

# GET READY TO RENOVATE

IF YOU'VE BEEN DREAMING OF A MAJOR RENOVATION, CONSIDER THIS YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS.

BY AMANDA LECKY

After months (or years!) of saving and dreaming, you're ready to embark on a renovation that will put Chip and Jo to shame. You've taken your "before" pictures and you're eager for the improvements to begin.

And yet you know you're committing to a long, expensive project that will disrupt your normal routine. There's so much to manage, and the process can be full of unknowns.

While there's no way to avoid every single bump in the remodeling road, having the right guidance can improve the trip. We asked top design and construction pros to share their best insights into every stage of the process.

## REAL RENO HARDWORKING KITCHEN

Cassandra LaValle, founder of the lifestyle site Coco Kelley, recently updated the kitchen of her Seattle home. Her biggest takeaway from this remodel was how much of an impact delayed decisions can have on the overall timeline; each choice affects others later. One choice that was a no-brainer for her: quartz countertops. LaValle and her husband are avid bakers and entertain often, so the durable, stain-resistant surface was a must-have for them.



BEFORE

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ELLIE LILLSTROM. PAINT: WHITE DOVE OC-17; BENJAMINMOORE.COM FOR INFO. COSENTINO SILESTONE COUNTERTOPS IN LAGOON; COSENTINO.COM/USA FOR INFO. COLLECTIONS BY LEGRAND DESIGNER SWITCHES AND OUTLETS; LEGRAND.US FOR INFO



### PRO TIP

Opt for classic styles for hard-to-change elements, like cabinets and countertops. Smaller items, like faucets and hardware, are lower-stakes places to play, since you can replace them easily if you don't love them in a few years.



## PHASE 1

# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You’ve heard the old saying “Measure twice, cut once”? Turns out it’s good advice for the renovation process: The more time you spend planning, the more smoothly the project is likely to run. So go slowly at the start, and follow these tips.

### PICK THE RIGHT STARTING POINT

Not everyone can afford to remodel their whole house at once. “Start with the room you use the most, or the one that’s stealing your happiness as soon as you walk into it,” says interior designer Emily Henderson. Kitchens and bathrooms are usually good candidates to tackle first. “They’re both really important to how the house functions,” says interior designer Lauren Behfarin.

Alternatively, live in the house as is until you can afford to do all the work at one time. “You’ll save on materials by ordering them all at once, and the contractor’s bid will usually be less for one large job versus multiple smaller ones,” says interior designer Marina Hanisch. While you’re waiting, you may learn a thing or two about how you live in your house. “It takes some time to see how the spaces work for you,” says Sherry Petersik, author and DIY blogger at [younghouselove.com](http://younghouselove.com).

“If we had renovated our kitchen right when we moved in, we would have added sliding doors to an existing deck—a deck we ultimately ended up removing.”

### COME UP WITH A LOOK YOU LOVE

Gather inspiration from magazines, Pinterest, Houzz, and more. “Give yourself at least two weeks for this process—really let things percolate,” says Petersik. “Then pick out your very favorite images and move them to a new folder or pinboard. You’ll find that they are all very similar, or that there are elements repeated in each one.” Use that style to guide you.

### DEVELOP A BUDGET

A financial planner can help you decide what you can afford. Once you have a handle on your resources, consider talking to a local real estate agent to see what renovated homes in your area are selling for (or look at listings online). Don’t invest more than you could get back, especially if you plan to sell in the next five years, says architect Suzie Mariniello.

Next, make a list of your priorities, divided into must-haves and nice-to-haves. How to decide which is which? The must-haves are the features that will change how you live in

### REAL RENO

## LIGHTENED-UP BATHROOM

The dark and dated basement bathroom in this Portland, Oregon, home was brightened up with a combination of tiles in a peaceful palette. Designer Emily Henderson used gray grout on the shower walls, floor, and accent wall to define the shape of each tile and make cleaning easier. Though the overall style is classic, she opted for a modern mirror and lights that can be easily swapped out as tastes evolve.



**MAKE OVER YOUR EXPECTATIONS**  
The experts are unanimous: Your project will likely cost more and take longer than you imagine. “Once you open up walls and get under carpets,” says Hanisch, “you uncover things you didn’t know were there. That’s not always bad—sometimes you find original wood floors or a fireplace hidden behind drywall. But I always advise cushioning the timeline and the budget by 10 to 20 percent.”

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SARA LIGORRIA-TRAMP; KOHLER JACQUARD BATHROOM VANITY, CABINET, ARTIFACTS COLUMN BATHROOM SINK SPOUT, ARCHER ALCOVE BATH, CIMARRON TOILET; US.KOHLER.COM. BEVEL 2X8 TILE IN PARCHMENT GLAZE, FACET TILE (ON SHOWER SURROUND); PRATTANDLARSON.COM. CONIFER ARTICULATING SCIONCE, MIRROR (FOR SIMILAR), MASSEY ROUND CABINET KNOBS; REJUVENATION.COM



### PRO TIP

If you plan to sell in the near future, a bathroom update can help increase the resale value of your home. A major kitchen remodel, however, could be risky, since you may not recoup the full investment.





#### PRO TIP

If you can't move out during the work, ask your contractor to set up temporary plastic walls to cordon off the work zone. Remember that it's not permanent, and the results will be worth the inconvenience.

#### REAL RENO

### FLEXIBLE BONUS SPACE

Homeowners Sherry and John Petersik transformed the above-garage storage space of their Richmond, Virginia-area house into a family-friendly bonus room that functions as a TV room, playroom, and occasional guest space. Rather than reframing the entire room

to eliminate the angle of the roofline, they embraced it and maximized the space with a budget-friendly built-in. The couple used Ikea kitchen cabinetry and some DIY floating shelves to turn a potentially challenging design feature into something decorative and functional.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF YOUNGHOUSELOVE.COM

#### BUDGET SAVER

If you're trying to trim your budget, it's OK to eliminate the decor for now. But be aware that you may not love the finished remodel as much if you don't update the furnishings. If it's within your means, shop sales and vintage sources to help keep the budget in check while adding touches that make a home feel more "designer" and less "contractor."

the space. These are the things you really don't want to cut or compromise on, because they're essential to your lifestyle or vision. In a kitchen renovation, for example, a must-have could be removing a wall to open the area to the family room, while a nice-to-have might be a pot-filler faucet behind the stovetop.

#### HIRING HELP

You'd never ask a stranger to babysit without checking their references and background, so don't rush past those steps when hiring the professionals you'll invite into your home. "Talk to their past clients," says Behar. "Ask if they were responsible, trustworthy, and punctual." Also, contact your local Better Business Bureau to make sure there are no complaints registered against the pro.

Look for signs of professionalism. "It's a red flag if your contractor writes the estimate on a napkin, doesn't offer a contract, or only gives you a cellphone number as a contact," says Petersik. "You want business cards,

#### ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM

Who you need on your team depends on the type and scope of your project.



##### INTERIOR DESIGNER:

They can help plan a space, design cabinetry and built-ins, and choose materials, finishes, and furnishings.



**KITCHEN AND/OR BATH DESIGNERS:** They're adept at planning storage and choosing appliances and plumbing fixtures. They can also help with the overall look of the space.



**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** "The GC is like the conductor of the orchestra," says Petersik. "They schedule the subcontractors, order the materials, and generally keep everything moving."



**ARCHITECT:** If you're moving walls or adding to the footprint of your home, you'll need an architect (and maybe a structural engineer) to make sure the plans are structurally sound.

proof of all required licenses and insurance, an official estimate, and a contract that spells out the job, the timeline, and the payment schedule."

Getting bids from at least three contractors is essential. "You're evaluating how the contractors conduct themselves and present their estimates, but you're also looking for confirmation of the ballpark estimate you did yourself before asking for bids," says interior designer Tracy Morris. "If one is really high or low and the others are close together, you'll know that the outlier is either out of whack or including different elements in the project." Rule of thumb: Go with the bid in the middle, since it's probably the most accurate.

If you are faced with unexpectedly high bids, it's time to return to your prioritized project wish list and start cutting items from the bottom. Or you may have to divide your project into smaller chunks and do some elements now and others in the future. You could try to negotiate with the contractor on some items, though Morris advises doing so very carefully: "If you put the screws to your contractor at the beginning of the project, they may be less likely to include freebies—like repainting a room because you decide you don't like the color—later." One exception: "If you've gotten several bids and the contractor you really want to work with is higher than one of the others, you can absolutely be open and honest about that and see if they'll meet you halfway," says Morris.



## PHASE 2

# READY, SET, REMODEL

Your plan is in place and your team is prepped—but you can’t just sit back and watch the action. Staying involved (judiciously) can help keep the reno on track.

### BE AWARE OF THE PITFALLS

Altering the plan after the work begins (“changing orders,” in construction speak) almost always adds time and expense to the job. “Take the extra time to nail down all the details before the project starts rather than making changes midcourse, when it will throw off your schedule and budget,” says contractor Howard Molen. Most designers and architects will use drawings and renderings to show you what they’re planning so you can see what the space will look like—and make adjustments.

Another tip for a smooth project: “Make sure all the materials arrive at the site before the work begins,” says Henderson. “You don’t want contractors to have to wait midjob. They might hop on someone else’s project during the downtime, and then it can be hard to get them back to yours.”

Keep in mind that wood flooring requires extra prep. “It should be delivered to the site a minimum of two weeks before installation and stored in the room where it will be used so it can adjust to the temperature and humidity inside the home,” says Molen. Otherwise the wood could expand or contract after installation, causing buckling or gapping.

### COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

When it comes to getting your ideas across to your team, “pictures are worth a thousand words,” says interior designer Amber Lewis. “It’s the best way to explain what you want, because designers and architects are

#### PRO TIP

When you’re faced with a difficult decision on-site, Henderson suggests asking, “What are my options, and what will they cost?” It’s a concise way to get all the info you need to find a fix that will suit you and your budget.

### IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Being open about your wants, needs, and concerns can usually reduce or resolve personnel problems fairly easily, but what if your contractor or designer gets sick or walks off the job? “That’s a nightmare, of course, but if it happens, you’ll just have to hire someone else,” says Behfarin. “Ask for all the contacts and contracts up front, just in case you need to communicate with subcontractors and vendors directly.”

so visually driven.” Plus, you can just point at something you like if you don’t know the technical term for it. “On our projects, we’ll laminate a drawing and stick it up on the wall,” says Henderson. “That way anyone working in the room can see the plan and all the measurements, and we can mark changes with a Sharpie.”

### HANDLE CHALLENGES WITH GRACE

Structural, plumbing, and electrical issues. Bad weather. Construction mistakes. Some moments will test you. But know that there is a solution to every problem. “Trust your team—you hired them for a reason,” says Lewis. “That said, also trust your gut. If there is something that you know you 100 percent do not want, you have to speak up.”

#### OUR EXPERTS

**LAUREN BEHFARIN**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN NEW YORK CITY

**ERIN GATES**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN THE BOSTON AREA

**MANDI GUBLER**, DIY BLOGGER AT VINTAGEREVIVALS.COM

**MARINA HANISCH**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN NEW YORK CITY

**EMILY HENDERSON**, INTERIOR DESIGNER AND BLOGGER AT STYLEBYEMILYHENDERSON.COM

**AMBER LEWIS**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN LOS ANGELES

**SUZIE MARINIELLO**, ARCHITECT IN NEW YORK CITY

**CHRISTINE MARKATOS LOWE**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

**HOWARD MOLEN**, CONTRACTOR IN NEW YORK CITY

**TRACY MORRIS**, INTERIOR DESIGNER IN McLEAN, VIRGINIA

**SKYLAR OLSEN**, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH AT ZILLOW

**SHERRY PETERSIK**, AUTHOR AND DIY BLOGGER AT YOUNGHOUSELOVE.COM



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF AMBER ULMER

## PHASE 3

# IT’S DONE! WHAT NOW?

The plaster dust has settled, the crews are gone, and your rooms look amazing. But there are still a few things to do before you post those before-and-after snaps.

### COMPLETE THE PUNCH LIST

At the end of the project, you may still be left with nicked paint in the hallway, crooked outlets in the kitchen, and sconces that were installed upside down—in other words, with a lot of little mistakes that need fixing. Construction pros call these final items the “punch list.” Your contract should include a plan for attending to them and (typically) a provision that you will not make

#### WHAT TO KEEP

- ☐ Physical or scanned receipts for everything you purchase, from paint to appliances
- ☐ Purchasing info for anything pros delivered to the site
- ☐ Reference samples and swatches
- ☐ Leftover tile in case it’s needed for repairs down the road

## REAL RENO

# MODERNIZED FAMILY ROOM

When Elsie Larson, cofounder of the lifestyle site *A Beautiful Mess*, moved into her suburban Nashville home, she opted to swap the maroon carpet for hardwood floors and paint the dark stone fireplace and ceiling beams a bright white. In a neutral space, layers of texture are key, so she balanced the stone with a DIY shiplap wall opposite it.



the final payment until they’ve been completed to your satisfaction. “When a job is finished, I walk through every space with a pad of Post-it notes and stick them to anything that needs fixing,” says Hanisch. But there’s no need to wait until the end of the job to alert your contractor to any issues.

### THINK AHEAD

Stay in touch with your renovation team if you think you might want to work with them again. Bolster your good relationship by providing referrals or writing a positive online review. Then relax and enjoy your finished renovation. Until you’re ready to start thinking about the next one.