



# Mobile Showroom Keeps Business Moving

Kitchen Design by Laura Hits the Road to Better Serve Clients

The location of Laura Wallace's showroom changes every day. "When people ask me where my showroom is located, I say it's in their driveway," she explains.

That's because this Sarasota, FL, kitchen and bath designer, and owner of Kitchen Design by Laura, has a mobile showroom...a 19-foot-long Sprinter van equipped with hundreds of samples, including those for cabinetry, countertops, flooring, tile, etc., that she can bring directly to her clients' homes.

### ON A MISSION

After spending several years working at other kitchen and bath companies, Wallace decided to start her own design business in 2007 to cater to Sarasota and Manatee counties' clients – as well as to long-distance clients who find her on the Internet. Their needs range from face lifts to remodels of million dollar homes.

"It was always a challenge," she says of working in a permanent showroom. "I just felt I couldn't service people. They would come in with their ideas, and I was trying to create a design based on their vision. But if they had the right vision, they



Laura Wallace believes she can better serve her customers from her mobile showroom...a 19-foot-long Sprinter van that she can drive to her clients' homes.

wouldn't need to hire a kitchen and bath designer. I felt like I was stuck in a tunnel," she reports. "I always thought if I could get out to their house and see what they were doing, it would really help," Wallace adds.

While she proposed a mobile showroom to several previous employers, none gave her idea much credibility. Undeterred, she moved forward on her own, just as the economy started to tank.

"I went out one day, bought my van and ordered all my products," she says. "Then I found out I had breast cancer, all within the same week. But I realized I was on a mission. I had to

help people. I know it sounds weird, but every house I walk into has a need, so I focus on that."

Wallace has remained unfazed by the recession, adding more than 250 projects to her "before/after catalog" in the past five years. She credits her success to several factors, one being that a large part of her business is referrals. While she runs an ad in a local home improvement magazine to maintain a presence, she indicates the best advertising is "doing the best job for my clients."

Three and a half years ago she also teamed up with a local contractor who boasts an extensive list of

satisfied clients, as well. "We do everything turnkey, and have every resource imaginable to do a remodel," she says.

She also stresses the importance of treating clients well, which correlates with her business philosophy of clients first, always. "I'm also a consumer," she says. "I know what it's like to be treated well. I treat my clients like I want to be treated. I take everything to heart. I think that's what makes a good company."

#### **CLIENT CONVENIENCE**

Wallace is confident she has been profitable during the recession because her showroom is mobile. "I don't know that I would have done as well in a [permanent] showroom," she says. "My overhead is lower. I don't have to pay rent or taxes on my space, and I don't have to pay anyone to be in the showroom or answer the phone. I have my cell phone, my Web site and my mobile van. I'm like a turtle with a shell on my back. I can go wherever I need to be. My showroom is convenient for my clients, and they seem to like it. I can set evening or after-hour appointments





## **AT A GLANCE KITCHEN DESIGN BY LAURA**

**Principal:** Laura Wallace  
**Showroom:** 19-foot-long  
Sprinter van  
**Hours of Operation:**  
adjustable based on  
client needs  
**Number of Employees:** 1  
**Design Software:** KCDw  
**Business Philosophy:**  
"Clients first, always."

With a mobile showroom equipped with hundreds of samples, Wallace is able to design spaces that cater to her clients' needs, such as the kitchens shown above, below and on page 29).

and work around their hours versus having to be in a showroom from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Wallace estimates her mobility saves seven to eight trips to various showrooms, although she does take clients to related venues when needed. "I have samples of everything with me, and what I don't have, I can get," she says, adding that she feels she has sufficiently stocked her space, which is little more than 150 square feet.

"Instead of huge displays, I focus on the basics. Clients can see what the cabinets are made of, what options they have for doors, etc. [Design] is all about creating a vision for clients – more so than them just looking at a showroom," she explains.

While convenience is a big plus, Wallace indicates her mobile showroom isn't without its challenges. "I don't think people realize how much it takes to put it all together," she says. "Not everyone can do this. You have to be good at what you do in order to be successful, whether that's a [permanent] showroom or a mobile showroom. It's like being a surgeon. You can have the tools needed to perform a surgery, but not everyone can operate. But I think everyone who has their mind set on a mission can accomplish anything. If you have a desire and a vision, don't hesitate – you can do it." 

