

Before Meeting with the Designer

Every designer works a bit differently, but here's the basic gist of what you can expect to take place when you design your new kitchen:

1. Make an appointment.

Some designers prefer to make the first appointment at your home. Others feel that you're more likely to be serious about the project, not just looking for free advice, if you take the time to meet them at the showroom. Either way, if you want a chunk of someone's time, get on their calendar.

2. Before the meeting.

Time is money, so most good designers are only going to give you an hour or two of free time at that first appointment. Make the most of it by doing some prep work. Here are some suggestions:

- Using magazines and the Internet, gather pictures of kitchen styles and products that you like. These will help you and your designer create the room you envision.
- Ask yourself questions such as how do you cook, eat and shop as well as what you like and don't like about your current kitchen. Your answers will point the designer in the right direction.
- Get together with all the members of your family and ask them for their input. Kids count, too—this is an opportunity to make it easy for them to help cook and clean
- Establish a budget range that works for your family. Remodeling a 200-square foot kitchen can cost \$20,000 or \$100,000, so don't just wait to see what the designer comes up with. When you know how much you want to invest, your designer can guide you toward products that will allow you to stay within budget.
- If you are building a new home or have hired an architect as well as a designer, be sure to get a copy of the floor plan to bring to the meeting.

3. The first appointment.

The first meeting typically serves as a getting-to-know-you session, and may or may not include a sales pitch. Good designers won't give you a hard sell—they'll want to hear about your needs, your wants and your budgetary and space constraints. This is your chance to ask questions about the company's services and products as well as its design (and installation or construction) process. Ask to see examples of the designer's work, and ask for references as well.

If this meeting takes place in your home, the designer will measure the kitchen's dimensions and possibly take some pictures, too. This helps them to a) document the space they're working with and b) remember how the kitchen relates to the surrounding rooms.

If the meeting takes place at the designer's showroom, think about measuring your kitchen ahead of time and bringing along the dimensions as well as some pictures.

At this point, the designer should have the necessary information to come up with some

rough concepts and a ballpark estimate. Some will start working on the spot, especially for small projects; most will prefer to meet again in about two weeks to present drawings and a price.

4. Initial design concepts.

Preliminary designs could be drawn by hand or on a computer, and might include sketches of the proposed floor plan and elevations depicting cabinetry, counter and fixture placement. The estimate will reflect suggested product choices. Some designers will provide a budget range or multiple figures, and explain the impact different product options would have on the ultimate price.

5. Refining the design and estimate.

Assuming you like the basic design and have a rapport with the designer, you'll probably be excited about discussing the possibilities for your kitchen: "What if you did an island instead of a peninsula?" or "Can we try a different door style?" At this point, most designers will ask for a design retainer or design fee before continuing to work on your project. They don't want to spend hours of time with customers who are just "kicking tires" and looking for free advice. You don't own the initial design, and the drawings aren't complete enough to be built from, either.

Once you pay the design fee, the designer will work with you to modify the floor plan and elevations to perfection and spec out products down to the last detail, including tile pattern and faucet finish. This process, of course, will modify the cost of the project. Your designer should be able to steer you toward products and design solutions that will help you stay within budget, though this may require compromise on your part.

How long does this part take? Depends on how good you are at making decisions.

6. Signing the contract.

Once the design is perfected and you're ready for your new kitchen to take shape, you need to sign the contract, which should include the final estimate and payment schedule. At most companies, the design fee you paid earlier will now be credited toward the cost of your project.

Some designers simply provide design services and cabinetry, and the contract's scope of work will reflect that. Others also offer some combination of additional products, installation services and project management. A true full-service or design-build firm will take care of all the demolition, construction and management, from scheduling to purchasing products.