



Eight Steps For A Successful Renovation

Taking on an extensive renovation can be an extremely rewarding endeavor and should always start with smart planning. Whether you are making drastic changes to one particular space, transforming your entire house into your next dream home, or are adding on some much needed space, doing a little due diligence up front will make all the difference for a stress-free renovation. From our many years of experience and numerous interviews with our clientele, we've compiled a comprehensive list of steps to take for a successful renovation.

1. Find your inspiration.

What are your motivating factors for renovating? For the best ideas, we recommend starting your search with design magazines, books and websites to look for current trends as well as various styles that meet your design tastes. Even visiting with neighbors, friends or family who have recently renovated can be an inspirational source for gathering ideas. You will most likely receive unbiased feedback from them regarding various features and/or finishes that were used on the project.

Quick Tip

When compiling your concepts, keep in mind that more details equal more accurate bids from contractors which will ultimately allow you to better maintain your overall renovation budget. Ambiguous design concepts lead to greater variances in determining the construction costs.

2. Set the budget.

What is your bottom line for the entire renovation, and is this a feasible number? This is a tricky question to answer and mainly due to the many variables that go into completing a large renovation. You'll need to not only factor in the renovation costs which can vary widely, you may also need to consider the cost of an architect, interior designer, new furnishings and the cost of lodging in the event that the property cannot be occupied during the renovation.

Quick Tip

It is highly recommended that you have a contingency budget of 5-10% of the total project amount for unexpected renovation costs or design revisions. Even if you do not use these funds, the renovation will be much less stressful and you will thank yourself for having the funds available for these unforeseen occurrences.

If you have a specific concept in mind for your renovation, you may want to meet with a professional renovation contractor to help you determine a ball park figure for the total construction costs. Most architects will also be able to provide some rough figures for the renovation but we always recommend confirming their numbers with a general contractor specializing in this type of work.

3. Coordinate the financing.

Are you planning to use outside funds, cash or a combination of the two to complete your project? A large majority of renovations are financed using home equity loans, construction loans, lines of credit, personal loans,

etc. It would be prudent to secure any type of financing before you hire an architect or general contractor to transform your concepts onto paper.

4 . Engage an architect.

By working with an architect, you can rest assured that your concepts will be translated to a set of blueprints and you will have an excellent starting point for gathering accurate bids from contractors. Accurate cost projections are important when sticking to your budget. A good architect will listen to your ideas and provide you with suggestions for an aesthetically pleasing design as well as ball park costs for the concepts you would like incorporated. And most importantly when interviewing architects, make sure you are clear with your needs and that they are able to address your concerns and wishes for the final product.

5. Gather bids and select a professional renovator.

This topic is critical, and we cannot emphasize enough the significance in selecting the right contractor for your renovation. This information could be the single most important step you take in finding the best fit for you or your family and ultimately reducing your overall risk.

If you are looking for an excellent customer experience, efficient project management and high quality results, hiring a professional renovation contractor is imperative. We hear far too many stories from clients that have had an undesirable experience with another contractor that could have been avoidable with some additional research on their part.

Where do you look for qualified Contractors? After interviewing our clients, these are some of their suggestions.

- **Friends & Neighbors.** Ask friends and neighbors that have recently renovated. You are more likely to get an unbiased assessment from them and you can often view the work that was completed. If you are on a neighborhood email group, posting your questions here will usually generate a number of responses from neighbors.
- **Search Online at NARI.** The [National Association of the Remodeling Industry](#) (NARI) has local chapters throughout the country and is the only major trade association solely dedicated to the remodeling industry. They are an excellent source for locating qualified renovation contractors in your area.
- **Review Websites.** Searching review websites is a fantastic place to find information on contractors. Look for positive reviews listed on [Angie's List](#), [Google](#), [Yelp](#), [CitySearch](#), [Yahoo Reviews](#), etc. After reading a handful of testimonials, you will get a much clearer picture as to how each particular business operates and if they have satisfied clients.
- **Home Tours.** Keep an eye out for local home tours through [NARI](#), the [Home Builders Association of Greater Austin](#) (HBA), [American Institute of Architects](#) (AIA) and the Cool House Tour by the [Texas Solar Energy Society](#). Visiting various renovated projects on these tours will help with conceptual designs and you will often get to meet the contractors, architects and designers that made it all possible.

What topics should you address with potential Contractors?

- **A. Detailed Proposals.** Ask the contractor if they provide a detailed scope of work with their bid. This is extremely important and knowing exactly what the contractor is bidding on will help you determine if

Quick Tip

Based on our experience, securing most types of financing for construction typically takes a little longer than expected. We recommend allowing 30-45 days to finalize the loan from application submission to closing.

your concept matches up with the proposed work. Having a detailed scope of work also helps in limiting change orders for work that the contractor may say is not included in their bid which can easily push you over your budget. If an architect has prepared concepts or blueprints for your project, have the architect review the proposal as well to search for discrepancies.

- B. Previous Projects.** Has the contractor completed any projects that are similar in scope to your renovation? Can they personally take you to view these projects first hand?
- C. Construction Schedule.** The contractor should be able to provide you with a timeline for completing the work with a start and finish date listed in the contract.
- D. Lead Safety.** If your home was built before 1978, there is a chance that existing interior and exterior paints could contain lead. And per the new EPA Lead laws, each painted surface over 6 square feet in area that is disturbed or to be removed during the renovation must be tested prior to removal. Any painted surfaces with lead based paint must be removed per the EPA Lead laws by a Lead Safe Certified Firm. If you speak with a contractor and they are not aware of this regulation, you may want to search for a more qualified and knowledgeable renovator.
- E. Pre-Construction Prep Work.** Does the contractor install plastic sheeting to help contain dust particles and install floor protection as necessary in any of the work areas? If you plan to live in the home during the renovation, creating barriers between the work areas and livable spaces is very important in keeping your furniture and belongings from getting covered with dust.
- F. Insurance.** Does the contractor carry a general liability policy of \$1 million or more? This is an important question to ask. If the contractor does not carry a policy with these minimum limits, you are drastically increasing your liability should something go wrong.
- G. Affiliations.** Is the contractor a member of the [National Association of the Remodeling Industry](#) (NARI), [Home Builders Association](#) (HBA), [National Association of Home Builders](#) (NAHB), [Better Business Bureau](#) (BBB) or other local or national organizations? Any professional renovator will be affiliated with at least one, if not several, of these organizations.
- H. Awards.** Has the contractor been recognized for their work? Winning an award for a renovation says a lot about the quality of work the contractor produces and the way they conduct their business.

After you have done your research and have narrowed down your potential contractors, it's very important that you ask yourself if you feel comfortable with this potential contractor working on your home and trust the information they are giving you. If the answer is not a definitive yes, then we strongly recommend that you continue your search. The owner-contractor relationship has to be positive and based on trust in order for your renovation to be successful.

6. Execute the contract.

Now that you have selected your contractor, it's time to put all of the details in writing to ensure that there is a true meeting of the minds. The contract should include and/or reference a detailed scope of work, any necessary drawings and specifications, a payment schedule based on completed work, a construction start date as well as the completion date and warranty information should any unforeseen issues arise after the work is completed. Before executing the contract, be sure to read it carefully and determine if you are satisfied with the scope of work that is

Quick Tip

When making your final selection for a renovation contractor, be sure ask for a minimum of 5 references and check them! Additionally, it would be a drastic mistake to select your contractor purely based on price. It's very enticing to select the lowest price but you do typically get what you pay for. We often make repairs on projects completed by other contractors where the client selected the lowest bidder. Following this one step could save you a lot of heartache and thousands of dollars.

Quick Tip

Be very careful when writing checks for deposits prior to starting the project. It is common to pay the contractor for materials upfront before the job starts but this amount is typically less than 30%-40% of the project. However, if the contractor is requesting 50% or more upfront before the job starts, have them provide you with material quotes from the supplier or you can opt to pay the supplier directly for the materials to reduce your risk.

described in the agreement. Are the contractor's responsibilities clearly defined? And if you have a question about the project that the scope does not clearly answer, it would be wise to include this information in the contract to avoid confusion and additional fees down the road. Does the payment (aka draw schedule) appear reasonable to you?

7. Consider living arrangements.

Do you plan to live in the home during the renovations or do you have lodging elsewhere? Are you going to store your furniture and belongings on site in a portable storage unit or off site? Have you coordinated with your contractor about the construction schedule? Have you asked your contractor if there will be any major interruptions to electricity, water, sewer, gas lines, etc. for longer than a day? Is the contractor going to provide a portable toilet or are they planning to use your bathroom? Have you established working hours for the renovation?

These are all questions you will want to discuss with your contractor that will make your life a little easier during the renovation.

8. Be flexible and monitor progress.

Even after following all the steps above, it's important to understand that even the best laid plans are not perfect and surprises can and do occur. This is why it's better to be flexible and to have a contingency budget in place equal to 5-10% of the total project amount.

We always recommend that you keep a good line of communication with your contractor and voice your questions or concerns about the work. It's also a good idea to take photos of all phases of work and keep them for your records.

Watermark & Company hopes that you find these 8 Steps For A Successful Renovation helpful as you undertake the great adventure that is remodeling your home. We are dedicated to making sure that all homeowners, not just our own clients, are well-educated and thoroughly prepared for the renovation process.

If you have any questions regarding this guide, or would like to discuss our Design | Renovate process, please feel free to contact us at your convenience. In the meantime, good luck on your renovation and we'll see you on the next project.



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