

## Kitchen Confidence

*Written for Upscale Remodeling Magazine, this tells contractors how to work with clients doing a kitchen remodel.*

Evaluate existing kitchens by observing the client's use of the space is a novel and informative way to understand your clients' needs, perhaps even better than they do.

When it comes to helping a client locate or re-locate all of the elements in a kitchen, make sure it's a family affair. While one or two persons in a family may be the primary user of the kitchen, other members of the household should be included in any well thought through remodel. If there are no children at home, ask if they have visitors who gather in the kitchen.

**Watch during peak use time.** Schedule your observational visit when there is kitchen traffic and answer the following:

- Notice the traffic flow. Is it a tough squeeze past the fridge when the door is open by one person and another wants to get past it?
- Do chairs, islands, or tables block the most natural flow through the space?
- Are foodstuffs, cups, plates, and utensils in the best spot for the youngest and the oldest of the house to access without assistance?
- Are there places for guests to sit or stand that don't impede the function of the kitchen?

**Do a dry run.** Have the client demonstrate for you how the kitchen is used. Have the client walk in to the kitchen carrying a grocery bag full of groceries. Make notes or videotape this as the client does this mock demonstration.

- Is there a functional well-located place for a grocery bag to be put down?
- Is it close enough to the refrigerator or the pantry, or the cabinets, or wherever the contents are intended to go?
- If not, where might you place one?

**Have the client cook a meal.** Use this checklist to answer the following:

- How far do they have to walk or bend to get the ingredients and take them to where they will be used?
- Are utensils and pots accessible?
- Are outlets, cleaning, and cutting areas well placed?
- Does the client seem physically comfortable during the cooking preparation process?
- Is there a safe place to put down hot foods?
- Can the person who's cooking converse easily with others in the kitchen or in an adjacent room?
- Is there a place to eat it if it's an eat-in kitchen?
- Can the person cooking see the television easily?
- After the meal, how easy is it to load or unload the dishwasher?
- Is the trash and recycling accessible?
- Are storage containers easy to access?

This unconventional observational approach to assessing a client's kitchen needs yields actionable results: you have first-hand knowledge of the client's needs and challenges and are well positioned to meet them. It reduces the guesswork in designing a functional kitchen for your client.