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## Designers & architects can save you money

### Pros prevent expensive home-improvement errors

By Kari Richardson, Special to the Tribune

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It will be simple, you tell yourself. Head to the aisles of the nearest home improvement store and make selections. Some pretty tile here, a few shiny new appliances there, throw in a few cans of paint and you have the recipe for a rehabbed kitchen.

But what happens when the cabinets won't open fully because the self-designed layout didn't account for their hardware? Or when you can't plug in the mixer because you forgot to include an electrical outlet on the kitchen island?

Perhaps it's time to call a professional designer.

Architects, landscape architects and other certified professionals are experts at planning for long-term needs, advising on the latest and best products for the home and navigating the details of construction projects — things many homeowners aren't equipped to do themselves. Professionals can even save homeowners money by advising on reasonable project costs or preventing expensive errors.

Architect Stuart Cohen, who has been working in the Chicago area for nearly four decades, said architects and designers are also masters at finding creative solutions for the space-strapped. "The biggest thing that design professionals bring to the process — other than our experience and expertise as designers — is our space-planning ability," he said. "It's 'how do you get two sinks in one relatively small bathroom?'"

That was the reason North Barrington resident Kris Hiatt hired a professional to remake two smallish bathrooms in her 1930s cottage. She was so happy with the professional results that she didn't hesitate to contact Lake Zurich landscape architect Bill Bach for help when a problem arose outside. Hiatt's backyard, sloping sharply to a creek, was a jumble of weeds and overgrown junipers that she had no idea how to untangle. Worse yet was the constant pooling of water in her basement.

Now, with the basement water problem solved and attractive new landscaping installed, Hiatt again

has no regrets about hiring a professional.

"We love this house and want to be here for the rest of our lives," she said. "We want the highest quality."

Although high-end projects account for a portion of architect Patrick Fortelka's work, he has been asked to design structures as simple as detached garages and covered porches. Architectural fees, even for high-end architects, are a small percentage of building cost, he said, typically about 2.5 percent to 3 percent.

"You will spend more on appliances," said Fortelka, of Naperville's Charles Vincent George Design Group.

Working with clients on a budget is nothing new for Gail Drury, of Drury Design Kitchen & Bath Studio in Glen Ellyn.

"People think that homeowners who hire a designer have high-end, luxury projects," Drury said. "In reality, we can save people time and expensive mistakes."

Common gaffes, said Drury, include installing a refrigerator in a kitchen corner where too-tight space makes it impossible to open the crisper bins. Or neglecting to place electrical outlets where they are needed for meal preparation.

"A lot of it is simple engineering stuff," she said. "Most beginning designers have made one of these mistakes once early on in their careers — and they will never make it again."

Cindy Grier of Naperville was looking for that kind of expertise when she hired designer Elizabeth Marusin of Asparagus Interiors Inc. to assist with a kitchen and family room remodeling project.

"I don't know how to do this kind of thing," said Grier, who had lived in her home for 20 years with few updates before undertaking the project. "I really needed someone to help me."

Marusin, who prides herself on her knowledge of green products, helped Grier and her husband repurpose a pair of built-in bookcases by repainting them and adding IceStone shelves for plants, a material made of recycled glass and concrete. Marusin also helped the couple save money by working their existing appliances and artwork into the space plan she developed.

Outdoors, landscape architects develop similar space plans for clients looking to add decks, walkways and plants. Bill Bach of Bach & Associates Landscape Design & Build with offices in Lake Zurich and Duluth, Ga., encourages clients to think long-term when creating such a plan. Would they like to install a swimming pool one day? Is a new deck needed in the next couple of years?

Planning for the future, Bach said, gives a property a cohesive look and eliminates the danger of having to uproot beds or tear out walls to install a new landscaping feature — a common problem for do-it-yourselfers.

"Often (homeowners) do one little section and it looks great," he said. "Then they might attempt

another section and it still looks pretty good. The problem comes when they move beyond sections and start tying everything together." His firm's design fees vary from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the size of the property.

Landscape architects factor in relatively mundane things such as drainage, lighting, irrigation and soil quality before creating a plan, said Ryan Kettelkamp of Evanston's Kettelkamp & Kettelkamp Landscape Architecture, with plants as the "icing on the cake."

In the best scenarios, professional design increases resale value and boosts enjoyment during the time a homeowner spends in the property.

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