

Planning for Change: Your Home Forever

The economic downturn has caused homeowners to delay maintenance on their homes. The normal volume of additions, kitchen and bath remodeling, even siding and roofing replacements, has been way below what one would expect in “normal” times. Homeowners are guarding their savings until they are assured that the financial situation in our region is stable, even improving. There has been a good side effect to this caution, in that all of us are more circumspect about how we spend and are determined to get real value and return on investment when we do home repairs and improvements.

Now that homeowners are beginning to fix up their homes again what should they consider so that they can get the best return on investment, usefulness, and comfort from the changes they plan to make? Remember that there are two parts to Value: the benefit that I get while I use my house and the perceived benefit a prospective buyer has when I sell my house. Let’s define return on investment in those two ways: first how long will it take me to get back the money I invest in my house in the short term, and second what upgrades are likely to make my home more valuable to prospective buyers in the future?

A typical response to these questions might be the tried and true closets and kitchens or curb appeal. The issues smart buyers and owners are considering are energy efficiency (what are my utility bills going to be) and Whole Life Design, also called Age-in-Place, (can my house be adapted so that we can live here through our retirement years, regardless of one’s diminishments.) I have talked to a dozen couples who love the look of their house, their community, their amenities, but are fatigued by rooms that are too hot or too cold, drafts, high PECO bills, condensation on the windows, musty smells, and attics that retain moisture. These are the issues that Home Inspection Companies target and that can become negotiation points for prospective buyers. These are the issues that can actually be **created** by renovations and upgrades which do not take Building Science in to consideration.

So if you are considering home improvements here is a list of what to keep in mind:

- 1) work with a company that understands your house-as-a-system, is Lead Safety Certified, and a NARI member.
- 2) make all improvements as energy efficiency focused as possible. Have an energy audit incorporated in the work at the outset so that some of the budget can be used to begin the energy savings upgrades. You will save money on your energy bills forever.
- 3) Consider what modifications to the design or use of the house will help owners live as independently as possible if and when diminishments to health occur. For example, if grab bars are not desired currently, at least add the blocking in the walls so that grab bars can be securely attached in the future.
- 4) Choose products which do not off gas potentially unhealthy chemicals. These gasses can cause underlying health issues.

- 5) Stay away from products which are petroleum based, such as oil fired furnaces. Not only is oil a diminishing resource the cost of which will be steadily rising, as a nation we are more dependent on oil imports now than at 9/11, a fact we must reverse.

Our homes provide us with so much more than a place to store our possessions and sleep at night. Our home is an expression of our values and an investment for the future.