

Custom Contracting, Inc.

“your neighborhood remodeler”

Your Neighborhood Remodeler

Now in our 22nd year!

Volume 33, Fall 2011

The Additions Issue

Could an Addition Be in Your Future?

We hear the story time and time again: Rather than trying to sell in this uncertain economy, homeowners are opting to make the most of their current space. After all, if you're going to stay where you are for awhile, you might as well enjoy it.



Please see the Client Spotlight (inside) for more details and photos on this two-story addition we recently completed for Custom client Suja Ramnath.

And contrary to what you might think, now is a good time to consider an addition to your home. Banks are offering historically low interest rates on home equity lines. Plus, unlike in much of the country, property values in Greater Boston have generally held up pretty well. A smartly planned addition that addresses your house's shortcomings will only enhance its value.

Weighing Cost vs. Value

Speaking of value, each year *Remodeling* magazine produces its Remodeling Cost vs. Value Report, which “compares the average cost for 35 popular remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale.”

As the 2010-2011 survey results show, some projects — including two-story additions — deliver a solid return on investment.

Interestingly, the figures captured below are quite similar to those from the 2008-2009 survey, so additions are holding their value in our region.

Highlights for midrange additions in New England:

- Deck (wood): 72.7%
- Deck (composite): 71.9%
- Two-story addition: 64.9%
- Family room: 62.8%
- Master suite: 60.7%
- Garage: 59.4%
- Sunroom: 51.9%
- Bathroom: 49.9%

Highlights for upscale additions in New England:

- Deck (composite): 58.2%
- Garage: 53.3%
- Master suite: 52.1%
- Bathroom: 49.8%

Custom Contracting, Inc.
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Management Memo:

What It Takes to Stay on Top



President Bill Farnsworth, general manager Scott Blain.

When you've worked as hard as we have to build a reputable company, it's nice to get validation that you're doing things right.

Satisfied clients are the most important type of validation for us. But recognition from our industry is nice too.

We're pleased that two forms of industry recognition have become a tradition at Custom: making *Qualified Remodeler* magazine's Top 500 Remodelers List and *Remodeling* magazine's Remodeling 550 list. (Please see the back of this newsletter for more details on this year's placements.)

With the thousands of remodeling firms in the United States, what allows Custom to rise to the top, year after year? Here are five factors that stand out to us.

1) Quality of the team. This is where it all starts. We've carefully put together a team of skilled professionals with specialized remodeling expertise. Several are certified lead carpenters, which means they also have the management skills to keep your home improvement project running smoothly. It all adds up to high-quality work that we are proud to back with a one-year warranty.

2) Network of skilled trade partners. Our in-house team is augmented by talented trade partners whom we can call upon for particular project needs. From electric and plumbing work to painting and roofing, we've got you covered. Any most of our trade partners have been with us for well over a decade, so we know they do great work.

3) A robust organization. Among the many advantages we present compared with "fly-by-night" contractors or even smaller remodeling firms is our large office staff. For instance, we have a project coordinator who (among many other things) assists with tasks like product selection. Also, we always have people in our office who can handle any logistical concerns you might have during a project. With Custom, you can count on a high level of customer service.

4) Twenty-two years of experience. When you hire a remodeling firm, you want to be sure they know what they're doing. Our carpenters have been in the industry for a long time, so they're skilled in troubleshooting most any issue that might arise during your project. And having been in business since 1990, we can draw upon mounds of historical data to produce accurate estimates upfront — rather than having you incur additional costs after the project is underway.

5) Client loyalty. Most remodeling firms don't last more than a few years. The biggest factor in our continued success is our clients, many of whom have become repeat clients and/or provided referrals. Thank you!

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Spotlight on Two-Story Additions

Many of the additions we do at Custom are covered above, but we'd also add these to the list:

- Kitchen bump-out plus family room (our most popular kind of addition)
- Kitchen bump-out plus bathroom
- Dormer
- Porch conversion (e.g. creating a new bedroom or office)

Sometimes our additions involve two floors of the house, such as these projects from recent years:

1. For a Lexington home, first-floor work included bumping out the kitchen and bathroom, and adding a guest room/study and laundry room. On the second floor, we expanded the common bathroom and added a bathroom and walk-in closet to the master bedroom.
2. For another Lexington home, we renovated and added space to the first-floor kitchen and family room, and created a master suite on the second floor.
3. For an Arlington home, we added a garage-size room on the first floor and "his-and-her" dens on the second floor.

Experience Matters

At Custom, we've completed dozens of additions over the past 22 years. Our experience serves us — and our clients — very well.

For instance, many homeowners are concerned about the disruptions that building an addition can cause. We can call on our experience to minimize those disruptions and make the experience more pleasant for your family.

In addition, we understand how much it costs to do various types of additions. We can give you a rough estimate on pricing and other considerations, and then you can decide on whether we should proceed with a formal proposal.

So if you're even thinking about an addition, don't hesitate to request a free consultation from Custom. We'd be happy to talk through your goals, budget and all other aspects of the project.

Client Reward Program

Refer a friend, get a gift: That's how our Client Reward Program works. You qualify for this program when:

- someone calls in and says you referred them,
- a referral signs on with us for their project, or
- you serve as a reference to a prospective client.

For more details, please call us at 781-648-2835.

Custom Is All Over the Web

Be sure to visit Custom's website at www.custom-contracting.com. You can see photos from past projects, read project spotlights, learn about our design/build approach to remodeling and much more.

Plus, Custom has dedicated pages at Facebook, YouTube, Yelp! and Angie's List. Once you're on our website, you can access these pages by clicking on the icons below.



Check out photos from recent client projects, tips from Custom and more. You can even write a review of Custom or "Like" us.



Our YouTube page is loaded with videos from the National Association of the Remodeling

Industry. Remodeling tips, information on NARI certification and more.



If you're a Custom client, we'd appreciate it if you took a moment to share your thoughts at yelp.com, which features reviews for a variety of businesses.



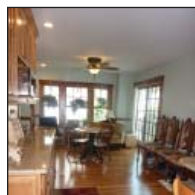
If you're an Angie's List member, please tell others about your experience with Custom.

Get Useful Tips & More Via Email

Would you like to receive emails featuring tips and other information about home remodeling and repairs? Just go to www.custom-contracting.com and fill out the form on our home page. We'll add you to our list!

Flooring Options for Every Taste & Budget

Whether you're planning a major addition or just renovating a single room, you have to factor in flooring. In order to simplify the process, we've broken your flooring options into four categories — here's what project coordinator Michael Daniell had to say about each.



Traditional Flooring

"Hardwood floors — typically white or red oak — are still the standard in kitchens, bedrooms, living rooms, hallways, etc. The big challenge with hardwood is making sure the new floor matches the look of the existing floors in adjacent rooms. It's very hard to perfectly match new oak with old, due to variables in the grain and hue.

"We're seeing more and more homeowners go with prefinished hardwood, which has already been sanded and coated with three coats of urethane. As a homeowner, it's nice not having to deal with the hassle and smell of having your floors finished on premises. And while prefinished wood is priced higher than natural wood, installation and preparation costs are much less. So it's pretty much a wash in terms of pricing."



Modern Flooring

"Here, you're looking at ceramic and porcelain tiles. You'll typically find these in bathrooms along with the occasional kitchen. Ceramic and porcelain come in a lot of patterns, shapes and colors, so you can probably find something right for your tastes.

"If you like the look of tile, the one big drawback is price. The per-square-foot price varies quite a bit, but you can count on tile being more expensive than hardwood. It also requires a lot more time for floor preparation and installation, which adds to the overall cost."



Resilient Flooring

"This category includes modern and commercial-grade vinyl as well as floating floors (both pergo laminate and wood veneer). You're most likely to find resilient flooring in a kitchen or perhaps a basic bathroom, but we don't do a lot of this category. Generally speaking, this is the least expensive of the four categories.

"What's nice about vinyl is that it comes in a variety of widths, so you don't have too many seams in the floor. Manufacturers also offer a wider variety of patterns now; some vinyls even have a 'tile' look."



Green Flooring

"Green flooring includes bamboo, cork and marmoleum, all of which are generally less expensive than hardwood. Bamboo usually comes in the form of a floating floor. Cork floors usually consist of raw cork with another material, like linoleum, on top. So you get the thickness and resiliency of cork but don't actually see it.

"Manufacturers describe marmoleum as a natural version of linoleum. It's environmentally friendly because it is made using all-natural materials and lasts for a long time. Plus, it looks a lot better than the drab flooring that most people associate with linoleum."

Not sure which type of flooring would be best for your remodeling project? Call Custom at 781-648-2835 — we'll be happy to go over your options.

Client Spotlight: The Ramnath Home

Wellesley's Suja Ramnath has lived in her 1920s-era colonial home since 2000. A couple years ago, she decided that while she loved the charm, she needed more elbow room and an updated interior.

Based on a recommendation from co-worker (and Custom client) Kevin Harrington, Suja contacted us to discuss her vision. The end result — a two-story addition — created the space she wanted and blended in seamlessly with the rest of the house.

“Kevin had always spoken so highly of Custom, and I could see the quality of their work when I visited the Harringtons,” said Suja. “Plus, when it comes to remodeling projects, it seems you always hit bumps in the road. I felt it was important to work with someone who could recalibrate when those issues came up. In talking with [president] Bill Farnsworth, I trusted that he could be flexible and creative in those situations.”

As it turns out, Suja's instincts were right on.

Dealing with Zoning Issues & More

When planning an addition, our first step is to determine if it will create any issues with regard to zoning or setbacks (how far you must build from the property line without needing a variance). Another issue is lot coverage — how much square footage is covered by the home vs. open space.

The original plans were fine in terms of lot coverage, but the proximity of Suja's attached garage to an abutting property made it necessary to acquire a special permit. We eventually were able to secure the special permit, but that added months to the planning process.

Next, we worked with Suja to finalize a floor plan and set a budget range to which we could design. The final plans called for a large two-story addition with a renovated kitchen and new family room on the first floor and a new master suite on the second. A smaller one-story section of the addition structure would consist of a half bathroom and entryway from the garage.

Visualizing the Master Bedroom

Suja and Custom designer Nikki DeFelice collaborated to come up with an open kitchen plan featuring a large island, granite counters, white painted cabinetry and more.

“The kitchen is over the moon — it's fantastic,” exclaimed Suja. “I actually don't cook at all, but I wanted a top-of-the-line kitchen, and that's what Custom gave me.”

Continued on back



Although Suja doesn't cook often, she did want a top-of-the-line kitchen.



Continued from front

Upstairs, Suja struggled with imagining what the master bedroom would look like. Fortunately, lead carpenter Bryan Lamoureux was able to provide the necessary guidance.

“Once we had the space gutted and ready for re-framing, we took a deep breath and Bryan worked closely with Suja to lay out the room in a way that met her approval,” said Bill. “Sometimes, no matter how good it looks on paper, clients have a hard time visualizing from the plans, so a site layout becomes the best way to get them what they want and the confidence that they’re making the right decisions.”

Quality People, Quality Work

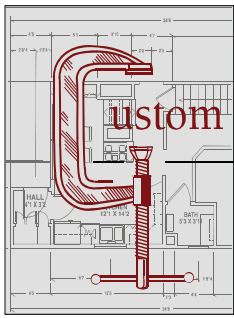
Suja is thrilled with her addition, especially with how well it integrates with the original home. “The most important thing to me was for people to not even notice I had new rooms,” she said. “And when you come into the house, they look like they’ve always been there. That’s a real compliment to Custom.

“I don’t have enough good words to say about Custom. I’d recommend them to anyone.”

Suja must really mean it. We’re now in discussions to replace her sunroom and add a full front porch next spring. We look forward to starting the design/build process in January!



The top floor of Suja’s two-story addition features a new master suite.



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From the Office



Two Honors for Custom

Qualified Remodeler magazine has published its **2011 Top 500 Remodelers List**, and Custom placed No. 337. This is the 11th time we've made the list in 11 tries.

Now in its 33rd year, the annual QR500 ranks the nation's top remodeling firms by revenue. In addition to sales volume for the previous year, it lists criteria such as number of employees, years in business, association membership and industry awards.



Meanwhile, *Remodeling* magazine recently released its **2011 Remodeling 550** list, and Custom ranked No. 120 on the **Full-Service Remodelers** list. That placed us ninth among Massachusetts companies.

The Remodeling 550 consists of the largest home improvement companies in the United States, distinguishing among full-service, replacement and insurance restoration contractors as well as franchise operations.

Continuing Education & Training

A quick update on continuing education and training recently completed by members of the Custom team.

Code Changes: Project coordinator Michael Daniell and production manager Craig Lielasus recently completed training on changes to the Massachusetts building code. Changes that went into effect in August included updates to structural requirements and the state's stretch energy code.

“A lot of the changes impact new construction more than remodeling. But this type of training is valuable because it keeps us in the loop on some important issues and helps with the renewal of our contractor's license,” said Craig.

We'll have more on code changes in a future issue.



Trip to Hansgrohe: In October, Michael also took part in a training event at Hansgrohe headquarters in Atlanta. The manufacturer of innovative kitchen, bath and shower products hosted remodelers from throughout the country for a tour of their plant, a chance to try out new products, a “remodelers roundtable” and more.

Our thanks to F.W. Webb Company for securing an invitation for Michael, who was one of only three Massachusetts remodelers to attend.