

Wondering how to save money in your new home?

Tips on What's Worth Upgrading - From a Custom Home Builder

Smart home building tips for the Kitchen

This questionnaire will help you determine where to spend your money in the kitchen as you build - and what you can do differently, later.

1. Where do you spend your time in the kitchen? Factor in ease-of-use and functionality.
2. Who hangs there with you? Do you need an island, breakfast bar, or conversation corner? Do the countertops need to incorporate extra width or arches, or will something simple do?
3. How important is the overall look and feel - layout, cabinets, countertops, flooring, lighting, cooking, sink capacity?
4. How much traffic flow through capability is necessary?
5. How much usage will the room get? Do you need the strength of granite, or will a laminate be sufficient?
6. What's a reasonable cabinetry package for your budget? Do you need a higher-end wood like cherry or exotics, or will a maple or oak package with lots of extra storage options be better for you?
7. Cooking for a crowd? Need two ovens, deep freeze, heavy duty dishwasher?



Some things are more costly than others to change later.

Here's what to focus on:

Layout

The layout is extremely expensive to do all over again. Expanding the kitchen to gain more space involves major renovations that can cost three times more later than during initial construction.

Adding an island or moving major appliances

Another costly renovation; unless your kitchen has a lot of extra space, an island added later can actually reduce your ability to maneuver.

Deciding the oven would be better in another area means rewiring and restructuring, plus changes to cabinetry (which may not match the originals).

Major structural changes to a kitchen can be the most costly change in the house.

Adding windows

The ability to add windows or sky lights later can depend on the construction of your home. It's not always possible to put it where you want it, once the home has been completed, due to structural issues. This is one of the things you'll want to get right, the first time. Not sure? Talk to your builder about "pre-framing" a future window.

Adding lighting

If you're going to want a lot of lights in the ceiling, under the cabinets, or in special areas, this is something you'll pay a lot less for if you have it wired when the house is under construction. Doing it later can involve a lot more time and complexity. However, **you don't need to spend a lot of money up front on the latest designer lighting fixtures.** If the pre-wire is in place, you can add many of the fixtures later. Start simple, with basic lighting.



Putting in a bigger pantry

If you want a big, walk-in pantry, you're going to pay a whole lot less to start right out with that. Unless you're willing to knock out some walls and lose some space later in the adjoining family room, dining room or hallway, there's just no way to add another room in the middle of the house without a lot more work than you're going to want to adjust to.

Cabinets

If you decide on inexpensive cabinets, don't be under the mistaken impression they can be changed out easily later on.

The process can involve much more than the cupboards - including removal of countertops, flooring, trimwork and appliances. Ask your builder how to choose a quality cabinetry that you'll be happy with, without breaking the bank - and start with these tips:

Type of Wood - Consider oak or maple as an alternative to more expensive hickory or cherry choices. A well-made cabinet can be just as appealing in a variety of different species, at varying costs.

Glazes and Special Finishes - a glaze can add 15-35% or more to your total cabinetry package. Consider accent pieces as an alternative if you're on a tight budget. A pair of glass doors or a contrasting accent door hardware can spark up the decor at a lower cost.

Storage Solutions - Have your builder tell you whether that built-in recycle center or wine rack involves an extra charge. It may be just what you want - but find out what it's costing, just in case.

Countertops

The difference in cost can be huge depending on what kind of countertop you use. Recycled glass countertops may sound economical, but can cost three times as much as granite. Your builder can walk you through the choices, benefits and costs of every option out there, so you know just what you're getting - and paying.

Countertop questions to ask your builder:

What kinds of countertops are best for each room?

What would it take to change countertops in a few years?

What are my best ways to save money on countertops?

Will a **few changes in design save some money** on countertops?

Flooring

Starting with a laminate floor won't break the budget later if you decide to go tile or hardwood. The floor is one of the easier things in the kitchen to change later - and many kinds of flooring can be done with some "do it yourself" skills.

Appliances

As long as you don't want two ovens instead of one, or a bigger appliance than what you're starting with, changing out appliances is not going to involve ripping apart the entire kitchen. But before you decide to start with the most economical brands available, determine other cost factors such as energy saving and estimated life cycle.

Ask your builder if you can supply your own appliances - then shop around for the very best pricing.

Keeping Upgrades in Line

Talk to your builder about your lifestyle, and let him help guide your choices, from layout through amenities.

Ask your builder if they'll let you take a second look at all your choices before making a final decision - sometimes it's easier to decide when you can sit down with the price tag for each feature.

