

Tips for homeowners on their first renovation projects

Home renovations are typically exciting, as homeowners get to see the visions of their dream homes come to light right before their very eyes. Turning an outdated bathroom into a modern oasis or an empty basement into the ultimate man cave strengthens the sense of attachment homeowners have with their homes.

But few home renovation projects go from start to finish without experiencing a few bumps in the road along the way. Such bumps can be difficult to handle for homeowners working on their first renovation projects, but there are many ways for novices to navigate the sometimes murky waters of home improvement projects and come out relatively unscathed on the other end, where a newly renovated home awaits.

- Plan well and know what to expect. When working with contractors, get all agreements in writing and spell out exactly what you desire in a home renovation. Photo references can help guide contractors and architects. Ask for the full picture of what can be expected with the work, from

demolition to the punch list. Knowing what lies ahead can keep you grounded throughout the project.



- Discuss work each day and set payment schedules. Make payments contingent on work completed. This can help keep contractors on schedule. Paying for all work upfront leaves homeowners at a disadvantage, as it does not provide incentive for workers to be timely and efficient. Check in with workers to get daily progress reports.
- Have reasonable expectations. A renovation project may exceed its budget and take longer than initially expected. Understanding that

these potential setbacks might be part of the process will make it easier to handle them when the foreman

speaks to you about any issues that arise.

- Accept the mess. Construction work is messy. There's no way to maintain a pristine house when contractors are entering and exiting all day. Dust is bound to be generated, and tools can fill up rooms. A home in disarray can be stressful, but continue to visualize the end result and the mess won't bother you so much.
- Establish a contingency plan. Bathrooms and kitchen renovations are typically the most disruptive home

improvement projects. Going without a kitchen can make it difficult to enjoy meals at home, while a bathroom remodel may require you to navigate water shutoffs. If your project is scheduled to take several months, establish a contingency plan to deal with the consequences of your renovation project. Speak with family members about using some of their home amenities, and prepare and freeze meals in advance so you can reheat them later on when you don't have access to your stove.

- Plan your escape. Sometimes the constant work and mess of construction is too much to bear. Afford yourself time away by visiting relatives or staying at a hotel. Even a single night away can provide the relief you need.

A home that is undergoing a remodel can be a less than comfortable environment. But homeowners who have never before lived through a renovation project can take several steps to make the process go as smoothly as possible.

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Power tool safety tips

Power tools can dramatically reduce the time it takes to complete home improvement projects. Professional contractors regularly rely on power tools for cutting and sanding, and many do-it-yourself renovators follow suit and invest in power tools to help get the job done. But power tools, in spite of their usefulness, are not without risk. According to the Work Safe Center, power tool injuries account for as many as 400,000 emergency room visits in the United States each year. Power nailers, chain saws and table saws account for the greatest number of injuries. Keeping safe is of the utmost priority when using power tools. Here's how:

- Read all manufacturers' instructions and guidelines before use.
- Keep your tools clean and in proper operating condition.
- Use the right tool for the job.
- Always wear eye protection, such as safety glasses or goggles.
- Wear standard cotton or leather work gloves to protect hands.
- Consider the use of earplugs or earmuffs with loud power tools.
- Don't use power tools in proximity to flammable vapors, dust or construction materials.
- Always check that wires are kept away from blades.
- Maintain a tight grip on a tool.
- Do not overreach when using tools, and maintain balance.
- Pay attention when working with any power tool.
- Only use attachments specifically recommended for the power tools and ensure proper installation.
- Unplug all power tools during breaks and anytime when tools are not in use.
- Routinely inspect tools for damage.
- Keep tools stored in secure locations when not in use.

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Add value to your home with these renovations



Finding space to install an extra bathroom in a home can be a worthwhile investment.

Homeowners choose renovation projects for a variety of reasons. Although many improvements are made to increase functionality and comfort of a home, several others are seen as worthwhile investments. These investments can add up to a higher resale value when the time comes to sell a home.

Certain projects have a history of providing a greater return on homeowners'

investments than others. The following renovation tips can add beauty to your home and generate great returns when you put the home up for sale.

- Invest in your kitchen. Kitchen remodels are a safe bet when it comes to putting money into improving a home. Residents tend to spend a great deal of time in the kitchen, but a dated, poorly functioning kitchen can detract from the value of a home,

even if the rest of the home is in good shape. It's possible to recoup between 60 and 120 percent of your kitchen remodel investment, especially if the kitchen matches up well with the rest of your home. Homeowners should know that a deluxe renovation may not be necessary, as relatively moderate improvements can create a whole new look for a kitchen.

- Look to paint. One of the least expensive improvement materials, but one that has a significant impact, is paint. Neutral, modern colors can easily liven up any space. If you paint with low-VOC paint, you also can advertise an eco-friendly home, which is very desirable these days.

- Put in another bathroom. Multiple bathrooms are an attractive selling point, particularly in older homes that may not have been equipped with more than one bathroom. Finding extra space for a bathroom can be tricky, but consider closets, areas under stairs or even taking some space away

from another room. Popular home-improvement television channel HGTV advises that half-bathrooms require at least 18 square feet of space, while full baths need 30 to 35 square feet for a stand-up shower or bathtub.

- Renovate the HVAC system. Aesthetic improvements aren't the only ones that add value to a home. Many home buyers are eager to purchase a home that has a new heating and cooling system, as buyers understand that furnaces and air conditioning units are substantial investments that can last for years. Other improvements, such as adding attic insulation or replacing older windows and doors with more energy efficient options, also are smart bets.

- Add illumination to rooms. A dark home is a dreary home. Adding light can mean including more overhead and accent lighting. Under-cabinet task lighting is a nice touch. Inclusion of skylights and sun tubes can bring natural light into rooms that may not have south- or west-facing windows.

- Put a deck addition outdoors. Outdoor living spaces have become more desirable, especially as the "staycation" has grown in popularity. Decks and patios can make backyards more appealing. The scope of your investment will depend on the size of the deck and design. Doing the work yourself can cut the cost of decks in half, but only if you have the specific tools or experience to tackle such a project.

- Improve curb appeal.

Adding attractive landscaping and freshening up the entryway to a home can add considerable value to your home, as buyers judge homes by their exteriors. Completely renovated interiors may never be seen if buyers pass up your home because of a less attractive exterior. Classy, subtle changes, like well-placed shrubbery and a green lawn, can work wonders. An inviting front door and well-lit entryway also add curb appeal to a home.

Before making improvements, homeowners should determine if a given project will provide a solid return on their investment.

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