

BUILDERS POINT OF VIEW

THE BOTTOM LINE **ON** **REMODELING AND RENOVATIONS** By Alex Guthrie

In my nearly 25 years of contracting I have been confronted with many difficult situations that could have been avoided by proper planning and research. It has always surprised me that more time isn't spent on planning how to save money instead of spending it later to fix mistakes. So here are some things to consider before, during, and after your remodel project.

Planning and Designing

Often homeowners are intimidated by the prospect of paying a professional architect and or interior designer. Their fears range from their inability to see a value for the services to loss of control of the project scope. Although some people are perfectly comfortable and capable making these decisions without professional assistance, it is difficult to concentrate and focus when you are running carpool and working long days at the office. Most people don't realize that the immense number of decisions that must be made to successfully complete a remodel are mind boggling. So you must ask yourself, are you ready or able to spend the required time to co-ordinate textures, colors, surfaces, and finishes. Select light and plumbing fixtures, make sure the finishes work together. Are you able to visualize what the finished design will look like and have you utilized and planned for the best use of space. In my experience a trained professional not only accomplishes all these goals , but also brings energy and excitement to an otherwise difficult task.

Bottom line – It is cheaper to change a line on paper than to move a wall.

Selecting a Contractor

Think of this like buying a new car, it would be nice to drive it for just a little while before you make the purchase but they just won't let you. Once you leave the lot it's yours. So how do you avoid the pitfalls and horror stories you hear from your family and friends? Think of this relationship as a temporary marriage between you, your design team, and your contractor. This is your team and your team motto is "All for one and one for all". Sniping and finger pointing is not allowed and won't be tolerated; we must work together. Not all personalities are compatible and you must remember that the people that work on your team are going to be in your house for the duration of the project.

To find a contractor first take recommendations from family, friends, and neighbors. This often makes the contractor feel more obligated to perform well, or check with the Better Business Bureau they can be a great resource. There are also organizations such as NARI and Home Builders Association that are always interested in promoting their members. Your contractor should provide you with a list of references, check them out, ask questions that matter such as "Did he communicate well?", "Were there problems with the

subcontractors?”, “Did he attempt to stay on schedule?”, “Did he meet the original budget?”- most importantly “ Would you hire him again?”

Once you’ve decided on your contractor do not start any work until you have a signed contract and your attorney reviews it. It is best to have a written job description and be aware that the state of Texas requires certain documents accompany these contracts. This is for your protection and your contractor’s protection.

Bottom line – This can be a wonderful marriage or an ugly divorce – make your selection carefully.

Be Realistic

There are certain realities that you must confront when taking on a remodel or renovation, being aware of these facts may help you be better prepared. This is a messy, dusty, inconvenience; it will totally consume and disrupt your daily routine, cost overruns are common and unpredictable and dealing with people is frustrating at best. So make sure you have a clear understanding with your contractor how this will be handled, who’s dealing with whom and insist on written change orders that clearly state the scope and cost of the change. First of all, make sure you are notified in a reasonable amount of time and that all fees and time delays are stated. Second, you and your contractor should agree and sign this document, this goes a long way in understanding the final cost and schedule overruns.

Your contractor depends on other contractors (subcontractors) to get the work done, this is a reality of our times and it is imbedded in all businesses in this country. Because of simple human nature it is not possible to predict or dictate everyone’s every move, what this means is that you will be inconvenienced from time to time and as good intentioned as your contractor might be, he cannot be there at every moment.

Bottom Line: Take it in stride, take a deep breath, and remember that it will be finished some day.

Murphy’s (Remodeling) Law

If it can go wrong; it will. Well, not always, but most of the time.

I often tell people that I can cure a drought by removing their roof, for it seems that every time I do, it rains like @#\$. I once waited until August to put a new roof on a beautiful house in Highland Park because we wanted to make sure and miss the rainy season. When I called the homeowner at her house in Santa Fe to tell her we just removed the old roof , she asked “What’s that loud boom?” sheepishly I replied, “Thunder”.

These things just seem to happen, the water heater goes out, the air-conditioning goes out, termite damage is found, the shower pan is rusted out; on and on and on..... So be prepared to repair sprinklers, rotted wood, leaky gutters, cracks in the walls, cracks in concrete, broken windows and pipes, you name it. Look at it as a prime opportunity to catch up on some old needed repairs.

Bottom Line: This will test everyone’s patience.

Finishing Up

Simply put, this is the most difficult and frustrating part of every project. Your contractor and his subs just want to finish but they don’t show up for days at a time. You call and he tells you that he also is frustrated. He probably doesn’t tell you that he’s having a difficult time getting the subs to respond to his calls, for they have moved on to bigger and better

things and most likely he has had to pay them for the work they did on your home, even though they're not totally finished.

This is the reality that exists in a business world where everyone is an independent contractor, we're not really their boss, we just do business with them now and then.

The fact remains that you have hired your contractor and (presumably) paid him and it is his responsibility to complete the task at hand.

This will present the most challenging moments in your relationship, and will probably define the way both of you feel about each other in the future.

Walk through the project and write a thorough list (punch list) of items that need to be completed and have your contractor do likewise, compare notes and develop a comprehensive list. Be sure to look underneath and in between cabinets, shelving, doors, windowsills etc., this may be your last shot at getting everything the way you want it. Agree to a reasonable time frame to complete the list and turn it over to your contractor.

Remember that this is work that is normally done in areas you've already occupied, this makes it very challenging to schedule and complete so you must be extra patient and flexible so the workers can get in and out.

Bottom Line: This is a great time to take a few days off and go to the lake house!!

The After Life

Well finally it's over, no more workers, no more trash, and the dust has finally become manageable again. It has been said many times that remodel takes on a life of its own, that's a very true statement but we must remember that life goes on afterwards too.

Surprisingly, most of our clients tell us that they miss having us around at first, although I'm sure this is only a temporary state of insanity, I choose to take it as a complement. The fact is, we do become part of the family and over the years we face the ups and downs of life together. Often I am called to help in emergencies or share in special moments such as weddings and births. I have been told that the remodeling process is similar to surgery, in that, the pain of the process is soon forgotten as the enjoyment life takes over.

A few tips to maintain your home: have your contractor come back once a year and repair caulking and chipped paint throughout the house. This not only keeps your home looking new but it also prevents an expensive repaint down the road. Notify your contractor if you observe any unusual movement or cracking. Ask your contractor to provide you with information on maintenance for your home and make sure you have all the warranties filled out and mailed for all appliances and purchased products. Follow all recommended maintenance requirements for all mechanical devices and they should last for many years trouble free.

Bottom Line: This is not only an ending but quite possibly a new beginning.