



“THE RELATIVES ARE COMING: DON’T PANIC!”

By Russ Disotell

When September rolls around Karen Colburn’s thoughts turn to Christmas, not because she’s a super shopper making her list and checking it twice, not because all of the presents have to be bought and wrapped by Thanksgiving. No, the Christmas thoughts can be blamed on something we’ll call “The Relatives are Coming Syndrome”.

With twenty-four years in the field, Karen Colburn, owner and principal designer of West Wind Design Group, knows that September and October are the months when most customers realize they want to get their kitchens ready for Christmas. The conversations usually start with, “Our family is coming to my house for Christmas, and I would love to have a new kitchen!” It’s a stressful time already without adding on the pressures of hosting the family for the perfect Christmas meal. Unveiling a new kitchen makeover might help dazzle those hard to please relatives, but make sure you leave enough time (and budget!) to get the job done properly. Karen considers having

sufficient time to complete a project to be one of the most important considerations. Time constraints lead to split second decisions, which aren’t always the best. “It takes approximately four to six weeks for cabinets to arrive”, she points out, “and compared to 20 years ago, there are so many more choices.” Time is of the essence when dealing with a fixed, can’t miss deadline, like Christmas. You don’t want to cut corners or compromise on materials because you are rushed – you and your family are in your kitchen 365 days a year! We work really hard to accommodate – and have even worked until noon on Christmas Eve once when the client’s contractor was behind, to help him out.”

At times a degree in psychology might come in handy. Even though it’s not in the job description, Karen points out that, “You learn people skills really quickly.” Home renovations are stressful, at the best of times; people aren’t always at their best. Karen recalls a couple who were building their dream retirement home, and were getting along fabulously... that is until they were selecting countertops.

“They completely fell apart on me – I sent them home with the request that they don’t think about countertop choices all weekend and see me next week.” She worked with the colours – the wife’s choice, went into the master bathroom, the husband’s choice went into his bar area downstairs, and they chose a new selection for the kitchen. They were thrilled to have their choices incorporated in rooms that were special to them, and thankful that they avoided arguing by trusting Karen.

You have to be brutally honest with yourself. How do you function? Do you clean every day or are household chores your worst nightmare? Do you have kids and pets? What do you use your kitchen for? Is your goal re-sale? (kitchens and baths are 2 of the top renovations that will increase value). How does your family function in the space? Rather than the traditional ‘work triangle’ create zones for specific activities to make your everyday life easier – and to keep everyone out of each other’s way. Function first and then add the details! “Customers panic when I tell them I want to visit at supper time”, Karen chuckles, “but I want to see the kitchen and family in action. It shows how the kitchen functions at one of its busiest times of the day.”

Following the latest trends can also be dangerous. Don’t opt for a white kitchen if you don’t like white, just because it’s the latest rage. Buyer remorse is very real! To put it more succinctly, while being interviewed for a spot on a local Cogeco station last year, Karen was asked about current design trends. “I am seeing some 70’s influence. You may feel how my husband Scott does about this, he says, I lived through the seventies once, I don’t want to live through them again!” Who knew kitchen design could be so humorous? “I could say I’ve seen it all, but I know that’s not true”, Karen laughs, “There’s always something new.” LH

Editor’s Note

You can reach Karen @ Westwind Design Group-AyA Kitchens 613-345-5556 or visit the website www.ayabrockville.com. 16 - 4501 South Ave Elizabethtown-Kitley, ON

There are some fine Kitchen Design companies in Brockville & Area that will offer expertise and great work and we encourage our readers to Shop Local and seek their professional advice if you are planning a major Kitchen Makeover.