

Builder Profile



Chris Chumbley: Exceeding Expectations

Chris Chumbley | USI Design & Remodeling

By Chad Andycha

Chris Chumbley got his start in the building and remodeling industry at a young age. He attributes his early growth and development to his strong willingness to learn as much as possible from his employers and other mentors in the business. For the past twenty years, his company, USI Design & Remodeling, has been dedicated to residential remodeling and has evolved into a design-build company with a distinct niche in the home improvement industry.

“Our particular company is at the advanced end of the remodeling industry. We do projects that most people cannot do,” said Chumbley. He believes there’s a big misconception in the consumer market that there are remodelers all over the place that can handle significant projects. In fact, that pool is quite small. “People today are looking for higher quality and more amenities, so they’re gravitating toward a unique part of the market.”

Since the collapse of the housing market, people have been thinking more long term.

There are now a record number of people in terms of tenure in their homes, and many are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel: getting the house paid off. But the reality is that house structures are depreciating assets and many interior finishes aren’t designed to last more than

twenty years. With a reluctance to move, people are taking a hard look at what they can do to turn their current house into their dream home.

“We give people the confidence that they can get everything they want where they’re at,”



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said Chumbley. “I’m in constant contact with the customer.” He believes customer service is paramount in this industry. Just recently, USI renovated two bathrooms for a repeat client. As they were putting the old toilet back, the homeowner realized he should have replaced the toilet, too, but

he felt he’d already spent too much and figured he’d just take it one thing at a time. After leaving the house, Chumbley sent an email to his plumbing rep to request a new toilet, and USI installed a \$250 toilet at no charge to the customer.

“He spent \$100,000 last time, \$60,000 this time,” Chumbley said of the client. “You telling me I can’t give this guy a toilet? In a year, we do millions of dollars worth of projects, so what’s 250 dollars? What’s 5,000 dollars?” Another customer recently had water damage on his laminate floor occur during the remodeling process. The client called Chumbley and said, “We’ve got a problem.” Chumbley responded, “No, you don’t have a problem; you’ve got me.” USI turned a bad situation into something good, tore the floor up, and updated it along with the other renovations, making the entire space all the better for it. The customer expected to pay something for the extra work. Chumbley told him not to worry about it. “The guy’s spending \$340,000; I can’t afford \$800 worth of tile and labor?”



Chumbley doesn’t view these costs as an extra expense in terms of service work. To him, it’s just marketing. Loyalty and excellent customer service are key to reputation management. He knows those customers are likely to do more work down the road now. He’s seen it time and again with USI’s large list of serial clients. “You just become the family builder. I’ve worked for multi-generations, the parents and now their kids.”

USI Design & Remodeling has won numerous awards. Last year they were named “Remodeler of the Year” by the Dallas Builders Association. Chumbley insists, “The only thing that qualifies it as remodeling is I had to tear something out of my way to build something new.” USI operates much like a new construction company. They subcontract everything out, it’s all trade specific, and they’re working off of new substructures.

In terms of inspiration, Houzz.com is the bible. “It’s the best thing that’s happened in the past five years,” said Chumbley. He uses the site as a catalog for his clients, allowing both parties to have a clear understanding of what they’re working toward. With the costs what they are today, a clear goal really helps give people the ability to purchase with confidence. For Chumbley, he’s always shooting for the “wow” factor in creating unforgettable spaces. “We concentrate on engineering strong focals in our space design.”

So what’s Chumbley’s personal favorite room in the house? “The master bath,” he answered. He values peace and quiet and has turned his own bathroom into a home sanctuary. “I live what I sell. In my bathroom I’ve got a steam shower, I’ve got music, I’ve got TV, so I can’t go anywhere in the world and have a nicer bathroom than the one I have at home. I’m a person that can’t concentrate without silence. In that bathroom I can shut those doors and it’s like a spa.” ■