

Gehman Design Remodeling

by Matt Cosentino

A kitchen backsplash has always been a smart investment to protect walls from the splatter of spaghetti sauce or the splashing of water from the sink, but nowadays it is also an important design element that can help bring a room together.

There is a wide variety of color and material options that can be used for an eye-catching backsplash, and homeowners don't need to break the bank to achieve the look they desire.

Since 1990, Gehman Design Remodeling has been enhancing area homes with its creative design concepts and its commitment to the finest craftsmanship in kitchen and bathroom renovations. *House & Home* spoke with President Dennis Gehman, MCR (Master Certified Remodeler), to learn more about backsplashes.

Cabinetry and countertops are two of the most important aspects of a kitchen remodel, but do you feel like the backsplash is an important finishing touch for the room?

I totally agree. It has become an area that usually does not require a whole lot of investment for people to make a statement. You might use stock cabinets and a basic grade of stone countertop, but for a few thousand dollars at the most you can have a really nice-looking backsplash that makes a statement and personalizes the space.

Does it make sense to use a backsplash just around the focal points of the kitchen—such as the sink or stove—rather than the whole room?



EXPERTISE: KITCHEN BACKSPLASHES



Dennis Gehman, MCR, president of Gehman Design Remodeling

It's more common to go around the whole kitchen, but then we can have a mural or some kind of focal point above the range. It can be a different color or a pattern in the tile or it can even have a frame around it.

Tile is usually the popular choice for a backsplash. Is that the material you recommend for homeowners?

Most people think of tile when they think of a backsplash, and that's probably the case 90 percent of the time. Then there are all kinds of patterns you can do within the tile. We're seeing a trend toward much larger tile, and that's not just in a backsplash, but also for floors and showers and everywhere. I think people are getting tired of all the grout, so there are large tiles you can use that minimize the grout.

Along with that, people want something that looks nice, is very washable and makes sense in terms of cost. Painted drywall is the least expensive, but the next step up is a plastic laminate. There are some really cool-looking laminates available. One piece goes up and you don't have any grout joints, so that is certainly an alternative. We've also done a few with just a sheet of stainless steel for a more contemporary or modern feel.

Are glass and stone good options for a backsplash?

Glass mosaics are still very popular. It's an easy way to add color and you can do a lot of mixing and matching to come up with a nice design without spending a lot of money. We do

some stone as well. One of the challenges with stone is that it has a bit more texture, so if you get things splashing on it, it's going to be harder to wipe it down and keep it clean. But it's durable and it looks great.

What are other factors to consider before installing a new backsplash?

Before you put all of this money into a nice backsplash, if you want some additional outlets or some under-cabinet lighting, it's a lot easier to run the electrical wires before the new backsplash is on. We're definitely seeing a trend toward removing all of the outlets or switches. Initially when I say that, people respond, 'Well I need some outlets to plug in my coffee pot or my blender.' But we put the outlets and the switches underneath the wall cabinets, so when you have this gorgeous backsplash it's not interrupted by an outlet or switch.

It must be very rewarding for you when your design ideas can change your clients' homes for the better.

Very much so. The conversation we have to have is how long they plan on being in the home, because that usually determines how much they want to invest in it. If they're thinking about selling the house and realize that the kitchen needs updating, then we want to stay fairly neutral so they're not turning off potential buyers. But if it's for themselves, that's the time to personalize it, and for a few thousand dollars you can really make it look good as far as the backsplash. Most people are interested in doing that. **H&H**

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