

Don't let home improvements ruin your relationship

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

As seen on reality-based home remodeling shows, nothing can tear a couple apart faster than a home redo. Often it seems when couples take out a building permit, they might as well step next door and take out divorce papers.

According to Jay Jeffers, principal designer of the Jay Jeffers Design Group in San Francisco and Los Angeles, avoiding such pitfalls comes down to simple planning and compromise. Chosen by House Beautiful magazine as one of 2002's "Rising Stars" of interior design, Jeffers has his share of horror stories, but he has a simple strategy for avoiding conflict, overcoming stress and completing redecorating and remodeling projects without having to pull out the prenuptial agreements.

"Before couples start working with contractors, designers, etc., I would have them figure out what their needs are and what their wants are to see if they are on the same page," he said. Couples need to determine their priorities as well as the items that, while they might make a room spectacular, are not essential. Such pre-emptive decision making will alleviate a lot of hassle when it comes time to spend the money.

"Most people are probably going to have to find areas to cut when they see the budget come in," Jeffers said. "Figure out what your favorites are and then decide where you're going to be comfortable cutting back.

"Go through a few magazines and tear out things that you like and things that you don't like. Do it separately then review it together," he said.

Comparing visions also helps couples see where they might need to compro-

mise or where they may have issues, Jeffers said. With visions of the perfect room in hand, it may be tempting to jump the gun and head straight to the professionals, but devising a workable budget is the next priority.

"Once you have an estimate of what it's going to cost, then you can better determine priorities and what's not as important," he said. "If you get to a point where you are over budget, then you'll know ahead of time what you are going to cut back on.

"It's also important to remember that it almost always happens that couples put all the money into construction, then have no budget left for the furniture, but it's really important to make sure you have everything you want," he said.

But don't feel like the entire project has to be done right away.

"I think everybody wants to have it all at once and have it exactly like they want it immediately," Jeffers said. "A remodel may take a little longer, but then you may get in there and see you don't live quite the way you thought you would in the room. Sometimes waiting will cause you to find other ways of doing things, so it has sort of a positive effect."

With goals and budget in hand, Jeffers recommends meeting with a professional interior designer or contractor who can advise you on whether your dream is possible given the budget.

"It's important to have somebody who has done this before. The clients will have their list, but the professional will have things they may have forgotten about," he said. "Also, someone who's done this before will be up on the latest and greatest things."

Once the project is under-

way, couples should divide the labor and respect each other's decisions.

"Whatever you're passionate about is what you should do, but it should always be communicated back to the other person what you are going to do," he said. "If one person is more passionate about what goes on the floor, that person should do the flooring."

Also, play on individual strengths. If one person is more organized than the other, that person should be in charge of budgeting, paperwork and communicating with the designer or contractor, according to Jeffers. Having one person as the go-between with professionals has benefits beyond simplifying tasks, Jeffers said.

"If I'm working on a construction project, I'll ask them to tell me who's work-

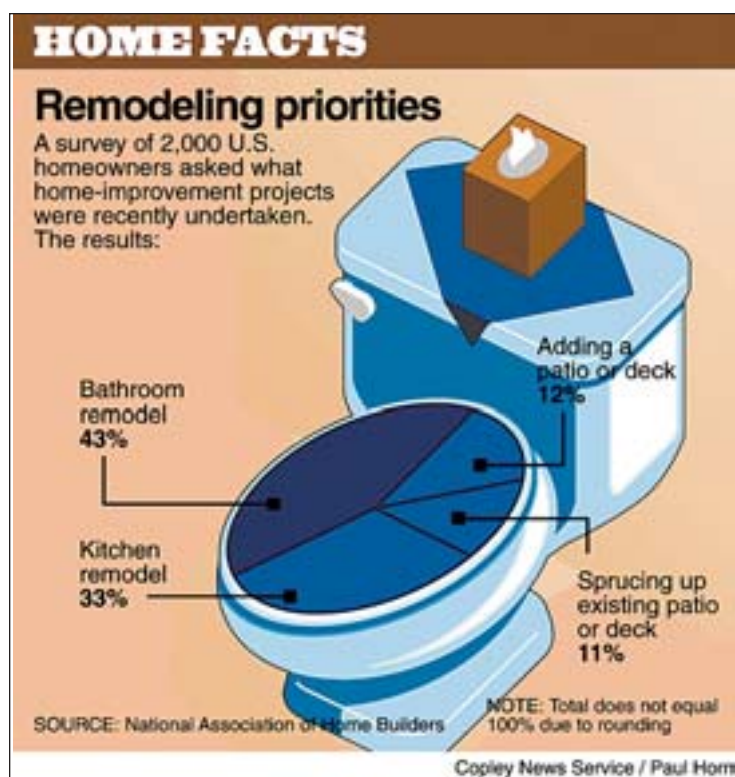
ing with who. Then we have one line of communication so two people aren't telling the contractor two different things," he said.

Shopping for supplies, furniture and accessories may be the one thing couples want to do together. "If both people have to make the decision, then both people have to go, but if one person is going to go do the shopping, then the other person needs to be OK with their decision," he said.

When the project becomes stressful, and it's bound to at some point, Jeffers reminds couples to work together.

"If it's really stressful for one person, the other person should step in and help out in that area," he suggested. "Just watch out for each other."

Regardless of what happens on the road to a



remodeled home, remember to have fun, Jeffers said. "If it isn't fun, you're never going to do it again,"

he said. "It can be stressful, but it can also be fun — and the end result is a place that you're both really going to enjoy together."



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