



HOUSE RENOVATION TIPS & TRICKS

*What you need to know
before getting started on a
house project*

HAVE THAT HOUSE PROJECT IN MIND BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

Before getting deep into a build/ renovation project, it is very important to do a proper research on it.

This will give you the inspiration and ideas on how things supposed to be. It will (most importantly) save you A LOT OF money along the way

There are too much to covers, however, our team have gather some bullet points that might give you a good head start.

QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK YOURSELF BEFORE BUILDING A HOUSE

This is likely to be the biggest interview you're ever going to carry out, asking those questions about your future home, the most important place you'll have. So what do you need to be asking?

For most people this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and so you want to get it right. Even if you are just beginning, here are some areas to think through.

These questions are not necessarily in any particular order but let's start with one that should have a very clear answer.



■ HOW ENERGY EFFICIENT SHOULD MY HOUSE BE?

There are no two ways about it, in the future energy is going to cost a lot more than it does today.

We are depleting the planet's fossil fuel reserves at the same time as new economies emerge and the world population swells. This means you need to build your house to be future proof. By far the easiest way to do this is by making it energy efficient. If your energy demands are negligible you know you will not fall into energy poverty (no matter how big your house is).

Look at the key factor to consider when buying a car these days and it's not how fast it goes or how big it is but how many miles it does to the gallon! The same is true with houses of the future. They all need to be built with energy in mind.

■ WHERE AM I GOING TO BUILD MY HOUSE?

Of course, you probably expected this question to be number 1!

After all location, location, location is everything. You are tied to the area once you've bought it, and while you may be able to make changes to what's on it, you're not going to be able to move it. When you're telling people about the build, the first question they will ask you is, "Do you have a plot?" There is no point buying a nice field somewhere in the hope of getting planning permission.

You must be confident you will get consent. What is your strategy for getting a plot? Are you going to buy a dilapidated bungalow and start again? Are you going to adapt an existing building? There are companies that can help you find the right site for you, but be aware competition for plots is likely to be fierce.

Other questions to think about... Do I truly know this location? Have I been to the area at different times of day? This will tell you a lot about what it will really be like to live there. Have I spoken to the neighbours? Have I looked at it on a map? What's nearby? Do I know the history of the area?

It's amazing how this factor alone can affect house prices and desirability. Is it an easy commute to work? How close will the local shops be? I'm sure you can think of 100 other questions about the practicalities of where you will be located, but don't skip this step. It should be fun. Carry out a thorough analysis of all aspects of where you want to be and keep asking the questions. Go through your daily life and everything that you do and transpose yourself to the new location.

The more knowledge you have, the less likely it is that you are going to be surprised.



■ HOW DO I KNOW IF I'VE GOT THE RIGHT CONTRACTOR?

Whether you're self-building or hiring in a contractor you are going to need a good team.

This just makes like so much easier. You have to remember that this process could be years rather than months, so working with people you can get along with is essential.

Again investing the time at this early stage could really pay-off further down the line. So line up some more questions... Is the contractor qualified? Have I been to several of the projects this contractor has been involved on? Do I actually know what it is they have done? Have I spoken to the occupant and got a fair review of the work? Do I get a feeling about this? Have I researched the company thoroughly on the internet?

Overall, you are not only looking for credentials and first-hand evidence of previous work but a relationship. Does this contractor have time for me? If they don't in the initial meeting, this may not bode well for the future. Who will I be dealing with on a regular basis? You might meet the boss on the first consultation, but does that mean most of your correspondence will be with him/her or someone else. Can my contractor be contacted out of hours? This may be the case with a small firm but is less likely with a bigger company. Who is actually designing the project? Have I met that person? Does this contractor get a lot of new business from recommendation? If so, this is a very good sign.

■ DO I KNOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MY NEW HOME?

You will quickly find that no matter what size your budget, it is possible to build a house that will cost more!

However, a good question to consider is, "how is the house going to be lived in?" This is where a brief comes into its own. What is going to take priority in the construction? Is it the aesthetics of the building? Is it a need for low maintenance? Is it the materials from which your home is made? Perhaps practicalities of workspaces or other important rooms? Is the house making the most of its location and views? How many square metres of space do I want or need? Are there any issues from my old house that I don't want repeating?

Ideally your brief is going to find the middle ground so that you get everything you want. When this isn't going to happen, a compromise will be called for and this is where knowing what's important comes into its own. Indecision will only slow you down and generate stress. Those who make decisions quickly and don't change their minds every five minutes are far more likely to be successful. That doesn't mean to say that you shouldn't have an open mind. But if you don't know what you want in the beginning, you'll be led by the architect and builder -someone has to decide.

The more time you spend planning, researching and designing, the less time you should spend on site and the smaller the risk of overspending.



■ WHEN SHOULD I TRUST MYSELF?

Nobody is going to want this house to be as good as you want it to be.

After all, it's where you're going to live and you are the driving force behind the project. So it follows that you should be making a lot of the decisions yourself and knowing why you are making those decisions. It's the equation of the professional knowing their field versus you knowing your circumstances - it really is going to help if you have a grounding knowledge and if you keep on asking any questions.

Have you ever gone to the 'cheap' garage and been told you need this, that and the other. Once you've paid the bill you then realise you've been hoodwinked! You don't go back. Although perhaps an expensive mistake, imagine how many times bigger it would be with a house. You may only do this once in your life. Inquisitiveness is an attribute that is essential to any house builder. Don't be afraid to make an idiot of yourself – keep on until you understand. If you make a mistake, it's much easier to deal with if it's your own! Plus you'll learn from it. Leaving all the decisions to the first contractor you meet could be a recipe for disaster. Do the contractors have experience with the specific work they are doing?

■ DO I HAVE ENOUGH MONEY?

As mentioned before, budgets can be swallowed up by grand designs and tempting options.

The last thing anybody wants is to run out of money and be forced to sell the property halfway through construction. Consequently there is no point building your perfect home if it ends up being a shoebox! Balance is the order of the day. However, building something smaller than you can afford does make it much more likely that you will not run out of money. Plus you can then kit out with the best quality materials etc. Is the money in the bank going to cover everything no matter what? Do I have a reserve fund? Does it matter if I dip into it? What if I lose my job? Does it affect anything?

■ HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

Similar to the question of money is the question of time.

In a perfect world everything would go smoothly and your build would come in on budget and in the allotted time. Of course, there are bound to be unforeseen circumstances, so again a lot comes back to how thorough the research and design stages have been. There are plenty of questions to think about when it comes to accessing the duration of a project. How complex is this project? How competent is the contractor? How long did it take the contractor on similar sized builds? Is all the relevant paperwork in order? Could weather conditions slow things down? Are we likely to uncover anything unexpected (underground wells, endangered species etc.)? Are the neighbours likely to cause problems? What are the demands on my time going to be?



TIPS TO RENOVATE YOUR HOUSE BEAUTIFULLY YET ECONOMICALLY

The key to renovating your house on budget yet beautifully is primarily to plan the entire process effectively.

The following sections will demonstrate how you can divide your entire renovation plans into sub-plans, according to the space you have and renovate your home effectively.

■ DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Effective planning is the key to effective renovation. If you are renovating yourself then you need to focus on both the bigger picture and the smaller parts. You might have heard the phrase “whole is greater than the sum of its parts”, you can apply the same strategy to your home renovation project and devise a renovation plan for each area in your house.

If you hire an architect for renovation, he will assess your requirements and then renovate accordingly. In this case since you're in charge, you will brainstorm your requirements, write your end goal for each space in the house and decide the overall goal

■ BUDGETING

Since you want to renovate your house economically it is important for you to decide the total expenditure requirements/limit.

It is important to remember in budgeting that you cannot overestimate your budget, keep your budget underestimated and then move on to researching for things you need.

■ RESEARCH

You will be surprised at the number of options you have once you start your research. The beautiful lamp that you liked at a high end store can be purchased at a lower price from elsewhere as well. So, when renovating your house on budget please remember that if you research to find the furniture you like, paint you want or the decorations you would like in your house, you are likely to find most of the supplies at an inexpensive price.

Take advantage of online shopping, thrift stores and second hand furniture shops and see how far you will go.

■ DOORS CREATE THE FIRST IMPRESSION

The first impression of your house is your door. If you are unable to change the door completely and if your existing door is in a good condition then you should repaint your door. Your doors could also affect the lighting of your room, and you could benefit from this great technique interior designer Amy Lau uses, “When dealing with a dark room, whatever color is used on the walls, I paint the ceiling, trim, and doors the same color but 50 percent lighter. Too much of one shade can overpower a space.”

So, when renovating on a budget if you are repainting your door try to use different shades according to the concentration of light in your house to optimize the lighting of your house the way you want to.



■ PAINT AFFECTS LIGHTING

Painting affects lighting and when renovating your house you might opt for a new paint. In that case if you are already on a budget purchasing different colored pallets might seem counterintuitive. If you are on a tight budget then opt for a black and white palette, it will give your house a modern sophisticated look and you will have the guarantee that you can never go wrong with white or black.

■ SMALL ROOMS DON'T HAVE TO LOOK SMALL

If you are renovating to make a small house look bigger than an inexpensive and beautiful way of achieving that goal is to use mirrors. It's an inexpensive technique but it's used by one of the most famous architects of his time, Sir John Soane, who used mirrors in the breakfast room of his London house.

■ KITCHENS AND STORAGE

If you are decorating/renovating your house then you are probably trying to de-clutter and maximize your storage as well. Utilizing your kitchen to its maximum capacity can help you minimize your storage problems. In order to do this on a low budget you can either DIY kitchen cabinets or storages from recycled material at your house, or take advantage of thrift shops in your area.

No one knows your kitchen space better than you do and your storage needs building DIY storage kitchen cabinets will not only help you save money and reuse old materials at your house but it will also ensure that you're building exactly what you need. If you already have cabinets which are enough for storage then you don't need to replace them you can just repaint them to make your kitchen look as good as new.

■ LIGHT COMES THROUGH THE WINDOWS

According to Marc Appleton, "half the experience of living indoors is seeing the outdoors" So when remodeling your house install large windows. However, you might not have the budget to change your windows in that case play around with paint and paint your windows a shade lighter than the rest of the room to maximize the light coming through the windows.

■ BATHROOM RENOVATION

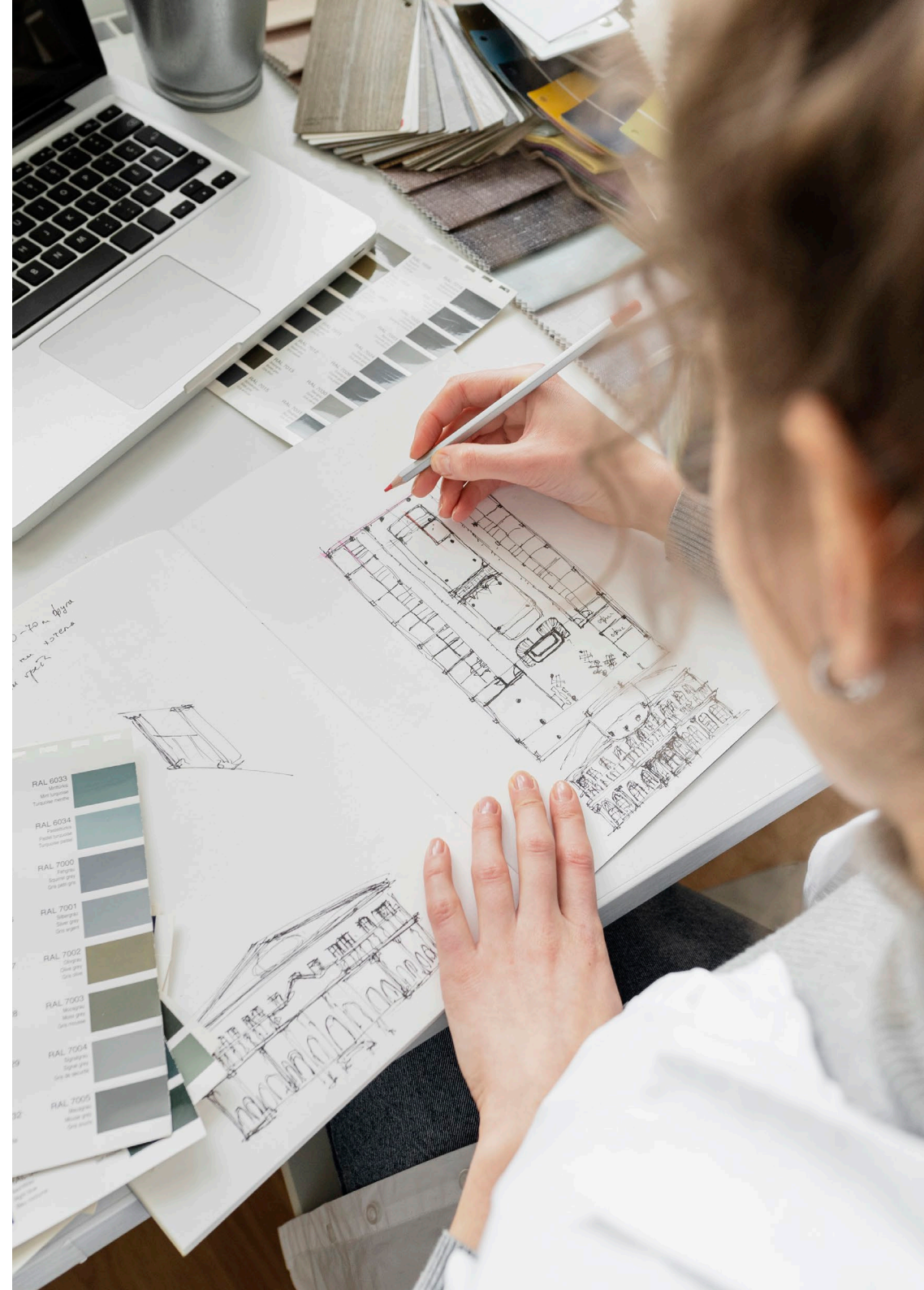
You would be surprised at the number of inexpensive yet quality products you can purchase to renovate your bathroom. If you are looking to install new toilet fixture you can check our Toto Toilet, and if you are not planning to install any new items, you can fix up your existing toilet by changing the paint, changing cabinet paints and by fixing the pressure of shower etc.



MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN BUILDING A NEW HOME

Poor planning and budgets that are too small can lead way to some wayward, inconvenient and disastrous mistakes. When you plan on building a new home, you must look at the home from many angles.

Poor design choices can make your home not only uncomfortable, but downright unhealthy. Architects, engineers and builders are all trained to help you make effective decisions. They will help guide you as to where you can save a few dollars and where you absolutely should not



■ PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR HVAC SYSTEM

Poor planning here can lead to issues with moisture and terrible mold growth. This can lend itself to great health concerns. Furthermore, careful attention should be given to the size of your units. Models that are too small will be underperforming and won't cool and heat your home efficiently. You'll come to regret this when your home is too cool in the wintertime and not cool enough during the hot summer months. Conversely those that are too large will utilize too much energy

■ POOR SPACE PLANNING

Unless you have plans to build a very large home, space planning and design is crucial.

Ample storage is necessary, but pay attention to where you place your storage space. Does the master bedroom really need an oversized walk-in closet when the space could potentially be added to your bedroom or master bath? Pay attention to where you place your closets. There should be one in each bedroom and in a main hallway. But too many and the storage space takes away from the living space.

■ POOR OVERALL PLANNING

When designing your own home you should take your lifestyle and habits into consideration. How long do you plan on staying in this home? Will you need to accommodate safety features for new or young children? Or might you need to think of your needs later in life as you reach retirement age and beyond? Think ahead, long term, to see where you will be and what you will need from your home.

■ POORLY LIT HOMES

Light fixtures and outlets should be plentiful. As should windows. Windows should be present in every room and as large as possible. Natural light, when possible, should be the main source of light. Think about adding skylights as well.

■ UNDER-UTILIZED ROOMS

The addition of a playroom, game room or multipurpose room sounds enticing, but only plan to build a room that will actually get used. What good is a wasted home gym where the treadmill is used to hold clothes from last season? Often an unused room becomes a dumping ground to place those things that never get used. If you plan on adding a spare room, make sure that it is a room that can transition well from one type to the next. A sewing room may never get used, but a sewing room or office that also doubles as a guest room could indeed get used often.



■ PLACEMENT OF THE LAUNDRY ROOM

This is a very personal decision. I've had laundry rooms in the basement, and off the mud room far away from all the bedrooms. Neither were ideal. Placement of the laundry room, or washer and dryer, should be relatively close to the bedrooms. I love an upstairs laundry room but many do not.

■ PLACEMENT OF THE BEDROOM

The bedroom needs to be as far away from the noise and traffic as possible. The master bedroom should not be near or above the garage if members of your family are likely to be coming and going while you are asleep or resting. It would be advisable to keep the master bedroom away from the central living areas as well. If your home is to be on one level, the master bedroom should ideally be at the far end of the house, the end furthest away from the garage. The master bedroom, ideally, should not share a wall with the central living area.

■ PLACEMENT OF THE KITCHEN

We've been in a few homes where the kitchen was nowhere near the main point of entry. When it came time to bring in groceries, one had to walk through the house in order to deposit the groceries into the kitchen. The location is very not ideally. It should be placed, preferably, near a garage or back entrance, as well as near the dining and living areas. The kitchen tends to get a lot of through traffic and it would therefore be best to divert the foot traffic from constantly traipsing through the main living areas.

■ PLACEMENT OF THE GARAGE

It is preferable to the garage on the main level, near a mud room and kitchen. My garage often feels like Grand Central Station with people constantly coming and going and coming into the house with dirty sports attire, heavy backpacks, bags of groceries, and other large objects. I prefer the dirt and chaos to be limited to the kitchen and mudroom areas.

■ LETTING SOMEONE TELL YOU WHAT YOU NEED!

You best know your family and your family's lifestyle and needs. Professionals can make suggestions but they cannot tell you what you do and don't need. You and only you know what is best for you and your family.



HOME RENOVATION MISTAKES TO AVOID

Renovating your home to improve its functionality and aesthetic appeal can be an exciting process. But, as with any major undertaking, there are many ways that things can go wrong along the way.

Here are the most common mistakes to avoid while renovating your home.

■ GOING WITH THE FIRST CONTRACTOR YOU FIND

One of the biggest home renovation mistakes I see homeowners make is to not properly vet their remodeling team. If you are planning a major home remodel, you should be sure to devote sufficient time to due diligence. Develop a list of questions to ask every contractor or designer you talk to and take notes.

■ NOT CONSIDERING PERSONALITY WHEN CHOOSING A REMODELER

Finding a contractor who is licensed, bonded, and insured should be considered “table stakes.” Good online reviews and maybe even a personal recommendation bring you even closer to finding the right team for your remodel. But there is one consideration that is often overlooked: personality.

Do you feel a connection with the remodeler? Do they seem to share your vision for how this renovation should look and feel in order to best suit your needs? Are they good listeners?

On the flip side, consider your own personality? Do you have an engineer’s desire to examine every detail and inspect every line item, or do you simply want the remodel to go smoothly and the results to be beautiful? Do you value a designer with good listening skills who can take your ideas and Pinterest Boards and turn them into a custom layout that matches your vision? Does the remodeler you’re considering click with your partner or spouse?

The fact is, your relationship with your home renovation team is about as personal as it gets. They will literally be sharing your space with you, possibly for several months. I can’t overemphasize how important it is to make sure you connect with them and feel comfortable with their style of communication.

■ POOR PLANNING AND SCHEDULING

Ideally, this is one of the services your design-build team or contractor will perform for you. But if you’re choosing to go it alone, make sure you know how much time is needed for each step of the renovation project and budget accordingly. You’ll also need a plan about where to store your belongings during construction; this can be as simple or complex as you want.

Whoever creates the schedule, it must be a detailed timeline that includes all major milestones and shows when each subcontractor needs to be on site to achieve them. Your master schedule will also help you determine when materials, fixtures, and appliances will be needed on site. You must also be able to adapt your schedule and keep the project on track in the case of permitting or other delays.



■ SKIPPING NECESSARY SAFETY MEASURES DURING DEMOLITION

Demolishing an old home or building is a serious undertaking, and you need to hire trained professionals for safety reasons.

Without first doing a lot of research, DIY demo can lead to injuries like broken bones, crushed fingers, burns, and more. You may even risk starting an electrical fire or bursting a water pipe. But by far the most common demolition mistakes homeowners make is to ruin parts of their home that should be preserved and create a huge mess in the process. If you intend to salvage your old brick fireplace, for instance, you need to be extremely careful in removing the wallboard around it. Likewise, if you don't want fine construction dust to infiltrate every corner of your home, you have to invest in a dust-containment system and know how to use it. In short, there are several good reasons for hiring professionals: safety, efficiency, preserving architectural details.

■ NOT THINKING ABOUT WHAT'S BEHIND THE WALLS

Homeowners often make the mistake of not considering how changes to their home's structure will impact existing plumbing, wiring, and structural support.

Let's take the example of knocking down a kitchen wall to create a more open floor plan. Before you grab the hammer drill, are you quite certain of what's hiding behind that wall? Is the wall itself helping to support your second story and would knocking it down compromise your home's structural integrity? Your architect or interior designer is trained to provide you with answers about what lies out of sight. He or she can give you advice on what changes can be made, either by modifying your floor plan or adding structural supports to achieve the open living plan you desire.

■ TRYING TO DIY TOO MUCH

When it comes to projects like home renovation or construction, there are often too many variables and considerations for a DIY-er. For those with little experience in the field, attempting to do everything on their own can lead to unanticipated errors that could become costly renovation mistakes and cause a project to be halted or demolished for safety reasons.

Things like painting, laying tile, and installing flooring might be doable. But larger home projects like plumbing or electrical work should always be left to the pros. Even if you are super-handy, the last thing you want to do is cause expensive delays to your entire project if you've taken on more than you can realistically complete on the weekends.

Remodel projects move fast, and it will likely cost you dearly if the contractors you've hired have to wait around for you to complete your portion of the work.



■ CHOOSING CHEAP MATERIALS

As the old saying goes, “You get what you pay for.” And that’s especially true with home construction products and materials. You may save a little upfront. But over time, the cost of maintenance will increase. The cheaper products also tend to be lower quality and won’t last as long in harsher environments like a kitchen or bathroom.

Do yourself a favor and invest in the best materials and products you can afford. Not only will they last longer, but the home improvements that are made with them will also look better and be of a higher quality for years to come.

Don’t skimp on high-end appliances or fixtures either. These products add value to your home and they will last for years.

■ WAITING TOO LATE TO BRING IN THE PROS

You want to start your home renovation project now, and you’re not keen on waiting to go through the entire vetting and hiring process. Why not just jump in and act as your own general contractor (or carpenter) for the smaller stuff and bring in a pro later?

Well, there are several reasons this doesn’t always end well. For starters, it means you’re going to be the one in charge of coordinating a myriad of tasks and people. And this is not an easy feat for someone who’s new to home renovation projects.

It also puts your timeline at risk. You’ll have less time for planning out the details if you end up needing to bring on a designer or contractors midway through.

■ FOCUSING TOO MUCH ON AESTHETICS

Paint colors, finishes, marble tile. It can all be so much fun to pick out. (I love to do it, too!) However, I recommend you resist the urge to start making such selections first thing.

Instead, try to prioritize the function of your space over form when making design choices for an area of your home that will be used daily (like a kitchen or bathroom). By definition, functional choices determine how you will live in and use the space. These also tend to be the decisions that are most expensive to modify later.

Take, for instance, kitchen cabinets. If you get the layout wrong, it will be extremely expensive and disruptive to fix it in the future. The cabinet finish, on the other hand, can be updated or corrected later with a coat of paint.

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We provide thorough initial consultation followed by professional design and construct services.

Our tag line 'From concept to completion' sums up how we work – we handle every stage of the process to make your life easy and take away the worry that can otherwise accompany major home alterations.

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