

Award winning design and remodeling are achieved by listening and understanding our customers' needs.

## Why Design-Build?

One-stop shopping can streamline the remodeling experience

Pamela and Steve love their newly purchased, seventy-year-old home in the Houston area. It has all the charming quirks of an older house—a lovely curved staircase in the front entrance, original hardwood floors, unexpected alcoves, and a marble fireplace. The location, a corner lot in a great neighborhood, couldn't be better for Pamela and Steve and their two children.

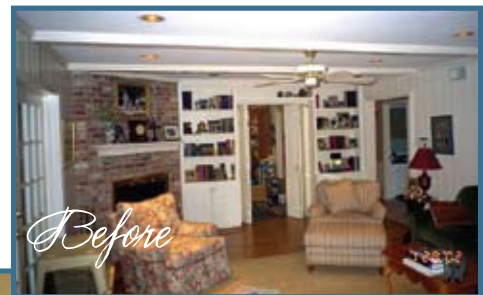
However, the charms of their new home are counterbalanced by inconveniences they didn't face in their previous suburban home. The bathrooms—only two of them—are narrow and cramped. The kitchen has poor lighting and very little counter space. The older house is just not equipped for a modern family. While Pamela and Steve wanted something more special than a cookie-cutter new house, they were surprised by the sacrifices their choice required.

Pamela and Steve decided to look into a remodeling project; perhaps they could add the features that they needed to the older house they loved. Their next door neighbors had set the example with their renovation project. However, when Pamela asked her neighbor for a reference, she was astonished to learn just how complicated such a project could be. Architects? Engineers? Contractors?

How many different companies would she have to juggle to get the home she wanted?

After seeking other recommendations, Pamela contacted a design-build contractor and found another way to make her vision a reality.

The design-build approach has become increasingly popular in the last five years with both homeowners and remodelers. While the more traditional pattern of the remodeling process involves meeting with three separate companies, the architect or design firm, the engineering firm, and the contractor, design-build companies incorporate design, engineering, and construction. Often billed as the "one-stop shopping" approach to remodeling, the design-build process moves seamlessly through three stages: interpreting the





client's vision, developing that vision into a buildable project, and finally, building the project as promised. In this way, design-build companies minimize the time investment and inconvenience for the client. Furthermore, this customer-oriented fusion of professional design and construction expertise offers homeowners greater savings and greater control over the final outcome in addition to greater continuity of service.

Why is design-build so much better? In the past, most homeowners who wanted to remodel would first contact an architect to design the project. Only after the design stage of the project was complete would contractors bid. However, the true cost of an architect's vision is often higher than a client anticipates, and the contractor must then reduce the scale of the project because the design isn't within reach of the client's budget.

A design-build company can calculate the cost of each design element from the beginning of the design phase of a project. For this reason, a design-build company can be more upfront with the estimate for the total remodel. Keeping the client's budget guidelines in mind from the very beginning, a design-build company can create a plan for the client that not only beautifully interprets their needs and wants, but also suits their finances. The disappointments and delays of the three company process are entirely avoided. Furthermore, design-build companies can be more flexible if problems such as faulty wiring or structural flaws are encountered, incorporating their solutions in a modification of the design.

Another benefit of design-build companies is that clients are able to develop a relationship with a single company that lasts throughout the entire remodeling process. The three company approach to remodeling can often be disorienting for the client. After working with an architect throughout the initial design stage, they suddenly find themselves in the hands of an entirely new company, often the lowest bidder on the project. However, clients of design-build companies have the opportunity to build trust in the remodeling company long before the workmen come into their home. This relationship facilitates better communication and also gives the client a better sense of security.

The stability of design-build firms offers other advantages as well—many that endure beyond the project's completion. Typically design-build companies work out of staffed offices; this means that they not only are much easier to communicate with while the project is underway, but also are easier to contact if problems or warranty issues arise two or three months after the remodel is complete. Design-build contractors have been in business a long time, and their businesses are far more likely to remain viable in the future. For this reason, design-build

companies provide better service and have greater accountability for the outcome of the project.

The fee structure for design-build remodeling services varies between companies and sometimes between jobs, depending on the scope of work involved. Many design-build companies separate the charges for the design and the construction phases of the project. The design fee covers the company's time and costs for developing the client's vision into a buildable plan. The design charges may be based on a fixed fee or an hourly rate, and may include a nonrefundable administration fee as well as costs for design, research, and drafting time. Construction fees, on the other hand, often are charged on a cost-plus (time and materials) basis if the scope of the work is less certain. For example, the exact location of utility lines may be unknown. Alternatively, a fixed fee arrangement may be used if the scope of the work can be more precisely determined.

The contract may also provide a structure for charging costs that are unknown or unexpected at the time of the contract. Cost allowances may be used if the exact cost of an item cannot be determined at the time of the contract; for example, a \$1000 cost allowance might be included to cover a specified area of carpeting when the manufacturer and pattern of carpet have yet to be determined. The contract may also stipulate additional fees for either client-requested changes or for additional costs incurred due to as-yet undetected defects in the existing structure that affect the project. In this way, a contract with a design-build company even prepares clients for the unexpected.

Homeowners like Pamela and Steve who choose design-build firms are looking for less hassle and fewer surprises. They also want greater control over the remodeling process: control over the cost, the duration of the process, and finally control over who they allow into their home. By hiring a design-build company, they can feel more secure in the knowledge that their home is in good hands, and their dreams are within their reach.

