

Antonella Romano, The Tile Oracle

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NORTH JERSEY HOMES

Antonella Romano is owner of the Stone and Tile Emporium in Wycoff (www.stoneandtilenj.com). Send your stone and tile questions to her at emolo@northjersey.com.

QUESTION: I live in a bi-level in Franklin Lakes. I have decided to put an addition to the back of the house so I can have my dream kitchen. A neighbor told me a lot of cabinet stores are offering to do the general contracting job. Should I let the cabinet showroom do the general contracting or project-managing, or should I get an independent contractor myself? What questions do I ask that will let me know what to do?

— Janice, Franklin Lakes

ANSWER: Your neighbor is correct that a lot of kitchen cabinet suppliers today are offering to general-contract on a job as a way to make renovations more convenient and lower the costs.

This is useful for smaller renovations. However, you're not just renovating your existing kitchen. You're adding an extension on to your house, with everything that entails, such as putting on a roof, putting in the windows, installing heat and lighting, prepping the floor and putting up the sheetrock.

A builder would be better suited for your size project. If the kitchen supplier is going to GC the job, he will probably be subbing out to a builder, anyway. I recommend hiring a builder yourself to manage the project, and having your cabinet supplier handle the kitchen design and installation of the cabinetry.

You are on the right track, though, by wanting to know what to ask and what details to look for. You certainly can enjoy your time on the tennis court and come back when the extension is done. But if you don't take the time to understand the details, you also don't know what to do if something goes wrong.

Here is what you should ask the builder: Do they have a team of people for the various trades, or do they subcontract out? What is the timeline and cost estimate for each of those jobs? Will they be getting the building permits or is this your responsibility? How will the bones of your extension be put together, will they need to be reinforced with steel beams and what kind of wood will be used? What kind of siding and roofing will they be using? What exactly is being installed — from the windows to the water heater — and what brands do they recommend for all of these areas?

The design of the kitchen and cabinets is an art and should be handled by the kitchen cabinet designer/supplier. They are the ones who can take the details of your culinary dream — your double island, your cabinets, your sinks, your extra seating for guests, your work space, where your kids will eat breakfast, etc. — and find the right design and place for everything. Cabinetry today is absolutely an art form, more akin to furniture, and can be very intricate. So have the cabinet maker install the cabinets, not the builder.

As anyone who has followed this column knows, I strongly suggest you hire a tile designer to handle the tile portion of the job, rather than the builder or the cabinet supplier. A tile designer, like myself, can make sure the design is tailored to you; can customize the tile design to your taste; and can handle the little details, such as keeping your backsplash free of outlets by putting them under the counter where they can't be seen. A tile designer will also ensure that the tiles aren't selected on looks alone, but are made from a material appropriate to your lifestyle and environment, so you don't wind up with a floor or a backsplash that stains or cracks.

I also recommend hiring a tile installer with a number of years under their belt, so that you won't wind up with common problems such as tiles that don't line up, loose tiles or uneven floors. When it comes to building your dream kitchen, it's the details that count.



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