



Photos courtesy of Kitchen Design Studio

# DESIGN A KITCHEN

## that's right for you

By Nicole Relyea

Whether you're usually the one hovering over the stove or the sink, you've probably got something you'd like to change about your kitchen. Remodeling can be a daunting and potentially expensive project, but experts in the field can make it easy, exciting and help you get exactly what you want.

Bigger projects can take several months to complete, so when you're deciding who to work with, it's important to find a good fit. "I tell my clients 'go ahead and interview a couple of people,'" says **Lori Jolin**, owner of **Lori Jolin Designs**. "When you're working with someone in your home, it's an intimate situation—you really need to be able to communicate, know what they like, read that, and

put those ideas together and make it happen." Jolin always starts with a detailed interview to get a good understanding of the clients' needs, lifestyle, budget and taste.

**Stacy Montague**, a designer for the **Kitchen Design Studio** on Madison's west side, goes through a similar process when working with a new client. "When people work with us, they're not just buying the products—they're buying us," Montague says she answers her phone until 9 p.m. because "sometimes people panic at night; that's when they're home, looking at things, and they'll call to make sure they asked this question or that I ordered the right kind of tile."

Once you've found a designer you like,

you'll need to decide what you want. Their interview questions, such as "what's your lifestyle?" and "who's the primary cook in the house?" will get you started, but a little research helps too. "Rip pages out of magazines, look at books and showrooms to get an idea for your style," says Jolin.

**Lew Snyder**, owner of **Kitchen Tune-Up**, suggests that you "go to appliance showrooms. They have great 'prop' kitchens for ideas."

Over the past several years, the trend has been to combine kitchens and family rooms. Montague notes that "kids are helping prepare food more," which affects things such as the height of cabinets and placement of simple appliances like microwaves, which now can pull

out at drawer level. Jolin has found that “people are doing more lower-level cabinets and pull-outs or drawers with pegs,” which keeps dishes at waist level instead of overhead. Both designers also are seeing more refrigerators with drawers in the front, which offers easier access for children and the added benefit of greater energy efficiency.

Green building has been growing in popularity, and as a result, “there are a lot of exotic woods coming out,” says Montague. Bamboo and lyptus are beautiful, durable woods that are environmentally friendly because the plants grow back much more quickly than the more traditional oaks and maples. Cork flooring is also a great “green” option, with the added bonus of a softer floor that’s more comfortable to stand on for long periods of time.

Perhaps the best shift in interior design is that it’s becoming more acceptable to mix woods in the home. “Visit any showroom or magazine and you’ll see mixed materials,” says Jolin. “They make it much more interesting—I think you don’t get as tired of it.”

“Some people have a hard time making that leap,” says Snyder. “They’re hesitant to put in cabinets that don’t match the floorboards or doorframes, but it’s okay.”

If you’re looking for ways to fix up your kitchen without spending the time or money required for a full remodel, having your cabinets reconditioned or replaced can be an easy and quick fix.

With the sleek, contemporary look that’s popular today, you can also consider using the rigid thermal foil doors that Kitchen Tune-up offers. “They look good in Euro-style kitchens,” says Snyder. “They’re very durable and have a more uniform look than wood grain.” Another inexpensive and easy fix is to update the handles and pulls on your drawers and cabinets.

Whether you go for a full remodel or just a cabinet fix-up, Jolin reminds you that “trends come and trends go. It’s your lifestyle—make sure that you love the design.”

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*Nicole Relyea is a freelance writer in Madison who loves spending time in her kitchen and dreams of the day when she can design her own.*

# Kitchen questions

Here are some good questions to consider when thinking about a kitchen remodel:

- What is your lifestyle?
- What is your budget? Timeline?
- Do you have children or teenagers who help with cooking or prepare their own meals?
- Do you have pets? (This can be important for flooring choices.)
- Who is the primary cook?
- Do you plan to entertain often?
- When you have guests, do you want to be able to face them while you cook, or do you prefer to have your back to the room when at the stove?
- What do you like most about your current kitchen? Least?
- How do you want traffic to “flow” in the space?

