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RENOVATION TIPS to save your sanity

1 Spend time on design.

It's a good, thorough preconstruction planning that ensures you are going to get what you want with no misunderstandings. With all the 3D modeling that can be done now you can see exactly what your project is going to look like when finished.

2 Get all specifications written down.

It may seem difficult to make all the decisions up front. The old idea of "Let's build the walls and then I will see how the space feels then make the rest of the decisions" just doesn't work. It slows the project up which adds cost and gives you no predictability on the final cost. The only way to really know what your project will cost is to know exactly what is going to be done and what materials will be used. With an exact specification list you can get fixed prices for construction on your project. Without the list it will be constant order changes and ugly budget surprises. The good news again is with the 3D modeling, it's easier to make these decisions beforehand if you are teamed up with a good designer.

3 Get a good contractor.

If you haven't personally worked with them before, make sure you talk to some of their past clients.

4 Get the whole contract in writing.

All the details. If your builder is not organized enough to document the specifications, drawings, written descriptions, payments terms etc. into a formal contract then they are not organized enough to manage a modern construction project. An organized, thorough, detailed contract is not only going to protect you but it is an indication of how they will approach the job.

5 Stay on budget.

On cost plus jobs it is easy to go way over budget if two procedures are not in place. First: have the contractor do real budgeting of your project during the design process. (even better, hire a design build firm to do both so there is no finger pointing if it does start to go over budget). Second: ensure the contractor has an accounting system in place to track all the expenses in detail – on at least a biweekly basis. This system must also include revised total new estimated costs to completion. The sad truth is a lot of contractors don't have a clue where they are at with the budget until they suddenly realize they are 90% through the budget and only 50% done with the work. Ooops. Make sure they have an accounting and projection system in place to prevent this.

6 Construction schedules done and posted

Ask your contractor to see what their schedules look like and how often they are updated. If they don't have examples to show you or if they don't use them weekly to manage your project you can bet its going to take longer. No one wants a project that goes on forever.

7 Be sure you like and trust your contractor.

You are going to be together every day for the next while and you want to be able to make sure you can always work things out if things get tough. Renovations are disruptive and can be very wearing and big projects can go on for a while. Treat hiring a contractor like you are getting into a partnership for the length of the renovation and ask yourself "is this someone I want as a partner". If there are problems, will they treat me fairly?

*Good luck with your project – done right,
they're a lot of fun!*

~ Doug Kerr.



Doug Kerr is the owner of Kerr Construction in Vancouver.

With over 26 years of experience in the renovation and new home construction business, he has developed the Kerr System for designing and building. With this Design/Build system he has helped hundreds of clients achieve their dream homes while also winning multiple national and provincial building and renovations awards.



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