

# Striking a Balance

WHEN TAKING ON A HOME RENOVATION, **Gehman Design Remodeling** STRIVES TO ENHANCE A HOMEOWNER'S LIFE WHILE ELEVATING THE PROPERTY'S WORTH.

BY **BILL DONAHUE**

**M**ost homeowners opt for a home renovation for one of two reasons: to enhance their quality of life; or to increase the home's appeal to a future buyer. Is it possible to accomplish both goals? We spoke with renovation expert **Dennis D. Gehman, MCR**, the head of Harleysville-based **Gehman Design Remodeling**, for his perspective.

## Q&A

**When people are considering a home renovation, how much should they consider factors such as resale value and the preferences of a potential future buyer?**

Unless people know they are going to sell their home within the next few years, it's not necessarily a question they should ask. We have seen people do some really interesting, really bold things—turquoise-colored rooms, red carpet and walls, you name it. Something really off the wall that will require a lot of time and effort to change might hinder a sale. If you plan on living in the house for five years or more, paint it the color you want to paint it; chances are the new owners will repaint anyway. It might even be smart to repaint in a neutral color before you go to sell it.

For the types of projects we're doing, by and large, people are hiring us because they have decided to stay in the home. A majority of our clients are empty nesters; their

house is paid off, the kids' college is paid for, the kids' marriages are taken care of, and now is the time to do something for themselves. My advice is to take a good look at what you really like, and spend some time thinking about what you really want so you will feel good about it 10 years from now.

**How often do you get involved in helping clients make aesthetic choices?**

I met with a couple this morning who were interested in a major project, and I was asking them about their tastes in terms of materials. The husband said his daughter had just built a house in which all the colors were light gray and white, and he said that was too stark for him. I reinforced the idea that you should get what you want when you're spending this kind of money. It's easy for me to say as a tradesman that maybe you shouldn't consider this color or that, but it really depends on the homeowner's preferences. We will give our advice based on professional experience, but it is their home. We want to be proud of the finished product, but you're the one who has to live with it.

**For those who intend to stay for the long term, I imagine kitchens and bathrooms are the most common renovations they're asking you to do.**

By and large, yes, but if it's a kitchen in an older home, most folks want more of an open floor plan. Once you do that, the project evolves. When you decide to take down walls, most likely you want to have the same color paint and flooring throughout the public areas. For the bathroom, a fair amount of the empty nesters we work with want a master bath, and in some homes there just isn't any way to do it without taking an adjacent bedroom. In a five-bedroom house, that's not a big deal. It's more limiting in a three- or four-bedroom house, because cutting back too far on the number of bedrooms will turn off some buyers if and when you do decide to sell.

**What advice do you have for people who may be considering a move sooner than later?**

We recommend doing things that are very neutral so the next people

don't have to do all that much. You don't have to go overboard to make a good impression. Even some new knobs or pulls on the kitchen cabinets can go a long way to get a decent return. With an average bathroom remodel, you're going to recoup only 50 percent of the cost if you turn around and sell the home in a year. Kitchens are about the same. The best return is overhead garage doors, which gets more than a 90 percent return. It's all about curb appeal.

Every other week we get a call from someone who is buying a house and wants to flip it, and now they need a contractor to help them get there. We're not the right contractor for that, because our focus is to not only add value to the property, but we also want to add to the homeowner's quality of life. That's what a good design-build contractor will do.

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