

home life

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In this edition

Tax Credits for Efficient Components	1
Ready, Set, Remodel	2-3
Looking Ahead: Trends for 2010 And Beyond	4

Tax Credits for Efficient Components

More good reasons to remodel in 2010

If you're thinking of remodeling your home, there is added incentive to do so before the end of 2010. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides a federal tax credit of up to \$1500 for including certain energy efficient improvements, and one of the best times to take advantage of this program is during a remodeling project. While selecting new windows or a water heater may lack the fun factor of choosing cabinetry or countertops, making the right choices can save both energy and money in the long term – and result in a nice credit on your 2010 federal tax return.

The tax credit applies to a wide range of qualified systems and components, including energy efficient windows and doors, heating and cooling systems, water heaters, and more. In some cases, such as windows and insulation, the credit is available for 30% of the cost of materials only, up to a maximum credit of \$1500. For heating, cooling, and water heaters the available credit applies to 30% of labor and materials combined, up to a maximum credit of \$1500. Qualifying improvements must be completed by December 31, 2010. Two notable exceptions are qualifying

solar water heating equipment and solar electrical systems, which have no dollar cap on the tax credit amount and can be installed up until the end of 2016.

Be sure your contractor can back up the eligibility of your selected materials or components. Each type of product or system must meet certain specifications in order to qualify for the tax credit, and in some cases these requirements have changed since the initial criteria were issued by the government. A knowledgeable contractor will provide you with current certification from the manufacturer that a particular product qualifies for the tax credit; this should be done before you commit to purchasing a product or system. You should keep this documentation and proof of project completion to substantiate your request for the federal tax credit. Also, be sure to take advantage of any available local rebates or credits that your project might qualify for.

For more information about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act federal tax credits, visit www.energystar.gov/taxcredits.



Ready, Set, Remodel

First considerations for your kitchen remodeling project



Getting the most out of your kitchen remodel requires time and careful planning. Before you delve into decisions on materials, appliances, colors, and finishes, give serious consideration to the basics – budget, work flow, storage, and other needs. A professional kitchen designer will take into account all of these factors and save you time, money, and headaches by getting the planning done correctly in the first place.

Budget

As with any project, developing and sticking to a budget is of utmost importance in a kitchen remodel. Discussing your needs and wants with your designer or contractor early on in the process will help you determine a budget that you're comfortable with and will help him or her come up with realistic ideas for your space. When budgeting, you will likely need to make some tradeoffs as you plan. Thinking through

what's most important to you will go a long way to help you make key decisions. For example, is your favorite countertop material more important to you than an extra-large capacity refrigerator? Can you live without a kitchen island as long as the work space is designed properly?

During the course of the project, changes made along the way will inevitably affect costs, so be sure to include a contingency or “not-to-exceed” total in your budget – and stick with it.

Work Flow and Function

Of all the rooms in the house, the kitchen is the one in which function matters most. Whether you're a dedicated cook or prefer minimal involvement in the kitchen, even the most basic arrangement must create a space that's easy to maneuver in without interference. The classic “work triangle” – the arrangement of sink,

Thinking through your priorities will help you make key decisions.



stove/oven, and refrigerator in relation to one another – illustrates a good principle of functional design. The easier it is to move among these three locations, the more comfortable and functional the space will be.

For example, locating a major prep area close to the stove will enable you to shift ingredients from prep to cooking without the need to carry a loaded cutting board or a full pot across the room. Likewise, minimizing the distance between the stove and the sink will make the cleanup process smoother. It almost goes without saying that the dishwasher should be located near the sink for ease of use when dinner is done.

Another factor that should be taken into account when considering work flow is how many active cooks will be using the space. The space may have a different dynamic if two people – or more – are prepping, cooking, and cleaning up at the same time.

Does your kitchen happily serve as a place to pay bills, do homework, and gather at the end of the day? If you want your new kitchen to retain its role in those activities, be sure to let your designer know so that your new space can accommodate them. Planning ahead so that the kitchen truly meets your functional needs will put you on your way to a satisfying result.

Storage

How many people do you know who claim to have enough storage in their kitchen? Not many, we'd bet. When planning your new

kitchen space, be sure that the design includes ample storage for the basics: small appliances, dishware, cookware, glasses, silverware, and food items. But also take into account any unusual needs you may have – a large collection of bakeware, oversized mixing bowls, a stand mixer, stock pots, and tall stemware, for example. Take inventory in your current kitchen and make note of any special items. Don't assume you'll just find a place for everything once the remodel is done! You'll want to make sure there is dedicated space in your new kitchen to accommodate what you have.

High cabinets and shelves should be reserved for seldom-used items such as oversized platters, trays, and pieces used only on special occasions. Large, heavier pieces should be stowed in lower cabinets or shelves. Pull-out shelves in lower cabinets not only increase storage capacity but make items easier to see and access. Including even a small pantry closet in your plans can go a long way to keep boxed, canned, and packaged goods organized and accessible and will eliminate hunting through cabinets and drawers to find what you need.

Taking the time and consideration to plan your budget and space accordingly is a worthwhile effort that will pay dividends later in the form of a new kitchen that suits you and your family perfectly.



Looking Ahead *Trends for 2010 And Beyond*

When it comes to fashion, picking up the latest fad can be an enjoyable and relatively inexpensive way to have fun with style. For a remodeling project, however, incorporating the newest trends can also look make a room seem dated in a hurry (remember Harvest Gold?). A remodel that incorporates functional trends such as heated floors will likely “wear” better than a project that hits all the latest visual styles, and is more likely to retain its value over time. But that doesn’t mean you should avoid trendy looks altogether – just incorporate them in small doses that can be easily updated. Want to include a trendy color that’s caught your eye? Use it for throw pillows instead of buying a new sofa.

Here’s some of what we’re seeing in our 2010 forecast:

Sustainability/Green Products

From structural framing materials to cabinets, flooring, paint products, and efficient appliances, “green” will continue to grow in importance everywhere in the home. With new technologies and products being developed all the time, contractors and homeowners need to do their homework to keep up. For many items, prices are becoming more in line with conventional products. We can confidently say that green is one trend that is here to stay.

Bathrooms

Heated floors: Radiant heating installed under new tile floors continues to grow in popularity. It’s relatively inexpensive to include heated floors in a smaller space such as a bathroom. These systems can be controlled via a thermostat so that the floor heats up for morning shower time, with no chilly tile underfoot. What’s not to like?

Large “spa” showers: Because there often isn’t room for both, many homeowners are forgoing a large bathtub in the master bath in favor of an oversized shower space for one or two users. These showers are often lined with beautiful stone or tile designs and incorporate niches to hold shampoo and other items. Multiple low-flow “surround” shower heads add to the spa-like experience, and use far less water than filling a large soaking tub.

Tile: Keeping a monotone color scheme but using tiles of varying sizes adds visual interest while maintaining a unified look. Medium-sized tiles can be used on the walls, with small versions as a border. Large tiles can be used on the floor. Alternatively, consider using a contrasting color for a border; for example, white tile overall with a border of small black tiles.

Skylights: Where space permits, a skylight is a great way to bring a lot of light into a bathroom while retaining privacy. Even a small skylight can really light up the entire space, making the room seem bigger and fresher. Be sure to use energy-efficient models to prevent heat leaks. Ideally, the skylight should also have a shade that can be closed to prevent overheating on sunny days.

Kitchens

Furniture-style storage: Storage for tableware and more is no longer limited to the kitchen cabinets or dining room. To break up the all-cabinet look, many designers are using hutches or armoires for kitchen storage. The newest wave of serious home cooking mean growing collections of cookbooks, so dedicated bookcases for the cook’s library are the order of the day.

Expanded-function elements: From sinks that include built-in colanders and cutting boards to drawers with adjustable dividers, elements are incorporating new features to make the space more convenient and better-functioning for everyday use. Casters on smaller kitchen islands can be moved around with ease, allowing them to be placed where needed.

Faucets: Sensor-triggered faucets allow the user to wash his or her hands or fill a pot without needing to touch the handle. Some models turn on or off with just a touch of a wrist or elbow anywhere on the faucet, so you don’t need to use your messy hands – keeping things cleaner and more sanitary. The water stays the same temperature as the last use until you adjust it again.

Backsplashes: The backsplash is a highly visible area and is the perfect spot to get a custom look at a relatively low cost. Metal tile is a striking, easy-care option. Solid color blocks in bright tones can also add instant punch to the room.



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