

Most kitchen designers' #1 piece of remodeling advice? Hire a certified designer to help you get the kitchen of your dreams. And they're not just talking from self-interest: An experienced professional with years of renovations under her or his belt really can maximize the efficiency and style of your space, make your project run more smoothly, and can even save you money by avoiding pricey rookie mistakes. It's an investment you're not likely to regret.

Yet as valuable as a pro's skills might be, hiring one just isn't in the budget for many prospective remodelers. That's why we asked CR's in-house experts and six National Kitchen & Bath Assn. (NKBA)-certified designers for their best remodeling tips. With their know-how-and the advice and Ratings in our Buying Guide on page 32-you can renovate like a pro, for a lot less.

DO: Live in your kitchen first. "You

Planning & Budget

have to spend time using the space to understand what works and doesn't," says St. Louis-based Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD) Ashley Smith.

DON'T: Rush the process. "I tell every new client I speak with to take their time and do it right. You will live with your kitchen for many years and you want to love it," says Brooke Eversoll, Certified Master Kitchen & Bath Designer (CMKBD), of Bee Studios in St. Petersburg, FL. "I also advise my potential clients to save up and do it once and do it right." Smith agrees: "Anything new makes everything old look even

save money and think you'll upgrade something later. You'll regret not having what you want from the start, and it will cost you more to replace in the long run-if you ever get around to it." DO: Think about resale. "I always ask clients what their longevity in the house will be," says Laura Eagan, CKD, of Estrella Cabinetry & Design Center in Goodyear, AZ. "If they'll only be there for a few years, or if they're remodeling to sell, then I recommend they spend money on things with 'bling' factor, like high-end appliances and a great tile backsplash and cabinet hardware-but to keep the cabinetry costs modest. No one's going to walk in and say, 'I can clearly tell these are custom cabinets with plywood sides,' but the specialty appliances will wow them." DO: Base your budget on data. "Nationwide, the industry rule of thumb is to spend 10 percent of the retail price of your house on your kitchen remodel, but you have to pay attention to the local market," says Eagan. "In some areas of New York, for example, a \$300,000 house won't sell without a \$60,000 custom kitchen. But in Scottsdale, AZ,



older. Don't scale back your plans to

you could put a \$15,00 kitchen in that house and sell it tomorrow. Talk to a knowledgeable local real estate agent to see how much more your house would be worth after a kitchen remodel-and make that number your budget." DON'T: Get caught up in trends. "Try to choose timeless styles and materials that will look great for 10 to fifteen years," says Elizabeth Leahy, an Associate Kitchen & Bath Designer (AKBD) based in San Diego, CA, "If you want something unique, go crazy on the backsplash. It's not that expensive to replace it if you get tired of the look."

Layout

DO: Make it functional, "Look up the NKBA's 31 Kitchen Guidelines online. These are all the specifications that designers use to make a space functional, things like the clearance you need between different elements in the kitchen," says Leahy.

DON'T: Crowd the Island. "Everyone wants an island, but you can't shoehorn one into every space," says Diane Wandmaker, CMKBD, of Kitchen Studios in Albuquerque, NM. "You have to make sure there's enough space to walk around it, including behind someone sitting at a stool. And think about how many seats will really fit: The NKBA recommends a minimum of 24 inches in width for each seat, but even that isn't enough if you're sitting with your elbows on the counter." DO: Save space with a banquette, "It's a great way to create a dining area in a corner," says Leahy. "You can add storage inside the benches, too."

Appliances

DO: Measure carefully before shopping for a new fridge, "Measure the height and width of the space your current refrigerator is in, as well as the space between the face of the current fridge

and anything opposite it," says CR test engineer Joe Pacella. "Some newer, highercapacity fridges are taller and deeper than older models, and you want to be sure that it fits, with room for you to stand in front of it and open the door." DO: Consider the cooktop. "Look at how the burners are arranged," says CR test engineer Tara Casaregola. "Are there enough large burners for your 12-inch frying pan and a stockpot, and are they in the positions you prefer?" Also, she says, take Btu/hr ratings with a grain of salt, "While you want a burner that can bring that big pot of water to boil, remember that most other cooking tasks use intermediate settings, not the highest flame or wattage."

DON'T: Get seduced by high-tech oven claims that add expense. "Ask yourself if you really want to navigate a series of button presses and scrolling messages to cook a frozen pizza, or if you're fine just following package directions," says Casaregola.

DO: Plan for adequate ventilation. "A recirculating hood is not good enough; you want the hood to vent outside," says Wandmaker, "And don't go with an over-the-range microwave with built-in. ventilation. They're not very deep, so the vent can't reach the front burners. which you're using all the time." DON'T: Make the microwave a focal point. "Hide it in a pantry or in an appliance garage, or pick drawer-style model, which sits below the counter and opens like a drawer," says Eversoll.

Lighting & Technology DO: Plan plenty of LED illumination.

"Lighting is not just functional, it also adds beauty," says Leahy, "You need task lighting over work areas-those are the undercabinet lights that illuminate the work surfaces and the can lights in the ceiling over pathways-ambient

lighting, like pendants over an Islandand accent lighting, like a glow inside a cabinet, or along a cabinet toe kick." DON'T: Forget the dimmer switches. "LEDs give off a lot of light and you don't always want the full-blown effect," says Wandmaker, "Dimmer switches let you control the level depending on the situation and mood."

DON'T: Get too "smart." "Smart home tech is very cool, but it can be super expensive," says Leahy. "Also, you have to consider obsolescence-everything is changing very quickly right now. And, finally, there's the security element. Some of these systems are very easily hacked."

Surfacing & Materials

DO: Consider quartz for countertops. "Quartz is more durable and less porous than marble or granite, and, because it's a manufactured material it's consistent from slab to slab-soyou have a lot of flexibility if you want to use it on both a countertop and a backsplash, for example," says Eagan. DO: Mix finishes and materials, "Juxtaposing sleek metals with natural elements is one of the best ways to bring interest and a collected feel to your kitchen," says designer Shea McGee of Studio McGee in Salt Lake City, UT. DON'T: Ignore traffic patterns when choosing flooring, "If your kitchen is the hub of your home, with kids, spouses, even pets adding to wear and tear on the floors, you'll want a floor with great wear resistance," says CR test engineer Joan Muratore. "It's also smart to look for flooring that can stand up to scratches, stains and moisture." DO: Weigh your DIY comfort level. "If you want to install flooring yourself, consider flooring that can be floatedmeaning it can be installed on top of your existing floor, without having to use nails or glue," says Muratore.





1. Add Undercabinet Lighting Bright work surfaces are safer and easier to use. 2. Mix Materials Varied wood and metal finishes add warmth and personality. 1. Accommodate the Island Leave room to circulate around the kitchen. 4. Build a Banquette Built-in seating can save space.





KITCHEN BUYING GUIDE CRORG