

UPGRADED REMODELING | HOMEOWNER PLAYBOOK

The Austin Kitchen Remodel Playbook

A practical guide for planning a kitchen that works beautifully, communicates clearly, and is ready for construction.

Original planning tools for Austin, Bee Cave, Westlake Hills, Lakeway, and surrounding Hill Country homeowners.

Design • Scope • Selections • Construction • Handoff

START HERE

A better remodel begins before demolition.

Your kitchen is one of the hardest-working rooms in the home. It supports meals, routines, school mornings, holidays, hosting, and the everyday rhythm of the household. That is why a successful remodel should begin with clarity—not a cabinet color or a quick price estimate.

This playbook helps you organize the conversations that matter before construction begins. It will not choose your design for you. Instead, it gives you an original framework for deciding what your kitchen needs to do, which choices should be settled first, and how to work productively with a design-build team.

Use this playbook like a working document

Bring it to your first consultation. Underline the points that matter, write down questions, and keep a running list of decisions. The goal is not to know everything at once; it is to arrive at each step with the right information.

0.1 Part 1: Define what success looks like

Before discussing cabinets, identify the problems your remodel needs to solve. A kitchen can be visually beautiful and still disappoint its owners if it does not make daily life easier.

0.1.1 Write your three most important outcomes

- ☐ Our kitchen must make meal preparation easier because:
- ☐ Our kitchen must improve gathering or entertaining because:
- ☐ Our kitchen must improve storage, organization, or circulation because:
- ☐ A design detail that would make the room feel like our home is:

0.1.2 Decide which goals are fixed and which are flexible

A useful design conversation distinguishes necessities from preferences. A fixed goal might be a larger work surface for two cooks, a first-floor accessible layout, or a durable finish for children and pets. A flexible goal might be a particular pendant, backsplash pattern, or cabinet color family.

Planning prompt

If your budget or existing conditions require a tradeoff, which matters more: more storage, a larger island, premium appliances, an open layout, or a finish upgrade? Rank your top five priorities before your first design meeting.

0.2 Part 2: Diagnose your current kitchen

Walk through the kitchen during a normal day. Notice the points where people hesitate, bump into one another, search for items, or work around an inconvenient choice made years ago. Small frustrations create the most useful design clues.

0.2.1 Function audit

Use the following questions to document what is happening now:

- Where does food preparation begin, and where does it break down?
- Which cabinets are hard to reach, hard to organize, or simply too small?
- Do appliance doors, drawers, or seats compete for the same pathway?
- Is there enough landing space near the refrigerator, oven, cooktop, or sink?
- Which tasks need better lighting?
- What creates the most daily clutter?
- Does the kitchen connect comfortably to the spaces where people eat, work, or gather?

0.2.2 Household routine worksheet

- ☐ Weekday breakfast needs:
- ☐ Weeknight meal preparation needs:
- ☐ Weekend or hosting needs:
- ☐ Children, pets, or accessibility considerations:
- ☐ Coffee, baking, grilling, hobby, or specialty-cooking needs:

A strong kitchen is designed around routines rather than a single inspiration image. Your designer should understand how your household moves through the space before proposing a new layout.

0.3 Part 3: Plan zones, pathways, and layout

A kitchen layout works best when it gives each major activity a defined home. You do not need to memorize rules; you need to explain how the room must perform.

0.3.1 The five functional zones

1. Storage zone.

Food, dishes, cookware, small appliances, recycling, and pantry items need logical, accessible locations.

2. Preparation zone.

This is the clear counter area where chopping, mixing, unpacking groceries, and staging meals happens.

3. Cooking zone.

The cooktop, oven, microwave, and nearby tools should make cooking feel efficient and safe.

4. Cleanup zone.

The sink, dishwasher, trash, recycling, drying space, and cleaning supplies should work together.

5. Gathering zone.

Islands, banquettes, beverage stations, homework areas, and dining connections should support the way people gather without disrupting the work zones.

Layout conversation starter

Tell your design team where crowding happens now. The fastest path to a better layout is often understanding where a second cook, a dishwasher door, a pet bowl, or a school bag creates a conflict.

0.4 Part 4: Make appliances part of the plan

Appliances are not a late-stage purchase. Their exact sizes, clearances, doors, ventilation needs, and placement influence cabinet dimensions, electrical planning, plumbing, and counter layout.

0.4.1 Appliance decision worksheet

- ☐ Refrigerator type and approximate width:
- ☐ Range, cooktop, wall oven, or combination preference:
- ☐ Dishwasher needs: standard, panel-ready, drawer, or specialty:
- ☐ Microwave placement preference:
- ☐ Ventilation goals:
- ☐ Specialty items: wine storage, steam oven, espresso machine, warming drawer, beverage fridge, or other:

Decide whether the appliances are meant to disappear into the cabinetry, become visual focal points, or balance both. Your answers help guide the cabinet plan and the finish direction.

0.5 Part 5: Build a storage strategy before choosing cabinetry

Cabinets should organize your real belongings—not an imaginary version of your household. Before meeting a designer, take a quick inventory of the items that do not have a good home today.

0.5.1 Inventory categories to discuss

- Pots, pans, bakeware, cutting boards, and serving pieces.
- Everyday dishes, glassware, and special-occasion items.
- Food storage containers, spices, oils, and pantry staples.
- Small appliances, charging stations, pet supplies, and school materials.
- Recycling, compost, trash, cleaning supplies, and linens.

Try this exercise

Open every cabinet and drawer. Put a mark beside any item that is difficult to access, routinely stored on the counter, or located far from where it is used. These marks become your storage brief.

0.6 Part 6: Select materials for the way you live

Every finish has a personality. Some look beautifully lived-in; others keep a more uniform appearance. Some require more care. A successful material plan balances appearance, maintenance, durability, and the total project vision.

0.6.1 Materials decision log

- ☐ Countertop priority: low maintenance / natural variation / heat resistance / statement look
- ☐ Cabinet priority: painted / stained / textured / minimal / traditional / contemporary
- ☐ Backsplash priority: simple / decorative / continuous slab / easy cleaning / focal point
- ☐ Flooring priority: continuity with adjacent rooms / softness / water resistance / durability
- ☐ Hardware and fixture priority: warm metal / cool metal / mixed metals / understated / bold

Do not make finish decisions in isolation. Ask to view materials together under lighting that resembles your kitchen. The relationship between the cabinet color, countertop, backsplash, flooring, hardware, and paint is what creates a cohesive room.

0.7 Part 7: Light, power, water, and ventilation

The most comfortable kitchens layer several systems rather than relying on a single ceiling fixture or a few scattered outlets.

0.7.1 Lighting plan prompts

Ambient light provides overall illumination. **Task light** supports preparation, cooking, and cleanup. **Accent light** adds dimension through pendants, under-cabinet lighting, interior cabinets, or feature areas.

- ☐ Where do shadows currently make cooking or cleanup harder?
- ☐ Where should outlets be convenient but visually discreet?
- ☐ Which devices need a permanent charging location?
- ☐ Will the new layout require plumbing or gas changes?
- ☐ How should cooking odors and moisture be managed?

Discuss these systems before finalizing cabinetry. They are easiest to coordinate when the design and construction teams are working from the same plan.

0.8 Part 8: Have an honest investment conversation

The price of a kitchen remodel is shaped by scope, existing conditions, layout changes, cabinetry, appliances, surfaces, labor, and how many decisions are still open. A meaningful investment conversation is not about guessing a single number. It is about matching the project ambition to a realistic scope.

0.8.1 Ask for clarity in these categories

- What is included in the current scope, and what is specifically excluded?
- Which selections are known, which are allowances, and which have not been chosen yet?
- What existing conditions could affect the plan once walls or floors are opened?
- What portion of the scope is essential to the project and what is optional?
- How will a requested change be priced and approved before work moves forward?

A useful principle

The right project partner should help you understand the assumptions behind the plan. Clear assumptions make it easier to make tradeoffs intentionally instead of reacting under pressure during construction.

0.9 Part 9: Choose a remodeling partner thoughtfully

A kitchen remodel asks a team to coordinate design, planning, site protection, trade work, material timing, detailed installation, and communication. Look for a process that makes these responsibilities clear.

0.9.1 Contractor interview questions

1. Who leads design, estimating, and day-to-day construction communication?
2. How do you document scope, selections, and allowances before construction begins?
3. How are trade partners coordinated and quality checked?
4. What project information will I receive during construction?
5. How are changes reviewed, priced, and approved?
6. How do you protect the rest of the home from dust, debris, and disruption?
7. What does the closeout, punch-list, and warranty process look like?

8. Can you show work comparable in scope and style to my project?

0.10 Part 10: Understand the design-build workflow

A design-build approach keeps design and construction under one coordinated team. The benefit is not simply convenience. It is the ability to test design choices against construction requirements, ordering needs, and scope decisions before the project begins.

0.10.1 A clear project path

Discovery. Discuss goals, routines, existing conditions, project fit, and the broad opportunity.

Design and scope development. Build the layout, explore materials, consider technical needs, and define the key decisions.

Pre-construction. Finalize selections, confirm documentation, coordinate project logistics, and prepare the home.

Construction. Protect the site, complete demolition and technical work, install finished materials, manage quality checks, and communicate milestones.

Closeout. Complete the punch list, review the finished space, explain new systems, and hand off the project.

No two homes are identical. A well-run process gives the team a way to manage those differences without losing sight of the original goals.

0.11 Part 11: Prepare your home and household

A kitchen remodel changes daily routines. Preparing before construction starts can reduce stress and help the project team move efficiently.

0.11.1 Temporary-kitchen checklist

- ☐ Choose a location for a coffee station, microwave, and simple meal preparation.
- ☐ Decide how dishes, groceries, and small appliances will be stored.
- ☐ Plan simple meals, takeout options, and any major events during the project window.
- ☐ Identify a pathway for pets, children, and visitors that stays clear of work areas.
- ☐ Remove sentimental, fragile, or high-value items from adjacent spaces.
- ☐ Confirm how the team will access the home, communicate daily updates, and handle deliveries.

0.12 Part 12: Know what to expect during construction

Construction is a sequence. The exact order depends on your scope, but most kitchen remodels move through a similar progression.

Protection and preparation. Work areas are prepared, pathways are protected, and expectations are confirmed.

Demolition. Existing materials and components are removed carefully to reveal the conditions behind them.

Technical and structural work. Electrical, plumbing, ventilation, framing, and other foundational work happen before finished surfaces.

Cabinets and surfaces. Cabinet installation, countertop templating and installation, flooring, backsplash, and trim bring the design into view.

Finish and handoff. Fixtures, appliances, adjustments, cleaning, quality review, and punch-list completion prepare the kitchen for daily use.

0.13 Part 13: Make change decisions deliberately

Some adjustments are inevitable as a project evolves. The objective is not to eliminate every change; it is to understand the impact of each one before work proceeds.

0.13.1 Before you approve a change, ask

- What is changing in the scope or design?
- What other components are affected?
- What is the investment impact?
- What is the schedule impact?
- Does this change solve a meaningful problem or simply reflect a new preference?
- Is there an alternative that protects the original project priorities?

Keep decisions visible

Ask your project team to document meaningful changes in writing. A clear record protects the homeowner, the design intent, the budget, and the schedule.

0.14 Part 14: Your final readiness worksheet

Use this page immediately before the first detailed design or construction meeting.

- ☐ I can explain the top three problems my kitchen remodel must solve.
- ☐ I have identified who will make decisions and how those decisions will be made.
- ☐ I have gathered inspiration and can explain what I like about it.
- ☐ I have thought about appliance needs, storage needs, and household routines.
- ☐ I can discuss an investment range and what should be prioritized within it.
- ☐ I know which schedule dates, travel, or family events could affect construction planning.
- ☐ I am prepared to compare remodel partners by process, communication, scope clarity, and craftsmanship—not price alone.

Your next step

Bring this completed playbook to your consultation with Upgraded Remodeling. Nick and April can help translate your goals into a coordinated design-build plan for an Austin-area kitchen that supports the way you live.

Ready to discuss your kitchen?

Schedule your free consultation at upgradedremodeling.com/contact-us/ or call 512-799-7950.

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