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How To Eliminate The Fear Of **Remodeling**

And Be Absolutely Certain You'll
Get Your Job Done Right!



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Facing The Fear

Thinking about remodeling your home? Scared of making a mistake? Don't know where to start? You are absolutely right to be concerned. Remodeling your home can be as treacherous as walking through a minefield. The Better Business Bureau gets more complaints for home improvements than any other category except automobile repairs. It doesn't have to be that way. Follow this plan and know that you'll have success.

Most articles written for homeowners contemplating a home improvement project list all the standard rules for selecting the right contractor, dealing with the legal aspects, etc. What they fail to do is give you enough information on how to properly assess your personal needs and then make sure those needs get translated into an outstanding finished product.

My goal is to give you the confidence to take charge of your project so you can make sure that you get exactly what you need and want - and at the price you want to pay. In other words, **to make it happen right.**

The first step occurs when it becomes obvious that there's a need to make changes in your living environment. It is out of

this need that the project will emerge. But how?

The Value of Planning

It's important to understand that proper planning is the most valuable tool you have. While a skilled designer can help you to focus on what's important, a little preparation on your part can go a long way in insuring a successful outcome.

First, it's tremendously valuable to list all the things you hope to accomplish with remodeling. Try to be as specific as possible. It's amazing how vague people can be about what they want. But the more clearly defined your goal, the easier it will be to achieve.

I suggest that you divide your list into two separate areas.

1. Physical requirements
2. Esthetic considerations

When it comes to the physical, I'm not referring to the actual construction process. I'm referring to specific physical needs. If your project is a room addition, what functions will take place in that room? What furniture arrangement will be used? If it's a kitchen, what types of storage are needed?

Often, at this point, I find that people begin thinking ahead to solutions. "We need a pantry cabinet for food storage." Don't fall into this trap. A pantry cabinet may or may not be the best answer to food storage, but don't limit yourself. A much more effective solution may evolve during the planning process. Concern yourself, now, with defining your needs and desires.

The esthetic aspect may be a little more difficult at first, but this is the part that yields some of the most interesting results. Begin by standing back and taking an objective look at your home as it is now. What elements do you like? Which do you dislike? Look through as many books and magazines as possible to pick out room settings and architectural features which appeal to you. Stretch yourself and find pictures you like, but

which may be more extreme than what you'll probably end up with. By stretching your imagination, you open yourself to the possibility of creating a unique, one-of-a-kind environment.

The Design Criterion Controls Your Selections

The combination of physical needs and esthetic desires will eventually form what I call the **Design Criterion**. Once this is clearly defined you will have a good mental image of what you want to accomplish. At that point, all the choices to be made throughout the project will be a simple matter of evaluating whether or not they support the Design Criterion.

Of course, the Design Criterion is not the ultimate goal. It's simply a picture - either mental or plans drawn on paper - that guides you to where you want to be.

The budget must be brought into the equation before we can establish the true goal. Choices of material can vary widely in cost. However, at each price level there are materials that still support the Design Criterion. For example, kitchen countertops can be made of laminate, tile, solid surfacing, or granite. While each of these vary substantially in cost, there will be colors or designs which will support the Design Criterion.

When you finish this initial stage of planning, you'll have some guidelines which will help to keep you focused on the end result. It'll, also, help you in selecting and working with the contractors, and other professionals who'll be helping your dream become a reality.

It's not important for you to formulate the Design Criterion on your own. There are professionals who can help you with this. However, understanding this process will help you to be actively involved and feeling in control of your project, while allowing others to use their expertise in turning out the finished product. You'll be more confident about selecting a contractor, since you'll invariably seek out someone who shares your vision.

Who Will Design Your Remodeling Project?

Armed with the lists you've made and pictures you've accumulated, you're ready to take the next step - selecting a designer or contractor.

You've given lots of thought to your home improvement project. Collected information. Dreamed of all the possibilities. You know what you want (or at least have a pretty good idea.) Now for the big question. Do you need a designer?

Unfortunately, there's no easy answer. Since you've already spent considerable time focusing your needs, making lists, and looking at pictures, it would appear that the design would pretty much fall into place. It might, but there may be a thousand important details that fall by the wayside.

A talented designer will be aware of the many subtleties which go into the making of an outstanding project. He'll have training, formal or informal, which has prepared him to analyze problems and find solutions. In addition, he will have seen a large number of similar projects and be aware of all the pitfalls; what works and what doesn't. And, he'll work through the objectives with you and formulate and refine the **Design Criterion** so that it fits you like a glove.

It is his obligation to be sensitive to your budgetary requirements. It benefits no one if you can't afford to build what's designed. There are usually several solutions which can lead to successful results, so finding a balance between desires and budget are not as difficult as you might imagine.

Often, people have misconceptions of what a designer is supposed to do for them. They fear that in some ways they'll be giving control of the project over to someone else. Unfortunately, this fear might be well-founded, but it should never be the case. Never hire someone who tries to impose their own values without offering valid justification why this particular viewpoint should be considered.

By far, the most creative results are born out of the careful

collaboration between the two of you. Remember, this is your project. If you want it to happen right, make sure you have someone you can work with.

So, where do you find this person. Here are the possibilities:

1. A contractor.
2. An architect or independent designer.
3. A design/build firm.
4. You or a friend.

It would be great if you could just check out someone's credentials and determine if they meet the required criteria. But, the fact is that **creativity is pretty much where you find it**. Let's take a look at each of these options to see which one works for you.

Contractors

Many contractors have the skill, expertise and flair to do an excellent job on the design work. Most don't, but the price, which is usually zero or low cost, can be pretty attractive. Be careful. You might get a design that's worth exactly what you paid for it.

Architects

Architects and independent designers can be some of the most highly talented and creative people in the business. But don't make that assumption. Many have excellent training on the "nuts and bolts", but may not be particularly adept when it comes to artistic ability. Or, they'll over-engineer the dickens out of it and come up with beautiful, detailed, expensive drawings that'll send the bids through the roof. Take the time to check them out. They'll be the most expensive of all with fees of 5% to 10% of the project cost.

Design/Build

Design/build firms have been increasing in popularity over the years. And, for good reason. These companies offer “concept to completion” capabilities which brings excellent continuity to the whole process. The cost of the design is usually much lower than other professional design services. A strong point for using one of these firms is that by the time you’re done with the plans, you’ll know whether or not you want them to do the construction.

Don’t sign a construction contract before you have a complete set of plans and a bid price. You don’t want to be committed until you’ve had ample opportunity to evaluate their capabilities as a contractor.

Unfortunately, some design/build firms require you to hire them for the whole project before the design is even started. That means that you’re tied to them. If you don’t proceed with construction, the plans that you’ve paid all that money for belongs to them. You can’t use them if you have another company do the construction.

Alternatives

What about handling the design by yourself or with a friend? Remember what I said about creativity being where you find it? If you feel there’s enough talent involved and the project isn’t too complex, go for it. Get the contractor to help with the technical aspect and you might get excellent results.

Once you have a working set of plans and a clearly defined Design Criterion, the selection of a contractor is considerably less formidable.

The Really Big Decision - The Contractor

Selecting a contractor is such a disagreeable job for some homeowners that many people just give up and forget the whole thing. Others, who are more persistent, suffer through

no shows, incompetents, and rude dudes before finally finding the right person to hire.

Some of this comes with the territory, but there are short-cuts. If you've been dealing with an architect or design/ build firm, you're half way there. You'll be considering them or their recommendation.

The important thing is to find someone with whom you feel comfortable and who you know is on your side. If you can't develop a good working relationship before entering into a contract, don't proceed with them. What will happen when things go wrong in the middle of construction? If you have a good relationship with a caring contractor, who has your best interests in mind, then overcoming obstacles is a cinch.

Ask them to furnish you with the critical information you need; including a list of references. Call these people and go see at least one or two completed projects. I urge you to actually view the homes they've worked on. Talking on the phone won't tell you everything you need to know. **Taking this step could save you much grief, later on.**

Asking the Right Questions

Here are specific questions you need to have answered. Some answers will come from the contractor, others from the references.

1. Are they licensed with the building department? Will they provide a permit?
2. Is their expertise compatible with the scope of your project?
3. Do they begin jobs on time and diligently follow it through to completion?
4. Do they maintain good communication throughout the job?
5. Are they insured for both liability and worker's compensation?

6. Is there a warrantee provided of not less than one year?

If you've done your homework well, then you can move forward feeling confident; in the contractor, and in yourself.

The Art of Protecting Yourself

Next comes the signing of the contract. There's a definite art to writing a good contract. If too little information is on the agreement, you leave yourself wide open to assumptions and disagreements. If it's too complex, it becomes unwieldy and inflexible. What you want is to eliminate the gray areas. You, the contractor, and the construction crew should know exactly what's included and what's not. If you're in doubt, err on the safe side and have it written in.

Since the design process, ideally, continues throughout the project, a certain amount of flexibility in the contract is acceptable. Good craftsmen have a whole bag of tricks for putting together the components of a job and they need to be given the freedom to inject their own creativity and experience.

Good Communication is Essential

The secret of getting construction details finished the way you want is to establish and maintain good communication with all the parties involved. **You don't want to become the general contractor, but you do need to feel connected to the process.** Even if this only means looking the work over at night and having a short phone conversation with the foreman, you'll still have some control.

The contractor should have a well defined method of establishing and maintaining quick and efficient channels of communication. If they don't, be awfully cautious. You should be able to reach them when you need them.

Construction - A Bumpy Road

Be prepared for the normal ups and downs associated with

remodeling. There are stages when progress moves with miraculous speed only to be followed by periods best compared with snails. In addition, if there are different tradesmen involved, the whole process becomes herky-jerky, start and stop. It can be maddening, but it helps to know it's normal.

If something isn't going the way you expect it should, don't sit quietly back and hope for the best. Ask questions. If you aren't getting the answers you want to hear, find someone who can give them to you. Talk to a supervisor, the designer, or even the building inspector, if necessary. But, make sure you're comfortable with what's being done. In extreme cases, stop the work. This is your house and you have the right to a project which has been completed in accordance with the Design Criterion. Not everything will go perfectly, but a good company will be diligent about solving the problems which arise.

Can you see it, now; the finished product? Remodeling is an adventure which can happen right. When the dust has settled, the results will be a source of great pride and accomplishment. What are you waiting for? Go for it!

How Can We Be Of Service?

HomePerfect is a good place to start when it comes time to remodel your home. We specialize in high-quality residential remodeling. As an established, design-build construction company, we've built hundreds of successful projects in the RTP area. Our first visit to your home is always free. There's never a long winded sales presentation - we don't like them any more than you do.

Instead, this is a time for us to listen - then discuss options, address the realities, and answer all your questions. Whether you choose to hire us or not, our goal is always to make you happy that we were there. The normal reaction we get from clients is a hearty thanks for taking the time to give out the benefit of our knowledge and experience.

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