

Updates Inside & Out

by Sarah Cox

While many homeowners focus on minor interior updates to change the look of a home while not dropping the big bucks, Matt Prescott of Prescott Construction has taken a different approach to Manley Butler's house in South Roanoke - he's changing the exterior. He has turned a plain brick ranch into a prairie style cottage with shingles, overhangs, and a patio system in back.

But Butler said the greatest change to his home has, indeed, been inside - the series of skylights in his narrow, erstwhile dark kitchen that have brightened up life considerably.

Prescott, who is a custom homebuilder as well as a residential and commercial remodeler and renovator, said lately he has been concentrating on building additions and remodeling existing homes. Baths and kitchens, of course, will give a homeowner the greatest return on their investment, if they are planning to sell and move. "The National Association of Home Builders does a survey every year, and the surveys have usually shown that kitchens and baths generate about an 80 percent return," he said.

This is particularly true in older homes where nobody has touched these two areas in years. "This is the perfect place for upgrading," said Prescott. For a kitchen in a home that will be put on the market, it is best to stay with neutral colors, he advised. Granite tops and stainless steel appliances are "well received, and new flooring will be good." Upgrades for a resale don't have to be the best, but cabinetry also makes

a large impact. Additionally, new sinks and fixtures, upgraded lighting, and new hardware are quick fixes.

He said that potential buyers prefer wood floors. "We do a lot of that, although some like tile floors in the kitchen." Prescott doesn't really like laminated engineered flooring because, he said, if it gets wet it gets damaged, whereas a traditional wood floor can be refinished. Tiles run the gamut from expensive to inexpensive, and some homeowners are even laying electrical heating systems under the tile for a warm floor. "That's a nice thing to have in the bathroom," said Prescott.

Top updates, according to this homebuilder, are repainting, adding crown molding, changing a hollow core front door to one that has panels and is made of hardwood, changing flooring and replacing carpeting (to reduce allergens), and upgrading kitchens and baths.

Bob Fetzer, president of Building Specialists in Roanoke, has been in the design/build business for 35 years, and in that time has built and remodeled a variety of homes, from small to large projects. He also has a commercial division and does fire restoration insurance claims and water damage. "One of our key things is working with owners in terms of fixing up homes and modifying them to where people can stay in them longer," he said.

His interior work has picked up recently, as homeowners have found that staying in their homes and upgrading them until the real estate market picks up may make more



Matt Prescott of Prescott Construction has added a new exterior look to Manley Butler's house on Bancroft in South Roanoke. He also put in kitchen skylights to brighten up a narrow, dark work area.

sense. He said one of the major trends is moving the master suite downstairs. In one case, he has made a mother-in-law suite, and in the long term the homeowners may convert that area to a master suite. He has also moved the washer and dryer closer to the master suite area, "closer to where the clothes are being generated," he explained.

With energy tax credits available, people are also converting their heat sources to more efficient gas furnaces, as well as replacing windows. "The investment is not only in improved windows, but also in reducing the sun glare and sun penetration," he said.

When Fetzer delves into older homes he has found that underneath the wall-to-wall carpets are beautiful hardwood floors, and if the carpet is stripped off and the floors are refinished, this look can add warmth to the atmosphere. Additionally, carpet can contain allergens, as can paints with off-gassing, so Fetzer talks to homeowners about other products such as low or no VOC paints.



This condominium, owned by Dr. Hilda Templeton, was remodeled by Building Specialists, who opened up the kitchen area by knocking down the wall that separated it from the dining and living room, constructed a wall sculpture to define the dining area, and made the screened-in porch into a year-round run room.

An inexpensive update, he said, is to open up an area by removing a wall that has chopped a room in two. One such update, in a condominium in Chateau Mont in Hunting Hills, received open shelving after the wall cabinets were also removed, new countertops, new lighting, and a sunroom where there was a screened-in porch. "This gave the condo a lot more space," he said.

He said opening up kitchens, where homeowners spend a lot of time, tends to make the house function a lot better. One way to do that is to give kitchens more windows and add under-counter storage space.

One homeowner decided not to buy a second vacation home, but instead invest his money into his primary residence. "He wants a retreat when he comes home," said Fetzer. Screened-in porches that are turned into year-round rooms, gas lines on patios for outdoor cooking, large windows to bring the outdoors inside, and even a two-sided fireplace open to two rooms are all projects that Fetzer has been or is involved in.

And that is why homeowners are staying put.