

Remodeling industry expects to see recovery

Continued from Page 8C

The 1984 jump was unusually strong in remodeling, a less cyclical industry than new construction, said Clements. Home remodeling "tends to hold a much more stable line and a more consistent growth pattern" because it includes unavoidable maintenance and repair work, such as roof repair, painting and plumbing, Clements explained.

For example, remodeling's 3.9 percent drop in 1991 was small compared with homebuilding, which plunged 19 percent from \$129.8 billion in 1990 to about \$109 billion last year, Clements

said.

In better economic times, the maintenance component of remodeling "holds its own, and money starts going back into major improvements," such as additions and replacements of kitchens and baths, he said.

In the 1990s, home improvement industry authority Walter Stoepplewerth sees remodeling "accepted as an equal to new construction." Spending on home repair and improvement grew closer to new construction totals in the past decade, said Stoepplewerth, of Bethesda, Md. who publishes a series of contractor estimating manuals and offers fre-

quent seminars to building trades contractors.

Bolatering Stoepplewerth's outlook is the state of the nation's housing stock. "There are over 100 million housing units in America, of which 78 million are 15 years old or older," he said, with the average age of a U.S. home at 27 years. "Houses which are structurally sound tend to last forever, but integral parts wear out on a predictable basis," Stoepplewerth said.

"As we add 1 million to 1.4 million new units each year, and the existing stock gets older, there has to be an increasing market for

remodeling."

About 80 percent of the money spent on home repair and improvement goes to the nation's estimated 500,000 to 700,000 professional contractors, Stoepplewerth said. But "only the top five percent are really professional," he warned, resulting in a 50 percent yearly fatality rate in the business.

"Most contractors are honest tradesmen and incompetent businessmen," he said. "They don't know how to charge and they go out and undercharge."