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Cranbury Design Center Owners Charlie Rini and Frank O'Leary

Homes Are Where Their Heart Is

For **Cranbury Design Center** owners, Charlie Rini and Frank O'Leary, designing exceptional home remodels for a lifetime is at the heart of their business.

Starting your next home renovation project can oftentimes be daunting, whether you're scouring the likes of Pinterest or simply don't have the slightest idea of where to begin. Gathering direction to harness your project idea is paramount in implementing your design, and making this vision come to fruition is not always as easy as some of the hit television shows advertise.

Fortunately, whether you're abounding with inspiration or need a point of com-

ment, there are professionals to assist—like the team at Cranbury Design Center—who live to make client homes where some of life's best moments are made.

Owners Charlie Rini and Frank O'Leary are, in a sense, veterans to this industry, both getting their roots from the time they were small children working with family on smaller side projects at ages 10 and 13. Fast forward several years later to 1995, the two met and developed a personal and profes-

sional based relationship. Five years later, Rini and O'Leary married their areas of expertise, gathered their third founding partner Kim Evans—who possessed a strong background in finance and marketing—and formed what is known today as Cranbury Design Center.

Once the three began business operations, they soon realized a need to hone in their offerings of services. Rini recalls they began the business still wanting to design

and build, including big additions and full-scale renovations, but the “aha” moment occurred when Evans suggested providing a niche and specific focus to clientele, rather than doing it all.

“Right now we mainly focus on kitchens and bathrooms, but we also do offices, window seats, fireplaces and bookshelves—anyone who needs furniture, we have that capability to build it from the cabinetry company we work with,” Evans explains. “And because of this, our target market and clientele are homeowners wanting to downsize while still having those luxury items they had in larger homes; those who are choosing to ‘age in place,’ as well as those with townhomes or condos. We’ve also created a network where we provide a cabinet design and delivery service for people in the building industry, such as architects, designers and builders.”

Evans says this design and delivery service has spanned beyond the confines of the state of New Jersey, however. Cranbury Design sees a regular influx of architects, builders and clients in need of cabinetry from Boston, New York City, and even parts of South Carolina. This nationwide success is a testament to the caliber of skill and craftsmanship possessed by both Rini and O’Leary.

Rini and O’Leary pride their business on the fact that their craftsmanship and services do indeed serve all clientele and all budgets. They wouldn’t run their business any other way.

“With the type of business we’re set up as, it really deals with all economical levels and all walks of life,” Rini states. “We had to figure out how we could represent Cranbury Design as a brand that will give assurance to the client that we’ll take their house apart and always put it back together in a prefixed budget. ... We cater to budgets that are entry level, medium or even higher level, but we never deviate from the kind of service we offer.”

“We make sure before we ever pull someone’s house apart, that they have all of the information they need to determine what their budget is for their project,” Evans adds. “We have a process that we go through with every client that helps them understand the major components of what a bath or kitchen project entails, and what cost factors are involved with that particular project. The client understands the components that they’re responsible for and that we’re responsible for, and we’re able to keep them on budget.”

Both Rini and O’Leary stress an importance on setting and sticking to a particular budget when designing your new space. In addition, Cranbury Design assists the homeowner in all phases of the project from start to finish, including selection of finishes and materials. This allows for clients to understand realistic costs and expectations and




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—Charles Rini, co-owner

eliminates that fear factor often induced in homeowners during renovations.

“We take the build aspect with the quality of how we build, and then take the managerial aspect of the organization and provide the client proper advisory of what real costs are,” Rini says. “Many times, a lot of contractors or builders will tell the homeowner to find everything on their own, and that puts fear in so many clients because they don’t necessarily know where to start, what paint to use, or what hardwood to use. That’s not who we are.”

“Depending on the client and project, we would either send them some place to a relationship we already have with another supply house, whether it’s a plumbing supplier or tile supplier, but we set them up and assist them so they meet with someone directly,” O’Leary adds. “These are all contacts [Cranbury Design Center] has established directly.”

The design process at Cranbury Design is best described as thorough, practical and nonetheless, personal. Homeowners can more than browse through this historic picturesque showroom, boasting its nearly 300-year-old charm, 1,250 square feet upstairs and another 1,250 square feet downstairs, featuring five kitchen vignettes, two

bathroom vignettes, a full-stone fireplace and a conference room. O’Leary adds that one of the kitchens, in fact, actually runs and operates for daily use.

“We’ve used it and had other people and organizations come in and use it,” he says. “It almost serves as a cooking demonstration.”

Evans recalls using the showroom kitchen one Thanksgiving about three years back, when her own kitchen was being renovated. Similarly to the approach both Rini and O’Leary took when finalizing their showroom aesthetic, Evans says she felt as if she was in her own home—not in a showroom.

“We designed this place to feel like home—not like a sale,” adds Rini.

Another aspect vital to Cranbury Design’s success is undoubtedly their thoroughness in examining homeowner needs. From analyzing spatial needs to ensuring cultural customs to make a home livable are met, Cranbury Design is one of only a few design centers in the region who truly takes these needs into account.

“As the lead designer, I never really instill my own personal style on any client, because in our immediate areas we work with, there is such a diversity of clienteles and cultures—and Cranbury Design has this understanding better than anyone else we know,” Rini says. “It starts with listening to what [the client] wants and figuring out their needs—do they have a large family? Do they have specific religious obligations that need to be followed, like a Kosher kitchen? It’s important to know all of this, and they’re looking to us for this help and expertise.”

Though Cranbury Design Center’s home renovation projects technically begin with the formulation of a new idea, Rini arguably claims the process truly begins from the touch of a handshake and upon initial client contact.

“The whole process really starts from that initial handshake; from the initial ‘Hi, how are you,’” Rini concludes. “There’s a tremendous value that everyone here at Cranbury Design brings to the table and to our clients. ... We have that longevity and expertise to assist a client into making the best possible decision for them and their home. Our goal is for [clients] to enjoy whatever improvements they have made for whatever time left they have in their space.” ■



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