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Residential Real Estate Guide - Fall 2006

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What a Million and More Buys

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MARKET
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Kitchen and Bathroom Renovations
WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO



Kitchen & Bath Renovations

WHEN NOTHING IS TOO GOOD OR TOO PRICEY

As part of a renovation of a Central Park South residence, Raymond Romano, a Manhattan contractor, gave the bathroom an extreme makeover with a custom vanity, crystal doorknobs, a bidet, Zanna tub and mother-of-pearl tiles.

"This bathroom alone cost \$75,000," says Mr. Romano, noting that during the renovation, the owner was vacationing in France, but kept tabs on the project with a personal code that gave her access to her home's progress on his Web site. When it comes to home renovations, nothing is too good or too pricey for members of the well-heeled and well-traveled set. In their quest for the best—in any price—they are constantly raising the bar on what constitutes the good life at home. In particular, their kitchens and bathrooms reflect not only their exacting tastes, but also the inventiveness of the expert builders, designers and architects whom they call upon to turn their fantasies into everyday living spaces.

Glodagh, the owner of Glodagh Design, works with a discerning clientele that has included everyone from Robert Redford to Sylvia Kluge, president of Motion Records and executive vice president of Universal Records. Glodagh's current projects include designing the interiors of The Calistonia, an upscale residential building on Manhattan's Westside.

As she tells it, her clients dine at the finest restaurants, stay at the best boutique hotels and relax at the most sophisticated

spots, so they have developed a strong aesthetic that fuels their desire for good design and plush amenities.

With that in mind, she brings a blend of drama and practicality to renovations, positioning the kitchen as a veritable theater, with the cook serving "as the leading actor." She notes that "we always face the cook towards the living room and make the kitchen part of the living room"—a design concept that turns the combined space into the "common room."

Among design whimsies, she has used bamboo veneer on kitchen cabinets, as well as on the kitchen floor, to provide the cooking area with a seamless, harmonious appearance. She specifies floor-to-ceiling cabinets for small appliances, since they afford the kitchen a "generous minimalist" look, she says.

While natural stone and natural materials remain popular for counters, Glodagh is increasingly introducing clients to the benefits of concrete. Guarded with a sealant to prevent stains, concrete gradually acquires a nice patina and is warmer to the touch than stone, she says. Moreover, clients can personalize their countertops by inserting a design icon—such as a nuclear sign—in the concrete.

For flooring, she has specified concrete or stone floors with radiant heat for warmth, or cork or reclaimed lumber. "My feeling is that all houses should be designed for the bare foot," she says.

Meanwhile, Glodagh says, fireplaces and small refrigerators, preferably filled with chocolates and champagne, are perfect additions to a bathroom. So, too, are saffron tubs and showers with two showerheads.

Mr. Romano's bathroom renovations include everything from bidets to Jacuzzis to Philippe Starck-designed tubs. Rain showers, deep tubs and hand-held showerheads are also popular with his customers. Shower doors are often wandless glass affairs that are a half-inch thick and run \$5,000, compared to the standard door that costs \$1,800.

"My customers also like real stone"—as in Piero Goffoni, an Italian stone whose veining brings out its grain—says Mr. Romano, who has appeared on *Yankee*, a real-estate show on The Learning Channel.

With a customer roster that includes both financiers and TV stars, Mr. Romano leaves no stone or wood unturned—literally—in satisfying customers' demands for perfection. In many instances, he will journey to the mill to choose the maple or cherry woods for his clients' kitchen cabinets and vanities.

"In real high-end work, you want to get the wood from the same trees," he says. He encourages clients to accompany him to select the stone they want for their countertops.

Needless to say, his client's kitchen appliances are exclusively high-end, with such brands as Thermador, Subzero and Viking lining food prep areas. Franche stoves and Goble fixtures are also mainstays, including a large Goble faucet installed over the range for filling up a stockpot. "It saves your back," says Mr. Romano.

Mary Anne Sprot, owner of an eponymous interior design firm with offices in Manhattan and Long Beach, N.Y., says mixing different textures with color is also the big news in upscale bathrooms and kitchens. For one client who recently expanded his apartment by breaking through to the adjacent unit, Ms. Sprot is redesigning the residence's two kitchens. The main kitchen will feature yellow, beige and lavender-colored granite complemented by lavender tiles, pale yellow cabinetry and pale gray walls. The other kitchen, designated as a wine room, will feature stainless steel appliances, gray tiles and beige and gold granite countertops with some raspberry veins in the stone.

For a Park Avenue residence, Ms. Sprot recently completed a master bathroom with yellow, orange, lime, gray, brown and beige Jersander limestone in the large shower area and a pair of egg-shaped brushed stainless steel sinks with matching faucets. The impetral wallpaper, with its tinted outline of a female body, harmonized with the beige limestone on the floor and the countertop.

"Color is very in vogue, because people want a change," says Ms. Sprot.

Photos from left to right: Luxury renovations from Glough Design

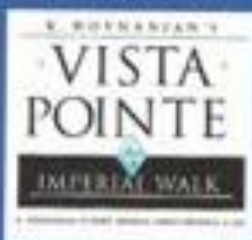
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