



A CABIN'S GREAT ROOM TAKES ON A COMPLETELY NEW LOOK

REMODELING (deconstructed)

Remodeling the home you already own makes sense, especially when available land is limited or financial times are tight. While creative renovation still requires a balance of funds, time, and well-laid plans, here are three individual projects that may provide timely inspiration for your own home-improvement ideas. **BY JEANNE ANDERSON**

PHOTOS OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: W. GARTH DOWLING; BELOW: KURT MITCHELL

INSET RIGHT: The framed-in stairway, shown at bottom left, was removed from this corner, opening up the kitchen visually; new cabinets, shelving, and a spiral staircase were the next step. The cabin's log walls were rechinked to provide energy-efficiency and a uniform look throughout.



Just east of the Teton River north of Victor, a 900-square foot cabin had, as Kurt Mitchell described it, “nothing really wrong with it,” but was unkempt after years of neglect. Its new owners loved the location but wondered whether they should simply build from scratch, or polish and update what was already there.

They decided to go the latter route, using Mitchell and his company, With The Grain Custom Crafted Building.

“It was worth leaving it and not starting over because that kept a lot of the charm of the old log style,” Mitchell said. Even so, the place needed a full-on update.

He and his crew replaced just about everything, including the structure's outdated chinking and its roof. The old metal roofing panels (which would have been thrown away otherwise) were moved down to the foundation area to prevent animals from crawling underneath the cabin. They restrained the house completely for a fresh, unified appearance, modified an attached three-bed bunkroom to match, and added a walk-around porch (part is screened) for additional family living space.



A CLOSET BECOMES A BATHROOM

A Teton Village slopeside home built in the 1970s had plenty of advantages as a ski-in, ski-out rental, but its new partnership of owners wanted to completely overhaul it for a luxury vacation home. They turned to architectural designer Tim Grimes of Houseplant and John McIntosh of Snake River Builders for the update.

The remodel involved major structural changes, and “every surface of the house was touched in some form,” according to McIntosh. They rotated the roof’s ridge by ninety degrees, added several decks, strengthened the existing foundation, and nearly doubled the structure’s size.

The junior master suite (so called since a late-’80s renovation) was just one room completely re-envisioned; a traditional closet was moved to create a new bathroom and the area where the bathroom had been was opened up for a walk-in closet.

The new tiny but fabulous bathroom takes up only ninety-three square feet but feels much larger due to its open design.

While it contains a toilet (expected) and double sinks (a nice convenience), this bathroom’s most innovative



element is a Nagano soaking tub made by Neptune. The tub’s minimalist footprint saves space and provides an elegant touch. A bather can move directly from the built-in shower into the hexagonal fixture for a chest-high soak.

“I’d seen one of these used before,” Grimes said. Japanese architecture provides for individual bathrooms to be a focus in a home, he notes, as “this is a room you use a lot.”

“A Japanese tub might be a cultural leap for some of us, but it’s highly valued in Japan as well as all of Asia,” McIntosh explained.

A custom-made bench doubles as a step into the sit-down ceramic tub, while triangular wedges provide handy spots for soap and shampoo. A Euro-style glass shower door

and oversized mirrors add to the room’s airy feeling

In moving the bathroom, plumbing was placed directly over an open entry area rather than within interior walls, McIntosh said. “We had to have enough drop with the structural floor package to build in adequate insulation to protect the waste and supply lines under the floor” to help reduce their susceptibility to freezing.

As a part owner of the property, Grimes was on the job site nearly every day of the remodel. Everyone involved contributed practical solutions to tricky questions, he said, even in the small bathroom. “It was a good exercise in space planning,” Grimes said. “The tile setter came up with the sweet little step and bench.” ■

PHOTO: W. GARTH DOWLING; OPPOSITE: KISA KOENIG

Inside the almost-square living area, one small corner was already tucked away for a bathroom; it too was updated. In the rest of the great room, the propane heater and refrigerator were moved to improve functionality. In the process, space opened up for a small but efficient mechanical room; it doubles as a pantry and laundry, complete with a stackable washer and dryer.

The ceiling was completely revamped, too. It and new tongue-and-groove walls were painted a vanilla-ice-cream color to better reflect light streaming in from the cabin’s many windows. The remodel also did away with a narrow, steep stairway to an upstairs loft. A graceful circular stairway now opens up the space while at the same time visually uniting both floors.

Like much of the rest of the house, the kitchen cabinets were “so, very very tired” before the remodel, Mitchell recalled. Replacing them with a distressed but stylish design below and sparse, open shelving above, harmonizes with the look the owners wanted—a blend of contemporary finishes balancing an old-fashioned tone.

The entire cabin floor was replaced using reclaimed pine provided by the homeowner, the recycled wood burnished to gracefully hide its blemishes.

Mitchell, who caretakes the property, e-mailed digital photographs to update the owners as the renovation took place. “This was one of those rooms where we had to get creative to make it work,” he said. “It’s cozy, very comfortable for such a small space.” ■

REMODELING 01

Vision and creativity are needed to see the possibility of changing functions within a given space.

More importantly, however, as mentioned by these builders, a successful remodel requires some serious problem-solving on the part of owners, builders, and others within the whole team of designers, architects, and subcontractors.

While the projects detailed here were part of bigger renovations, a homeowner is well-served by applying some of those larger concepts to any size undertaking.

Before you start remodeling, ask yourself what you truly want the changes to provide. Try to describe your desires in practical, tangible measures and brainstorm all the ways these goals may be accomplished.

For example, perhaps you want to enhance enjoyment of cooking and have the family spend more time together in the kitchen. Then, ask what it is that’s holding you back—outdated or poorly serviced appliances? Lack of counter space? Insuffi-

cient storage? A poorly designed floor plan? Badly placed windows and therefore little natural light? Figuring out what’s missing will help you fine-tune your results.

Expect the need to be flexible; understand things will come up during the process. “There are certainly a lot more challenges with a remodel,” Steve Bontecou said. “It’s very difficult to quantify all the problems that are going to pop up.”

Kurt Mitchell agrees. “With a remodel or addition, you have to think outside the box because you run into something unexpected or find something that will work better than what you’d originally planned,” he said.

Realize plans may have to be modified. This is what John McIntosh calls the “ripple in the pond” effect; making one change will necessarily require other changes. This may be a small matter—“what you choose for one item [like a faucet] may affect what you can use for something else” [like the sink or tile treatment], he noted. Or the ripple effect

may involve something larger and much more difficult to remedy: e.g., an existing foundation that won’t support the kind of structure you envision.

“When you start brand new, there are no surprises,” architectural designer Tim Grimes noted. “Anyone who gets into remodeling should be prepared. There are repercussions for every decision, even though you try to cover everything beforehand.”

“With a remodel or addition, think outside the box. The unexpected may work better than the original plan.” -Kurt Mitchell

Some rooms will require particular care. On a bathroom remodel, for example, two important elements to think through carefully are dealing with moisture and providing proper ventilation, McIntosh said. “You have to figure out where it [water vapor] is going both in the room and also to the outside.”

Be aware that a remodeling job may be more expensive than first envisioned, as a builder encounters unforeseen stum-

bling blocks that require costlier fixes than estimated. Establish clear guidelines regarding what parameters matter the most to you; that will help keep things on budget—and limit headaches for your remodeling team.

Renovations take longer than one might think, and assembling a good team—one that works together well over the long haul—can be key to your ulti-

mate satisfaction with both the process and final results.

Above all, those in the local construction business believe that renovation is the wave of the future, at least during our current economic times.

“We think there will be a lot more remodels than fresh starts,” Grimes said. “The valley [Jackson Hole] is getting built out. People will be buying older homes and trying to make them what they want.” ■



A GARAGE BECOMES A MASTER SUITE

In Wilson, across the highway from the elementary school, a pre-World War II log home also recently needed a facelift. Its new owner “wanted to make it into something that he wanted himself,” according to builder Steve Bontecou of Bontecou Construction, who, with Berlin Architects, tackled this project. In so doing, they needed to come up with some workable ideas to solve a multitude of problems; for example, the whole place was built on a slab, and rafters and other structural elements were underbuilt.

On the outside, originally, the house “looked like one of the old park log cabins,” Bontecou says. The new owners wanted to retain the rustic-mountain feel of the entire place while adding fine finishes throughout.

Just one part of the remodel’s scope was to turn an existing attached garage, added on sometime after the original structure was built, into a 725-square-foot master suite.

A major challenge was to disguise that part of the structure’s original use. “It was

just a basic two-car garage,” Bontecou said. “We had to make it so that you don’t come in the house and say, ‘This used to be a garage.’”

Architect Larry Berlin’s design called for changing the traffic flow by shifting the exterior driveway to the west side of the house. Then they created a new hallway from what had been a mudroom, revealing a beautiful expanse of original logs and chinking previously hidden by laundry machines and counters.

The master suite now includes a spacious bedroom, walk-in closet, full-size gas fireplace, and ultra-chic bathroom with frameless shower doors and stylish surfaces of granite and tile.

A critical aspect for success was getting plumbing into the new master bath. “We had to raise the floor and build it up with framing, and jackhammer out part of the slab to get the drains and the water line in,” Bontecou said. “The main sewer line to the septic has to slope, and that was a challenge, because we were tying it into an area that also had a slab.”

The former garage is now a two-story wing of the home. Above the main part of the space, what had been an attic-style storage area with high trusses became a fully finished exercise room, accessible by a newly installed stairway from the bedroom.

Large windows in the master suite now offer views to the Tetons. Located on the southeast corner of the house, the room provides “a bright and sunny space for starting one’s day,” its owners say. ■



PHOTOS: W. GARTH DOWLING