provided and is there a charge? e.g. electrical & plumbing plans, colour planning.
7. Will the company take total responsibility for the job? This may include removing old cabinets, construction, electrical, plumbing, flooring, ceramic tile, painting,
8. Does the company install the cabinets or a third party?
9. Will the delivery schedule meet your requirements? Where do the cabinets come from? Could there be delays?
10. What warranty does the company offer?

The installation questions are important because if the homeowner has to hire the different trades the greater the chance of cost increases and schedule delays.

### **Short list your companies**

Now you need to compile a short list of companies from whom you wish to request a proposal. Three firms will be about right. Each designer may furnish several layouts with different options and price levels for each one. Too many proposals will result in an unmanageable amount of information which will confuse and frustrate the objective of picking the best company for you.

The following are important points to consider:

1. How was your reception in the showroom? Did you feel welcome or were you treated off-handedly.
2. Were the salesperson's answers to your questions in accord with your values.
3. At each company did you feel comfortable and did you think that the designer was someone with whom you could work and trust.
4. Did the staff respond knowledgeably and were they willing to help with all aspects of your renovation, or did they just want to sell you cabinets. In the latter case are you prepared to take responsibility for job planning and coordination.
5. How long has the company been in business? Do they show a responsible attitude to business by being a member of a professional organization? The cabinet business sees a lot of companies come and go. You want to pick a company that will be there when you need after sales service.

### **The home visit**

The following are important points to cover during the home visit.

1. Give a copy of your list of priorities to the designer. Be clear about which items are important and which are nice to have.



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2. Inform the designer if you plan to replace appliances or fixtures or add items like a dishwasher or microwave oven. New items may be different in size which will affect the design.
3. Are you flexible about appliance locations, position of sink, etc., or must the design work around current placing. Do not assume these changes are necessarily expensive and dismiss them for this reason. Such restrictions may result in a less functional kitchen.
4. The designer should know about plans for a flooring upgrade to ceramic tile or hardwood because this will affect cabinet heights and transitions to other rooms.
5. Let the designer know if you want electrical or plumbing work, cabinet tearout and disposal, or decorating work included.
6. The designer will measure walls, window and door placements and plumbing locations. For a custom design, sizes will be required for the refrigerator, microwave oven, cooktop and wall oven.

### **Review the proposals**

Key points to cover when reviewing the proposals are as follows:

1. Is the plan clear with all measurements shown so that you can properly determine what is proposed.
2. How well does the plan reflect your expectations for function, budget and esthetics. This is the time to discuss any deviations from your ideas. Try to understand why the designer might reject your ideas. There may be good reasons based on considerable experience. Maybe the designer is not listening to you.
3. Most people have great difficulty visualizing space and translating drawings to the actual space. If changes are major, try using boxes, masking tape, etc. to lay out the plan in your kitchen to get a feel for it.
4. Is the price proposal in writing and specific on what is included. Are you clear on what other costs are necessary to complete the renovation. Is the quality level (model) and door style specified. Are the accessories you requested listed.
5. Is the documentation made available for you to carefully review at your leisure.

### **Design review**

You have reviewed the layout proposals with the designer for each of your selected companies. It's possible that everything is just what you expected but more likely revised plans will be required to get exactly what you want. This will depend on the size of the job and how extensive the renovation is. You may shorten your list of contenders at this point, depending on how the designers have responded.

These further points should be reviewed in the plan:

1. Consider the kitchen as a number of work areas and make sure that there is the appropriate storage and work surface available for each task. The primary areas are food preparation, cooking, serving and clean up.
2. There should be adequate counter on both sides of the sink and stove, and on the opening side of the fridge.
3. The sink, stove and fridge normally form a triangle but this is not essential provided that all work areas are available and distances between areas are not too long.
4. Islands and peninsulas should not restrict movement between major work areas but should keep unwanted traffic away.
5. Small kitchens found in older houses frequently have to break some rules but still can make very functional rooms. Just work your way around the plan visualizing the tasks you normally perform and ensure that everything will work for you.

### **Check References**

You now need to check out some references.



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Obtain three names and 'phone numbers from your chosen kitchen supplier.

If you are still nervous about how your finished kitchen will look try to get names of people that have purchased a similar style. Most people are only too happy to show you their new kitchen. Visiting a reference gives you the best opportunity to look at a finished installation but a telephone interview is satisfactory if their standards are the same as your own.

Key points to cover in an interview are as follows:

1. What was your overall feeling about the company?
2. Would you use them again?
3. Did you get exactly what you expected or were you disappointed about anything?
4. Was the quality what you expected and were all the accessories and finish trim items included that you expected?
5. Was a schedule set when the agreement was signed, and were the dates met?
6. Did you have a list of items to adjust after installation, and was everything fixed without a hassle?

### **The Agreement**

Now you are ready to sign an agreement.

Key points to cover in an agreement are as follows:

1. Both you and the cabinet supplier will sign and date the document and you both keep a copy.
2. The total price and schedule of payments must be shown.
3. The warranty terms should be included and there will be other terms and provisions that you should be sure you understand before signing.
4. A plan must form part of the document. It must be accurately dimensioned and show all details of the cabinets. You should know how many shelves, drawers, pullout trays and accessories (such as cutlery liners, spice racks) are included. Trim items like finished ends, crown moulding, and lighting valence should be listed or shown on drawings.
5. The document should clearly state who is responsible for purchase of appliances, fixtures, and other items that form part of the renovation.
6. Responsibility for electrical, plumbing, carpentry, drywall and decorating must be stated, and who is obtaining any needed permits.
7. Schedule must be specified with start and end dates. A large renovation should show stages so that you can monitor progress.

Good luck with your renovation. With this advice you will enjoy your new kitchen for many years to come.