

## KITCHEN AND BATHROOM RENOVATION:

# REALITY VS REALITY TV

By **DANA W. TODD** | Photography courtesy of **PARRISH & COMPANY, INC.**

Admit it. You've watched a reality TV show where a bathroom or kitchen renovation took place in eight hours at a budget level that was minimally invasive to the homeowner. Then you compared the timeline and budget to the remodeling quotes you received from a local contractor who quoted your job. You shook your head and wondered how the TV design and construction experts did it. It's time we set the record straight.

**L**et's face it: If it only took eight hours to renovate an entire kitchen, we'd all tackle the project a lot sooner. When the progression of a homeowner's project is watched by thousands or even millions of TV viewers, it's much easier to get vendors to show up on time at a specified hour, and it's simpler to schedule inspections and pull permits in time for the cameraman to capture the excitement. The harsh reality is that not every vendor and government inspector responds immediately, and they certainly don't routinely work into the wee hours of the night.

"It's all a bit of an illusion," says Michele DeCorby, designer and kitchen and bath remodeler and owner of Swanx Fine Cabinetry & Interiors. "A large team works for weeks ahead of the show to select the location, pre-plan the remodel, and line up all the trades so the TV show host/designer can get in and out of there. The blue tape stuff doesn't get done until weeks after the show, and the host doesn't do all the design work. There's a whole team behind him or her."

TV budgeting and real-life budgeting take decidedly different turns. Television producers don't disclose to viewers that project materials usually are heavily discounted from suppliers and probably won't be available to other homeowners in the future at that price point. Labor charges usually aren't factored into the budget equation either, so many homeowners experience sticker shock when they begin to renovate their kitchens or bathrooms.

"You have to understand on TV the producers are looking

for sponsorships with the countertops, flooring, and cabinet manufacturers. This is great exposure for brands," says Greg Vannostran of TOPS Kitchens & Baths. "In my previous job with Silestone®, I received many calls from producers looking for donations to appear on their shows.

"My best advice on any home improvement project is to measure all the variables of importance to your needs," Vannostran continues. "Too often price outweighs the other variables...It's like going to a car dealership and asking for the price of a car. Yes, you are comparing cars, but you also have to compare the manufacturer who built the car. Your project is custom fit to your home, and the material is just a component. Quality of services and craftsmanship can vary. In most cases, you are only looking at a five percent variance between high-middle-low [product choices]. In most cases, you get what you pay for."

"Being forthcoming with your budget helps us save time and energy for the homeowner in the long run," says Kelly Parrish Walker of Parrish & Company, a distributor of home products. "Be honest with yourself about what you are willing to spend, and we can go from there. Homeowners sometimes are skeptical about giving a dollar amount, but our job is to research and find products for your situation. We want you to stay within your budget."

DeCorby advises homeowners to include a 15 to 20 percent cushion in their budgets for surprises during the remodeling



process, at least one of which always appears. On the other hand, she says, having a designer is not a luxury. Like displayed on TV, designers help clients save money by using the power of their knowledge and research methodologies to find the best value in furniture, cabinetry, countertops and accessories for their clients. Often a designer will become a positive part of the budget, saving enough money elsewhere for homeowners to add one more feature they can't live without.

Another misnomer seen on TV relates to product availability, according to Walker. Often, homeowners see products they would like to purchase for their own renovation projects, but those products are out of budgetary reach when costly charges are added to cover long-distance shipping.

"Look at the local showrooms," Walker says. "You can find similar products locally, where there is a great pool of resources. Be open, and you can find a similar product to achieve the same look more cost-effectively."

Remember, saving money by shopping locally is a way to add a realistic edge to your remodeling budget, but don't expect a room renovation in a day's time. It takes time to wade through the

overwhelming number of product choices. Although a designer can help, says DeCorby, it still takes time to go shopping with the designer and wait for samples.

Learn from the reality shows by observing the wide range of solutions available to solve tricky design challenges, but remember not to place too much emphasis on the timeline and budgetary details explained on these TV shows. Instead, apply realistic expectations to real renovation situations to experience your own happy ending. ❖

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