

planning+products ask a pro

# Smart Updates

Hit a wall in your remodeling project? Don't fret—our team of professionals at the National Association of the Remodeling Industry is here to answer your most challenging questions.



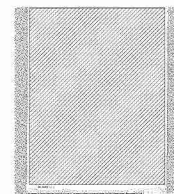
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KING AU, left; MIKE JENSEN, opposite, top left; BLAINE MCATS, opposite, middle left; BRYAN MCCAY, opposite, bottom left.

**Q** I have an entryway adjacent to my garage. Half of it serves as our mudroom, and the other half is a laundry room. What would be a good built-in storage solution for folded items that wouldn't make the space feel even smaller?

**A** If your main concern is making the area look bigger, choose open shelving or glass-front cabinets—the eye reads it as open space, which is key to making a small room look larger. When it comes to laundry rooms, however, some things are best kept behind closed doors, especially for child and pet safety. Consider installing base cabinets next to your washer or dryer. This will provide some folding space and closed storage for those potentially dangerous cleaning supplies—just be sure to use child safety locks to keep contents out of reach from curious little hands.

**Q** We have a gas fireplace in our den, and its back side bumps into our screen porch. Is it possible to convert the fireplace into a double-sided unit that opens to both spaces?

**A** Two-sided fireplaces are beautiful, indeed. But transforming an existing fireplace into the one you're dreaming of can be rather tricky. Have a qualified installer look to see whether your unit can be modified; a complete demolition and reconstruction may be necessary. If you live in a climate where temperatures vary greatly from season to season, you'll have to install something on each side to prevent cooled and heated air from sneaking out your home. An improperly sealed fireplace is like having a 5-square-foot hole in the side of your house—and the high energy bills could drain your enjoyment of your new fireplace pretty fast.

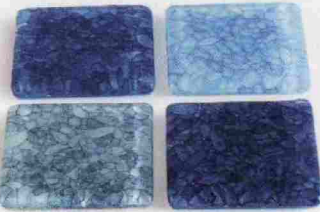


**HAVE A QUESTION?** Visit [BHG.com/remodeling](http://BHG.com/remodeling), click on Ask a Pro to submit your question, and get a quick, personalized response.

**Q** My home is nearly perfect. The problem? It's not big enough. I'm thinking of converting the garage into a study. Is that smart?



**A** Converting a garage from a parking spot into living space is significantly less expensive than a standard addition. Chances are it's already wired, adding to the budget-friendly appeal of this project. But before you get started, do your homework. Find out if this remodel will comply with local building codes, and determine whether you have enough alternate parking for yourself and guests (some homeowner associations prohibit long-term parking in the driveway or on the street). Adding 600 square feet of living space sounds good for resale, but if a garage is a must-have for home buyers in your area, this conversion could actually hurt your home's value. If, however, you and your housing market can stand to part with the garage, let the conversion begin. Many a man cave, study, playroom, home office, or den started as a garage. Assuming your garage has a window already, consider installing a room air-conditioner that cools and heats, such as one from Friedrich's Kühl series (available in six colors and with a remote control). It's cheaper than expanding your central air system, and the timer lets you program on/off times to correlate with the room's use.



**Q** While shopping for shower tiles for our bath remodel, my husband and I found some we love at a big-box store. Our problem? The store doesn't stock the bullnose pieces. Is there something we can do to the existing tile to make it work? We're trying to avoid bringing in another material.

**A** This is a common complaint about big-box stores. We all love them and patronize them, but issues like this sometimes arise. If you really love the field tile you've found, a little sleuthing is in order. Check out the box the tile comes in, and jot down the tile style information and manufacturer name. A visit to that company's Web site should direct you to a tile supplier that has full access to the line. Or ask around the store to find a tile guru who can help you come up with an alternate solution that won't compromise your shower's style.



**Q** I'm tired of the tile countertops in my kitchen, but I don't want to deal with the mess and hassle of tearing them out. Is there a surface I can simply install over the tiles that will complement our granite-topped island?

**A** I understand your dread of removing the tile—the process isn't fun. Quartz overlay surfaces can be installed over existing tile. But for the price of veneer, you could probably pay someone to rip out the tile and install new countertops to match the island. Consider granite tile—it's a more affordable way to bring a high-end material into your home.

## NARI Spotlight

**NARI PROFESSIONAL**  
 Jonas K. Carnemark of Carnemark Systems + Design, Inc.  
**PROJECT**  
 Kitchen remodel  
**LOCATION**  
 Bethesda, Maryland



**Q** Some contemporary spaces can feel cold. What's the secret to this kitchen's warmth?

**A** The red wall in the foreground is key. It houses a support beam and ductwork, but we chose to turn it into a focal point with a pop of color and display space for the vase to make it both functional and artistic.



**Q** How does this space stay clutter-free?

**A** I like to use a mass wall to house storage and appliances; it frees up space for things often left out of the kitchen, such as art, media, and color.

**Q** How does the design and zoning contribute to the kitchen's efficiency?

**A** Zoning is a huge part of this kitchen's design. It's divided into areas for perishables, nonperishables, cooking, and cleaning. This way, everything has its designated place so the homeowner can work efficiently while keeping footsteps to a minimum.