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PHOTO BY ALYSSA GRAHAM

(From left) Lori Harrington, Carolyn Johnson and Heidi Pierce in their new Uptown showroom, which they designed and remodeled themselves.

Standing the heat

BY GREGORY J. SCOTT

The women of Satoree Design want you to love your kitchen

Designers Lori Harrington, Carolyn Johnson and Heidi Pierce didn't waste any time.

Just days after their previous employer, Home Valu Interiors, fell spectacularly into bankruptcy last January, the three women were in Harrington's basement, cooking up an entrepreneurial plan. By the end of the month, they had launched Satoree Design, scooping up many of the orphaned Home Valu customers and providing some business to the company's newly out-of-work contractors. Eight months later, the trio opened their cozy Uptown showroom at 1612 West Lake St. They're now winning bids for some major kitchen and bath remodels in the area.

It's a phoenix-from-the-ashes story. But the brand new showroom — with its countertop samples, its tile collection, and its tantalizing models of cabinets, islands and appliances — is just the first chapter.

We met the Satoree women at their new Uptown location for a brief chat about design tastes in Southwest, some remodeling advice and why painted cabinets and inset doors will never go away.

First off, can you tell us briefly what your specialties are?

Johnson: We do kitchens and bathrooms. Countertops are a big thing, both solid surface and laminate. We focus on doing homes and remodeling. But we also work with a lot of property management companies for apartment turn-arounds, redoing their cabinetry.

Pierce: We can do everything start to finish, too. We'll come to your home for a free consultation and to establish a budget. We'll design the project and install it. Or customers can just purchase materials from us and install it themselves.

Are you finding any tastes or design concerns that are particular to the Southwest area?

Pierce: It really varies. Just the homes around the lakes, if they're newly remodeled, then they can be modern. Or they can be very old.

Johnson: Very often they try to stick within the period and style of the home. Or they have a smaller kitchen and they want to better utilize it. Because they didn't make big kitchens in the older homes. A lot of times we

open up the kitchen into the home, taking out walls. Maybe a little bit more of an open floor plan.

Harrington: It's South Minneapolis, you got all the oak floors. And you know, a lot of maple going in. People are really drawn to painted cabinets. And inset doors. That's really traditional. Or they swing the other way and go really contemporary. So we hope to show that we're really versatile here. We can really do any kind of look.

The tax credits during the first half of this year encouraged a lot of people to take the plunge into homeownership. Now a lot of these folks are facing remodeling issues for the first time. What kind of advice would you give to a first-time remodeler?

Johnson: Really get your budget figured out. Price out everything before you start the project. If you just whirlwind it, you might spend twice as much as you had planned. A lot of people think that the big box stores are going to save them money, and that's not necessarily true. We do cabinet bids all the time for Home Depot, and we often come in for less.

Harrington: They really need to understand all the steps. Like installing counter tops. You're probably going to have some plumbing involved. Some demolition involved. It might affect your tile. Someone thinks, oh, it's easy just to replace the countertops. But it can get really tricky.

What trends are you seeing in kitchen design right now?

Pierce: Thicker countertops. And people really want the bells and whistles on the inside of their cabinets. Soft-closing doors. Places to store trays and utensils. I think that's really a big trend right now, just to make it hidden and functional.

Harrington: People realize that if they're doing any kind of entertaining, it's going to end up in the kitchen. And they really want the kitchen to function for that. So it's the island. It's all about the island. If you can get an island in, they're going to want it. And if you can't, well then we're just going to pretend.

And the overall trend in housing is to go from the big McMansion to a smaller house. People don't want the 5,000-square-foot house. That being said, the kitchen is going to be smaller, so you really need to utilize that space.

It depends on who walks in the door. You know, younger people they just gravitate toward darker, toward glass, more contemporary. But painted cabinets and inset doors, that never goes away.

With dipping home prices, some people have come to question whether homeownership is still a reliable path toward wealth. Are remodels still a smart way to boost the value of a home?

Johnson: It is.

Harrington: And good design doesn't have to be expensive. We can come in and suggest good design changes, and it doesn't have to be the \$75,000 remodel. I think it's always worth it to put that in.

Johnson: And it's your life. You have to think about your life in your home.

Harrington: People are more conservative. There was always this assumption that you put the money in your house, and your house is going to appreciate, and you're going to come out fine in the end. So I think now people have to make a choice of how bad they want it.

Do you have any tips for smaller, budget-friendly tweaks that might make a dramatic impact on a kitchen?

Pierce: Repaint the cabinets.

Harrington: Countertops. Add a backsplash, and put new hardware in.

Satoree Design, 1612 W. Lake St., is hosting a grand opening party for the showroom Sept. 23, 3-8 p.m.
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