

McLean Design Firm Puts Key Focus on 'Serial Remodelers'

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Some people remodel out of necessity or boredom. Others view it as an extension of their creative impulses.

Many customers of BOWA, a 60-employee McLean design firm that also has an office in Middleburg, are "serial remodelers" who improve their homes in stages.

Great Falls residents Donn and Sharon Davis have undertaken two remodeling projects with BOWA. The most recent effort doubled their house's size and added a family study, gym, master bedroom, basement playroom, garage, pool and several bathrooms.

"We wanted to remain in the house while the work was done, as we have three young kids who thought it would be a fun adventure," the couple said in an e-mail.

The Davises installed only modest technological upgrades.

"We did add iPod docks that play music throughout the entire house, as well as some motorized shades, but we did not want to undertake 'house automation,'" they wrote.

BOWA president Josh Baker described the serial-remodeling phenomenon and how his company is capitalizing on it.

When did this trend begin? "Even when we started the company, one of the things we've been most surprised about is that there are serial remodelers. During some years, our business is 40 percent repeat clients."

What are the traits of such customers? "Some of the serial remodelers do things in stages. They have a long-term plan and execute some parts now and some later. It's a tactical approach to remodeling.

With others, it's more organic. They start one project, live with it, identify new needs, do another. Those people have a passion for the whole remodeling process and they enjoy designing. Some people are remodeling spaces that they remodeled 20 years ago."

What are the advantages and disadvantages of serial remodeling? "There is the advantage of doing a project in stages. I tell all clients that they should plan for the future, have a strategy for what they want now and what they think they'll want in the future. They could plan for changes in the family, old age and new family members.

The point is to plan for the future and not limit the [remodeling project's] potential. If you're planning for additional work, you must install proper utilities so that project can be done more easily in the future.

The potential downside is it's likely to be

more expensive to spread construction over more projects. On the positive side, you may be able to keep living in the home during the projects.

Organic remodeling is less planned. These customers are almost addicted to remodeling and like to keep changing their homes. They have an appreciation for the trade and like engaging those folks."

What factors come into play with such projects? "The project priorities are based on the family's particular needs. By doing things in stages, they can have the financial ability to pay for things over time.

If you're planning for a future addition, we might install heating and cooling systems that are designed to handle the extra capacity in the future.

One of the conversations that always comes up is higher performance, green energy. [This equipment] will cost less to maintain over the long term. The technology side of things is so widespread. Some folks are technophiles and some aren't."

What's special about BOWA? "We are a one-stop shop. We offer complete accountability for design and construction of luxury renovations and additions.

What's different about us is that each project is unique. We don't have a signature

BOWA project. We put together a team of professional designers and consultants and are the clients' advocates throughout the whole process."

What do these projects cost? "As part of our services, we study what's feasible for [customers'] homes. Paper is cheap. It's better to look at all design opportunities before jumping into a solution. Projects generally start at \$100,000 and go up to the very high end."

What trends are you tracking? "Bigger is not always better. People are trying to focus and reuse existing spaces, rather than just expanding. People expect to spend more time in their home. They're less formal and they want the whole family around the kitchen.

People are becoming more conscientious of materials that are environmentally friendly, and looking at reducing their carbon footprint and increasing energy efficiency.

People continue to invest in spaces that are almost like vacation spots in their back yards. They want pools, fireplaces, more seating, cooking places and places for entertaining. The economy is part of it. People may be less extravagant with their travel. People say, 'I'd like to keep my kids home more.'"

For more information about the company, see the Web site at www.bowa.com.