

Coach Remodeling Trends

by Sharleen Nelson

Interior design trends are continually in flux. Who can forget the earthy tones of the 1970s—harvest gold and avocado green walls juxtaposed against wall-to-wall, electric-orange shag carpeting? Believe it or not, variations of these three colors are back in vogue. Even shag carpeting has made a comeback, but now they're calling it "frisé." Still, when we grow tired of our theme, what do we do? We remodel. Interior trends come and go in residential homes, and the same applies to Marathon coaches. Owners may be fond of their coach's floorplan, yet want to update the interior to reflect their unique personal style. Remodeling can be a satisfying experience. Not only do you acquire the features you need, but you can also obtain the one-of-a-kind style you've always desired. Are you ready for a makeover?

Coach Remodeling Do's & Don'ts

Remodeling is a relatively broad term; it can be as simple as updating the lighting, reupholstering furniture, or switching out a few accessories to alter the look and feel. Or it can be completely redoing the bath, replacing floors and tile work, reconfiguring space to accommodate electronics or a computer workstation, or taking advantage of multiple uses in the underbelly.


According to Marathon Sales and Service Technician Mike Norton, customers have different motivations and needs. "One customer wanted a complete remodel. His parents purchased a new coach and gave him their previous one, so he remodeled it to his own taste," he said. "Other customers will come in and have a sofa redone, or with flooring, they'll change out the carpet color or go to a stone or



Switching to HDTVs and adding computer workstations are in high demand.

wood floor." Service Manager Pat Sprenger said Marathon typically does 10 to 15 remodels a year. "We get requests for everything, but if you break it down to individual projects, it would be flooring, upholstery, valances, headliners, flat-screen TVs, and computer cabinets."

Karl Allegger, a service technician that specializes in electronics and electrical systems, said that popular electronic upgrade items include DVRs, surround-sound systems, GPS mapping systems, camera surveillance systems, and even ports to accommodate iPods. "We're in the digital age now," he said, "so we get a lot of orders for flat-screen TVs, computer stations—even in newer coaches, people are requesting an extra workstation." Marathon Service Technician Fred Goodwin, whose specialty is cabinet design, assists owners with structural changes, for instance, constructing a computer work space, which is currently in high demand. Goodwin said that workstations are a relatively easy undertaking in most coaches. "On some of the older buses, we actually have an inven-



tory of already built, stock cabinets,” he said. “When a customer comes in wanting a computer cabinet, we can say, ‘there’s one right here.’ We just have to wrap it in the proper laminate and build them a deck—it’s all done very quickly.”

Still, when considering a remodel, customers are discouraged from altering the basic structure of the coach, or taking on projects that might be cost prohibitive. “Moving walls around is not good for us,” Sprenger said. “We accommodate customers as much as we can,” added Goodwin, “but we steer them away from actually ripping decks out because they’re big and pretty much cemented in. If you get into moving pocket doors or refrigerators, that’s a lot of work.”

When customers first come in with their ideas, a technician evaluates the coach to determine if the project is viable. “I’ll get their ideas and put them down on paper—anything from underbelly to interior work,” Goodwin said. “Based on the evaluation, I give them my input and we work together to design something that will accommodate their particular coach.”

Redesigning the Interior

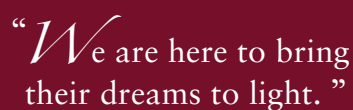
The motor coach industry tends to echo many of the same national trends in home interior decoration, and fads come and go, but according to Marathon Coach Interior Designers Jennifer Clausen and Gail Curtis, their job isn’t to discourage anyone, but rather, to listen to the client’s ideas and guide them toward a satisfactory end result. “If they want a certain look, I encourage their selections and respect their personal taste,” said Curtis.

Clausen agrees. “A client’s personal ideas can be implemented or tweaked in a way that’s complimentary and tasteful in the small space of a coach, but not overwhelming,” she said. “Ultimately, I want the client to feel comfortable in their environment and the environment to reflect who they are.”

“We are here to bring their dreams to light,” Curtis said.

Curtis often recommends a design style that is “transitional,” in the sense that it incorporates some traditional, as well as modern, el-

ements. “I generally avoid materials and accessories that are excessively large scale,” she said. “Earth tones are often the colors people want—tan, black, gold, and brown—possibly adding a splash of color such as red. We then pull all of the old and new elements together to give them a classic look.” Clausen is of the same opinion, but with a twist. “That’s the beauty of our job as interior designers, no two coaches are the same,” she said. “We’re able to implement ideas and be innovative on every project whether that is more modern in one scheme, traditional in the next, or something in-between!”



“We are here to bring their dreams to light.”

Owners contemplating a remodel should also consider how they use their coach. Do they travel with kids or animals or do they use the space primarily for entertaining? For clients who use their coach in a heavy-duty capacity, Curtis recommends choosing durable fabrics and accessories. “Treated leather, sunbrella and kryptonite products are always quite durable,” she said. “There is also a wide variety of new velvets, chenilles, and silks that are made with extremely durable fibers that mimic the look and feel of the original, yet are rated for high-use or contract use, and are even fire rated.” For those meticulous clients who use their coach only for entertaining or “light duty,” Curtis said she would incorporate “some elegant silks and fine crystal accessories.”

According to Clausen, if an owner has a coach with sofas, they should consider having them both upholstered. “Balance is important in a small space, so placing one leather sofa across from one fabric sofa causes the space to be disconnected and the suggestion that





Left: Bill and Patti Woods' coach before their remodel.



Above and right: The Woods' southwestern-themed coach after their remodel.

there was a shortage of one or both materials." Perhaps the most inexpensive way to achieve a new look is by simply adding accents. Small changes can often make a tremendous difference. A few coordinated and well-placed accessories can change the entire look and feel of a coach. "Accessory pieces are the 'icing on the cake,'" said Clausen. "They add a residential and personal feel to a coach's interior."

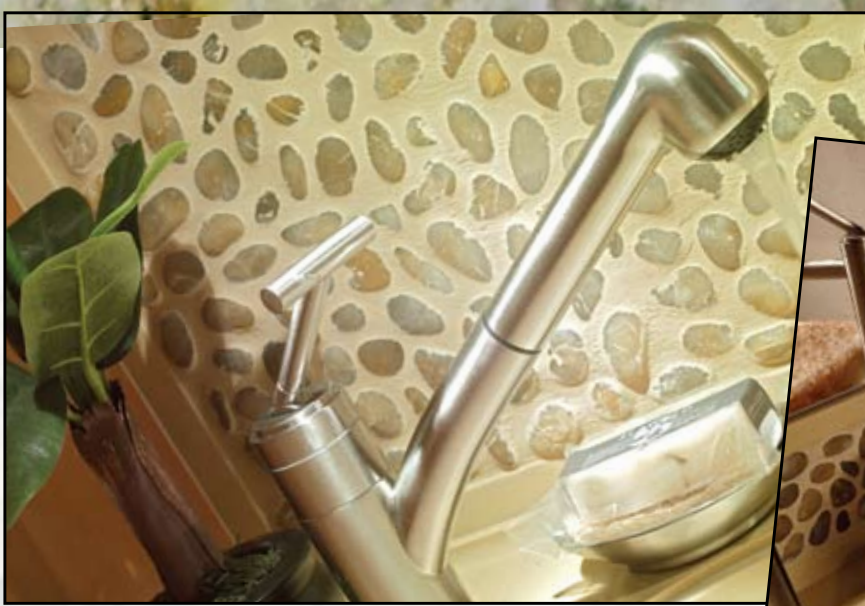
Indeed, according to Curtis, accessories are the only upgrade some clients request. She recently put together a full accessories package for a client. "We designed custom pillows, galley ware, lighting, artwork, and rugs," she said. "The coach was very neutral—black and beige—so we also brought in some dramatic accessories and color accents to liven it up. The clients loved the transformation and told me it felt like a brand new coach."

Using Themes

If you're in the mood for a completely different vibe, themes are another way to go for sprucing up a ho-hum interior space. A terrific

example of a theme coming to fruition was achieved with a pre-owned Marathon coach purchased by Bill and Patti Woods. Before the remodel, their coach reflected a more traditional style, and the furniture arrangement didn't reflect the Woods' lifestyle. "There was nothing wrong with it the way that it was," Bill said. "but we didn't like the couch arrangement. We felt it was a little too stark, or a little too formal that you're sitting across from each other." Additionally, because the Woods use their computers a good deal when traveling in the coach, the L-shaped dinette also didn't suit their needs.

Typically, customers spend time on the phone or come in and sit down directly with the interior designers to discuss and choose color schemes, design ideas, new materials, etc., but in this case, the Woods knew exactly what they wanted—southwestern. "They offered no input other than 'southwestern,'" said Norton. "They told Gail, the interior designer on the project, to use her imagination, and they were very happy with the results."



Bill Woods sent Marathon an e-mail detailing what he and his wife Patti wanted. "You guys are experts at what you do, you do it every day, so my philosophy was to give you the general idea and then let you run with it," he said. "We simply said, 'please make it happen, and we'll be more than satisfied'...and we are."

For the Woods' remodel, Curtis eliminated one of the couches and recommended a complete dinette rebuild. "It was more traditional looking; a little bit formal, so I just selected a dinette fabric that brought out the colors that already existed in the coach and tried to mutate it into something with a southwestern feel." She also commissioned a new pile sculpted rug with a southwestern motif to

complement the chocolate leather sofa, which the Woods loved.

What's Hot?

So what are the hot trends that people are asking for? According to Curtis and Clausen, clients are updating their backsplashes and shower bands to incorporate new materials such as stone, glass, ceramic, and metal tiles, as well as upgrading the faucetry and bath accessories with finishes such as oil-rubbed or natural bronze and brushed nickel. "Polished brass is not used as much," said Clausen. "Oil-rubbed bronze and nickels are very popular, and polished chrome is still a classic selection."

The designers receive many requests to remove existing carpet or solid surface flooring

Most Popular Remodel Items

- Flat-Screen TVs
- Computer Tables/Workstations
- Furniture Reupholstering
- Flooring
- Valances
- Underbelly/Bays
- Tile Backsplashes
- Fixtures/Lighting
- Decorative Accessories



Slide-masters have a 2,000-pound capacity and pull out like a huge drawer.



The Clinger kitties adore their underbelly condo lifestyle!

and put in granite, marble, or wood plank flooring. "Clients are also interested in adding flooring accent tiles in metal or contrasting materials," Curtis said. And if they're not removing the carpet, they are upgrading to new, fresh patterns, typically earth tones, but with more texture. "The textured carpet is very popular," Curtis said. "The sculpted design also adds interest and drama to the space."

Reupholstering furniture can certainly change the entire look, but in addition to updating the obvious furniture pieces, headboards, stiles, and valances can also be redone. "In regard to upholstery, attention is given to the design and styling of the piece, and also to materials selection," said Curtis. "I like to use sturdy chenilles, velvets, and soft leathers." As addressed earlier, a complete accessories package installation can go a long way toward revitalizing the inside of a coach, as can adding or switching out lighting, rugs, or new bedding and pillows to introduce splashes of color—a great way to soften, liven up, or completely change the overall look.

Structurally, Sprenger and Norton have had requests to remove mirrored ceilings, which

can be replaced with three-panel headliners for a more classic and toned-down effect. "Another hot thing is the entryway," said Norton. "People seem to like stainless steel and the new polished door panels that are on most of Marathon's new coaches."

A sometimes overlooked area is the underbelly, or bay sections of the coach. Although the dimensions vary depending on the type of coach, its year, and whether the coach has slide-outs, the space underneath can be transformed in a variety of interesting ways—from installing wine coolers and freezers to storage cabinets and closets. According to Goodwin, the underbelly entertainment center is a frequent request, particularly in older coaches that have the smaller 20-inch TVs. "We take out the whole cabinet and replace it with a bracketing system for a flat-screen TV," he said. Recently, Goodwin and Alleger installed a barbecue for a customer that slides out from the bay.

Another popular item for the bay is a "slide-master," a slide with bearings that works like



Custom barbecue grills that slide out from the bays are immensely popular.

Ideas for uses of the underbelly space are only limited by one's imagination.

a huge drawer, allowing customers to easily stow and retrieve stored items without having to crawl around inside the bay. "It has a 2,000-pound capacity, so it can hold a lot of weight," said Goodwin. "It's one thing we do a lot of, and because we've streamlined the process, they're simple to do."

Ideas for uses of the underbelly space are only limited by one's imagination. Marathon coach owners Cub and Carolyn Clinger transformed their coach's underbelly space into a feline retreat, complete with a playhouse, custom-made cabinets, and a rope staircase. "We put a stereo down there and the cats had their own music and TVs," said Allegor. "We called it 'The Kitty Condo,'" said Goodwin. The underbelly of a coach is also spacious enough for humans. "We recently did a bedroom for a customer's teenage son," he said. "We cut a hole in the floor and made a hatch, which was hidden by carpet, but sealed so when you walked into the bus you wouldn't notice it. When the boy

wanted to go to the room, he simply moved a recliner, opened the hatch, and took the stairs we put in going down." In addition to a bed, the hideaway included a full-screen TV with a DVD player and a small A/C wall unit. "It was his own little apartment in the bay," Allegor said. "It was very neat—an underbelly lounge!"

Remodeling Experts

If you're considering a remodel, Marathon is here to help. Unlike a remodeling project in your residential home, in which you must work with several companies and people—one business for flooring, another for countertops, yet another for tile, and so on—Marathon's Oregon facility offers full service interior design, exterior paint, and service departments, all under one roof.

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According to Sprenger, customers benefit from Marathon's collusion of creativity, quality materials, and workmanship. "They get total access to the interior designers; their knowledge and resources, as well as all of the experience and expertise in the service department—the full treatment as if they were putting together a brand new coach."

Coach owners can even stay in their coach while the work is being done. "In most cases, they can spend 95% of the time in the coach," Norton said. "We don't run them out. They can sleep in there every night." Alleger concurs: "For most jobs, depending on the amount of work we're doing, the customer is not at all inconvenienced."

Once a coach owner has decided to pursue a remodeling project, Marathon's service and design departments work closely with them throughout the entire process. Customers

are encouraged to bring their ideas, lists, and particularly, examples, which might be something they saw in Marathon's annual calendar, a magazine, or a feature observed in a neighbor's new coach.

Bill Woods summarized his coach remodel experience this way: "I believe in giving kudos when they are earned: It was a pleasure dealing with Marathon. I think people absolutely should take advantage of their services because we are more than pleased with our 'new' remodeled coach."

Now that you know about all the hot trends, and basic do's and don'ts of interior coach remodeling, perhaps it's time to let Marathon's design experts help you attain that one-of-a-kind style you've always wanted. •

—Editorial Note: Look for more coach design-related articles in upcoming issues of The Maratime.