

 Lowcountry CLASSIFIEDS

real estate



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TO SELL!
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INSIDE!

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Under One Roof

Design-build can oversee all aspects of renovating a home, either to market or keep



A once drab master bathroom in a home in The Crescent was recharged with new tile floors, lighting fixtures, tub and bright colors. Classic Remodeling handled the design and work.

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PHOTO BY JIM PARKER/STAFF
Principals in Classic Remodeling & Construction Inc. include (from left) president Bob Fleming, his wife and former marketing director Sue Fleming and the new marketing director, Candice Culbertson.



Wooden fireplace mantel and surround and tray ceiling were two of the changes that Classic Remodeling made to this older home west of the Ashley.

BY JIM PARKER
The Post and Courier

Renewing homes to sell is but one feature of Classic Remodeling & Construction Inc.'s work. Yet, it's an important one.

The Johns Island venture specializes in so-called "design-build" renovations, handling everything from the architectural planning to the physical work. It remodels residences either for owners to enjoy or to prepare them for sale, tackling assignments "from \$50 to \$2 million (plus)," says Bob Fleming, company president.

With the recent housing downturn, there's a heightened awareness of how remodeling can beef up a home's list price.

"The first thing is (to make sure) the project is priced correctly," Fleming says. "In South Carolina, we do pretty good on pricing." At the same time, the home must be palatable to the

buyer. That's where restoration comes in.

Fleming cites a few tips to get a home ready for prospective purchasers.

- Make small repairs or improvements that don't cost much, such as repainting faded receptacles.
- Inside, focus upgrades on areas that shoppers tend to be most interested in such as family rooms, kitchens and master suites.
- Similarly, key on exterior spots that buyers would eye. That can include decking projects or landscaping features such as trellises or pergolas.

Celebrating its 20th year in the Charleston area, Classic Remodeling has 25 employees from designers to project managers. It also joins up with craftsmen and subcontractors on larger projects.

Homeowners typically meet

with a lead designer to go over the basics, including whether the work is compatible with the existing structure. "You don't want to put an ultramodern addition on an old style home," Fleming says.

Soon after, the company negotiates with the homeowner on a budget. "Most clients are unrealistic at first," he says. Usually it comes down to, "Do we cut the budget, increase the scope or meet in the middle?"

Whether remodeling to stay or sell, the homeowner should come prepared. "It always takes longer than you think for the design process," Fleming says. "But if you know where you're going, it moves faster."

The local business takes a hands-on approach to managing projects. "We have in-house people every day, looking out for the clients' best interest," Fleming says.

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

This house was opened up by allowing the kitchen to flow into the family room. Also adding to the ambiance are hardwood floors and pendant lighting.

ONE ROOF from page 6G

Before the work starts, Classic Remodeling brings together the project team, which includes the company's designer, site manager and color scheme selector as well as outside contractors such as electricians, plumbers and craftsmen. "We want their input to make sure we didn't miss something," Fleming says. For instance inspectors would point out that smoke detectors are required in every bedroom.

Then, the company holds a pre-construction meeting to explain the work to customers – for instance how long they would be without their kitchen and using a temporary cooking area.

"Remodeling is a very disruptive experience," he says.

Next comes a pre-drywall meeting, the last chance that customers can make changes in selection of wall switches or any other electrical or "behind the scenes" adjustments.

And Classic Remodeling holds a post-completion meeting to make sure the work is up to par. It usu-

ally is, says Fleming's wife Sue, former marketing director. "We are like family members," she says. "We get thank you notes."

Across the country, the housing industry has seen a builder shake-out, leading some contractors to venture into the design and remodeling business while trying to undercut the competition, Fleming says. But low prices don't always bring the best results.

"It's a lot different than buying a car," Fleming says. "You can touch and feel it and (cars) are built on the same assembly line." But no two home renovations are alike. "A lot of has to do with relationships."

Classic Remodeling uses a third party surveying firm, Guild Quality, to catalog what customers think of the company's work. Customer satisfaction has been at the 100 percent level the past three years.

The business recently started promoting its specialty services, where it handles smaller projects in a more streamlined manner. "You need fewer points of contact," Fleming says.

Whether a major or minor job,



Detail work around the fireplace marks this renovation of the living room in this downtown home.

shoppers should examine prospects closely to see that they are experienced and not fly-by-night operations. Customers can check with the businesses' vendors to see if they're being paid on time, he says, even visiting construction sites two or three times to see how the company performs.

"I think a homeowner needs to be more savvy in who they are hiring," Fleming says.

After all, remodeling can be aesthetically pleasing – and financially practical, says Candice Culbertson, the new marketing director. "It is building the value of the home."

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An obscure breakfast area at the back of the house was brought to life with glass shelves, an artistic ceiling fan, and French doors.

