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Laura's innovation: Kitchens on the go

BY KAREN MAMONE

These days folks may complain about the imploded real estate market, and fret about home improvement plans and projects delayed or postponed. But the one thing that everybody is still doing – no matter what – is remodeling the kitchen.

That's the good word from Laura Wallace, and she ought to know; her Kitchens by Laura is going full steam ahead, literally and figuratively.

Wallace, a well-known local musician and one-time private investigator, worked for several remodeling firms before starting her own business last year.

Her better idea was simple. She has put her whole remodeling showroom on wheels. Working from a handsomely customized Dodge Sprinter with a 19-foot-long cargo floor, Wallace brings hundreds of samples of cabinet styles, countertops, fixtures, lighting, tiles and flooring to her clients' front doors.

With so many people working, and the need to coordinate decision-making with other household members, prospective remodelers must often make many trips to various outlets – to pare down and select

from their myriad options in a remodel job.

"It wouldn't be unusual to require 10-12 visits for a husband and wife to both review their selections."

Instead, Wallace brings it all to her clients, and she is able to make appointments evenings and weekends when others are not available.

Working with a cabinetmaker and a coordinated team of referral plumbers, electricians, tile-setters and other kitchen professionals, Wallace is able to make a remodel job a lot more convenient, faster and less expensive, because of the lowered overhead costs, she said.

Instead of waiting for return trips and special orders, Wallace said a remodeling job can often be completed in as little as two weeks.

"Remodeling your kitchen is never a bad idea," she said. "Great kitchens are what sell houses." And if you're not looking to sell at the moment, you can enjoy it yourself until the time you do sell.

Wallace can supply any style of kitchen her clients desire – from Rococo to Retro, and modern to Mediterranean.



Kitchen before (above) and after (top).

Her personal advice, however, is to keep it simple, with a versatile Shaker or streamlined contemporary style kitchen.

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Certainly there are kitchen trends (granite is in, Corian is out; stainless is in, no matter how much more trouble it is to keep gleaming), but Wallace suggests that a practical, timeless style with clean lines is always a good idea.

Wallace's other area of expertise – bathrooms, also benefits from a clean timeless updating that isn't instantly identified with a certain fad or a certain time period.

After all, she laughed, how many turquoise sinks can one house handle?

Top right: A finished project.

Below left: Before work starts and after (right)



REMODEL MAVEN HAS ANOTHER MISSION

When she's not captaining her landcraft mobile showroom around town, or playing with her five dogs, five children or five grandchildren, Sarasota resident Laura Wallace has another interest: promoting breast cancer awareness.

After being diagnosed and having a double mastectomy in February, she is in remission and undergoing reconstruction surgery while trying to promote frequent mammograms and breast cancer education.

She has begun counseling women who have just been diagnosed through an online information service and she is also active in supporting area cancer prevention programs.

Her friend Amy Arnold is leading a "Treasure Chest" team of women who will walk in Wallace's honor in the annual Susan G. Komen 3-day 60 mile Breast Cancer Walk to be held Oct. 31-Nov. 2.

Wallace, 45, said she had scheduled a mammogram every year since she was in her 30s. Her previous mammograms were all clear, but this year – and she had delayed it a few months because of other issues – it showed stage one cancer in both breasts.

In fact, detection of the tiny tumors was so early that she was even spared the side-effects of radiation or chemotherapy.

"I am a true testimony to early detection," she said, "And I want to spread the word to as many people as I can."