



THE DOS AND DON'TS OF RENOVATING

BEFORE YOU START

It is important to have a very clear idea in your mind of what you would like to achieve with your renovation. What are the primary objectives of renovating your house? For example; is it to accommodate increased family needs or to increase the value of your house? What are the alternatives to renovating and are they truly viable? What is the opportunity cost of using one of those alternatives?

There are some things that we suggest you do in order to formulate an idea of the correct renovation for your lifestyle, your budget and your peace of mind. We have also included some common mistakes made by renovators which if you avoid - may keep you out of trouble.

What should you do?

- Look at lots of pictures in magazines (keep a record of design ideas you like).
- Take notice (and photos) of parts of other houses that you like both internally and externally.
- Think about what is important to you, eg lifestyle, resale, aesthetics.
- Talk to other people you know who have been through a renovation (find the ones who are happy and ask who worked for them; ask the ones who are not happy what went wrong and WHY?).
- Talk to lots of people in the industry about your ideas, become an informed consumer/industry professional.
- Look at the price of other houses for sale in the area that will be comparable with your renovated house.
- Check out the state and local government planning rules. Which ones apply to you, which are negotiable? You could save yourself a lot of time and effort.

- Understand the differences between Architects, Project Managers, Building Designers, Design and Construct companies, and Draftsmen. There can be a lot of overlap but they are not all the same and don't all do the same thing the same way.
- Have a clear strategy for running the project and know who is protecting your interests and how they are going to do it.
- Be very clear on how much money is available – don't plan to spend it all.

What shouldn't you do?

- Don't be pressured into signing anything (avoid the hard sell types).
- Don't expect people to work for nothing.
- Don't exaggerate your situation; people can only help if they know the real story.
- Make sure you don't commit to spend more money than currently you have.
- Don't assume things will be OK in the end. If you don't control things proactively it will be a disaster.

ONCE YOU HAVE DECIDED TO RENOVATE

Once you have decided that renovating is the right choice for you and your family it is important to communicate your vision to those who will be working on the project. The easiest mistake to make during the design process is to include all of the fancy and expensive elements that you want and take them out when the project is over budget. In our experience once a fancy element is in, it is very hard to take out and usually ends up causing budget blow-outs. It is easier to keep the fancy elements aside until you know they will fit in the budget. Here are some other tips.

What should you do?

- Get an expert on your team early. This can be a family member or friend but the arrangement should be formal as you will need them to dedicate a lot of time to your project. (We recommend a professional Construction Project Manager)
- Include this person in any negotiations you conduct with consultants or builders.
- Decide how you would like to structure your project – how much are you comfortable doing yourself and what should be done by an experienced consultant?
- Collate your pictures, design ideas and notes into a format which can be interpreted by others. This will aid in the creation of a design or architectural brief.

- Ensure your designer or architect clearly understands your budget.
- Use the design brief as a written basis for the design and be sure to refer back to it throughout the design process.
- Get an estimate or quote done by a builder prior to lodging your plans with council. This is the true test of whether the project is financially viable. If it is over budget you should make some hard decisions then and rework the design.
- Try to select all of your fittings and finishes before going to tender.
- Ask questions, this is your project and you are entitled to straight answers, if you're not getting them there's probably something wrong, keep asking.
- Obtain a proposal / quote from more than one consultant /contractor before committing to do business with any of them
- Beware of words and phrases like “exclusions, assumptions, caveat, condition, variation, PC sum, SBO, estimate, latent conditions and discretionary” They can all cost you money beyond the budget
- Make sure your neighbours (tenants *and* owners) know exactly what will be built, when access is required, the approximate construction duration and working hours
- Have an expert check the safety standards and finish quality of the builder during construction. (Project Manager or expert selected originally).
- Have some money in reserve for some variations because they are inevitable.
- Get help from any friends or family in the building industry.

What shouldn't you do?

- Don't commit to a design that you can't visualise - ask for sketches.
- Don't wait until the last minute to decide on a fitting or design element
- Do not submit plans to council that you know are over budget. Rework the design prior to submitting.
- Don't buy anything (especially a kitchen or a bathroom) until you have actually signed a construction contract.
- Don't sign up to something you do not understand.
- Make sure you don't commit to spend more money than currently you have.
- Don't spend more money on your house than the improved house will be worth on the market.

REMEMBER

Planning and making informed decisions are the most important factors in achieving a successful renovation. Know exactly what you are buying and get independent expert advice. Changes on drafting paper cost almost nothing but changes after you have started construction will cost you dearly.