

RENOVATION

Planning really does make perfect

Mark Armstrong and David Johnston offer advice on how to avoid common renovation pitfalls.

IF YOU don't have your own horror story about the cost of home renovations, you probably know someone who has. Don't despair — it is possible to renovate without widening the hole in your hip pocket. It all comes down to planning.

If you've just bought a home that's unrenovated but liveable, it's important to get a feel for the property in its current form before making any lasting changes. Consider living there for a year so you know what it is like at different times of the day and in different seasons.

For example, do some rooms get good natural light all day or all year, or only at certain times? If other rooms are always dark, how will you increase the level of light?

Pay attention to the layout and functionality of rooms. Does the arrangement of living and sleeping areas reflect the way your family lives, or are structural changes required? Do you need to open up a certain area or divide it to make better use of the space?

While you're taking the house for its year-long test drive, think long-term. How long will you live there after the renovations are done? If it's less than five years, you may not achieve enough capital growth to justify the cost of extensive renovations. In this case, it may be best to confine the revamp to areas that need the most attention or those with the highest traffic,

such as the kitchen and bathrooms. If you're planning to live in your home for five, 10 or 20 years, the amount of capital growth may justify the cost of more complex renovations. Having said this, the way your family lives today may not be the way you live in the future. It's important to ensure your renovations will accommodate the inevitable life changes. For example, if you have young children and they share a room now, they may want their own room as they get older.

Decide whether an architect or a draftsman will draw up the plans.

An architect is trained to think creatively about a home's potential, make the most of its good features and downplay or change the less attractive or functional ones. If you're undertaking complex renovations or you need ideas about what renovations may be suitable, an architect may be your best bet.

A draftsman, on the other hand, is trained primarily to draw up plans and as such may rely more on your creative input. They're probably an appropriate choice if you're undertaking less complex renovations or you already have a clear idea of what you want. A

draftsman usually charges less than an architect so they may also be a better choice if you're on a tight budget.

Once you've chosen the appropriate professional, ask them to draw up some initial concepts so you can take them to a builder, who can give you a quote for the cost of the works. If the quote is beyond your budget, it's back to the drawing board, so to speak. If

Do's and Dont's

- If possible, live in your home before renovating.
- Pay heed to light levels, layout and functionality.
- Ensure the renovations will suit your family long-term.
- Choose the appropriate professional to draw up the plans.
- Itemise your desired fit-out to avoid cost blow-outs.
- Get the builder to agree to a fixed price.



If you vary the building plans during construction, the builder will charge for them.

PICTURE: PHIL CARRICK

the quote is acceptable, instruct your architect or draftsman to do more detailed ("working") drawings from which the builder can work.

After the working drawings are done, get the builder to agree on a fixed price. When it comes to home renovations, the biggest cost blow outs come from windows, doors and flooring, along with kitchen and bathroom fit-outs.

If you are choosing the fit-out, specify the individual items when

you request a quote from the builder so they can obtain accurate costings. Otherwise, they will simply quote based on an estimate, leaving the way open for a nasty surprise when the bill arrives.

An architect can choose the fit-out for you but be aware that many charge for their services based on a percentage of the building cost. The more costly the fit-out, the higher the architect's fee.

If you vary the building plans

during construction, the builder will charge for them above the fixed price contract — so obtain a firm price, sign the variation and make sure the builder does, too.

If you plan properly, renovating your home can be a highly rewarding experience.

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www.propertyplanning.com.au