



Carol Blitzer

*Left: Kitchen and bath designer Mollyanne Sherman will offer her years of expertise when teaching a class through Palo Alto Adult School on how to manage a remodel project beginning Jan. 31. Below: Sherman designed these kitchens and a bathroom through MAC Design.*

## MANAGING



Treva Johnson

## A REMODEL

**Designer Mollyanne Sherman teaches how to deal with spaces that don't work**



Treva Johnson

## LIKE A PRO



Treva Johnson

**P**lanning and communication — those are the keys to any successful remodeling project, according to Mollyanne Sherman, of MAC Design, Palo Alto and Newark.

Sherman will be sharing what she's learned in her 20-plus-year career as a certified kitchen and bath designer in a five-week class through Palo Alto Adult School beginning Jan. 31. She says the class is ap-

propriate for anyone thinking about tackling a remodel — whether it's one room or the whole house.

"I'll talk about how to start, where to go, what resources are out there," she said, including how to find a contractor. For the do-it-yourselfers, she'll guide them toward finding the products they want. She'll also deal with common design errors and will review each student's proposed projects.

A typical kitchen remodel could be completed in four to six weeks, she said, but will more likely be done in 10 to 12 weeks — if you're working within an existing area.

That means no bashed-out walls. She pointed to a recent Palo Alto project in which the kitchen was relocated to the back

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## Remodel

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of the house, and the old kitchen space was replaced by a small family room. Doors were moved, or widened, to change the flow of traffic, radiant heating was added, as well as a new master bathroom. Ultimately, almost every room in the house was involved. That larger-scale project took nine months, and required the family to move out during the process, she said.

The point of planning, she said, is to line up all one's ducks: Have the cabinets, appliances, light fixtures, faucets, etc., on site before demolition even takes place. What can slow down the process is waiting until demolition to do final measurements, or not anticipating that it will take four to 12 weeks to build custom cabinets.

Sherman has been involved with design and building for much of her life. The daughter of a graphic designer and a remodeling salesman, who later opened their own construction business, Sherman studied interior design at Bauder College (now Westland College), then worked at a series of design firms from San Jose to Atherton.

In the 1990s she worked at Home Depot, eventually training design associates. "I applied what I learned working with higher-end personnel to more average clients," she said. Soon she was training others at Home Depot about the

rules developed by the National Kitchen and Bath Association about solid kitchen design: "how to make good, functional and safe spaces. Form follows function," she said.

Sherman contrasted the roles of designer, architect and contractor.

"An interior designer is key to evaluate the interior function of the home — how does it flow, the space needed in each room, how rooms relate, how people will live long-term (aging in place)," she said. The architect tends to more focused on the outside, she said, and the contractor figures out how to make the plan work.

What the designer needs to supply is "a great design with well-planned spaces, detailed so the contractor can bid and build appropriately," she said.

After Home Depot's higher-end Expo division closed, she left and started her own firm in 2004, with offices in both Palo Alto and Newark. She started with a major remodel on her own home, applying what she had learned professionally to her own project.

One of the key pieces she'll deal with in class is figuring out a budget and how to stick to it, what she describes as a major obstacle for some remodelers.

A rule of thumb she cites is 50 percent product, 50 percent construction. But if you're keeping your cabinets, that throws the formula off, she added.



Mollyanne Sherman

*Mollyanne Sherman moved the kitchen to the rear of this Palo Alto house, creating a small family room.*

In an ideal world, she suggests beginning by hiring a designer who can create a plan that can then be taken out to bid by contractors. Expect to pay at least \$1,500, she said, for a plan that is clear enough to be submitted to the city for permits.

Some designers work by the hour (at about \$150/hour) and others prefer to give a flat proposal, she added.

With a designer, more decisions are made earlier in the process so there are fewer surprises later.

"The important thing is that everyone is communicating and understanding expectations," she said.

She points to what may seem like a simple choice: "There are so many nuances in a cabinet order with natural wood. Wood has variation." If the designer can explain to the clients upfront that there will be flecks, dings and variations in that wood, the clients are likely to be OK with the choice. But if they're surprised by those variations — which they see as flaws in the wood — they won't accept it, she said. And if they really object to those flecks, they should be choosing a more select grade or painting the cabinets.

Sherman tries to get clients to understand their choices, but is sometimes stymied by budget lim-

itations. Once she's working on a project she may see new directions that will increase the budget (such as expanding the upstairs bathroom to match the pushed-out walls downstairs). The quandary then is whether to offer the new direction (at greater cost) or blindly stick to the budget and risk having the client say later, "Gee, I wish I'd thought of that sooner."

"The challenge is not to push someone to spend more than they want to. It's important for there to be a conversation about the choices, to have a good dialogue. ... With an unlimited budget, it's a different story," she said, adding that rarely happens.

"Ninety percent of the time people spend more," she added. ■

**Associate Editor Carol Blitzer can be emailed at [cblitzer@paweekly.com](mailto:cblitzer@paweekly.com).**

**What:** How to Manage Your Kitchen or Bath Remodel

**When:** 6:30 to 9 p.m., Tuesdays, Jan. 31-Feb. 28

**Where:** Room 1706, Palo Alto High School, 50 Embarcadero Road, Palo Alto

**Cost:** \$75 plus \$30 materials fee payable to the instructor

**Info:** [www.paadultschool.org](http://www.paadultschool.org)

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