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10 steps to a successful renovation

Ensure your project comes in on time, in budget
and is everything you hoped it would be

WORDS KUNLE BARKER



An extension at the rear of this villa in west London by Found Associates (020 7734 8400; foundassociates.com) provides a strong connection between the house and garden

Take your time

Planning your project well in advance of the construction work will help ensure everything runs smoothly. 'Pre-construction is the time to make as many decisions as possible,' says Wessley Johnson, managing director at IH Flagship (020 8798 0562; ihflagship.com). Elements to consider and confirm include:

your budget; hiring a project team; approving the design and layout; submitting a planning application (if required); choosing materials and even the interior design elements, such as the colour schemes. Take as much time as you need at this stage and avoid making decisions later in the process, which will almost certainly extend the project completion date and incur extra costs.

2 Hire an architect

Whether you need an architect, and the precise nature of their role on your renovation, will depend on the scale and complexity of the project. In most cases, at the very least, it's worth consulting with a professional who has experience of working on a similar build.

'An architect will add value in many different ways,' say Linda Stevens, head of client services at RIBA (020 7580 5533; architecture.com). 'They will make the best use of your space, help choose a builder, manage planning applications, select materials and get the best prices from your supply chain.' Use RIBA's online architect-search feature to find a practice in your area.

3 Provide a clear brief

'It's important for clients to talk about what success looks like,' says Chris Dyson, founder of Chris Dyson Architects (020 7247 1816; chrisdyson.co.uk). 'If your build team doesn't understand the priorities, it's more difficult for them to deliver exactly what you're hoping for.'

Be clear about what's important to you and what you want to achieve. Outline the budget, your design and build aspirations, and when you want the project delivered by. 'It is fine to assign equal importance to each of these factors, but make sure this is communicated to your architect and/or builder,' adds Dyson.



In 2016, Chris Dyson Architects (020 7247 1816; chrisdyson.co.uk) extended and renovated a former brewer's cooperage in north London. Its basement has become an open-plan family space

4 Stick to a schedule

Drawing up a document detailing the costs and the timeline for your renovation has advantages. 'Compile a schedule of works, so that your build team is 100 per cent clear about what's included in your contract sum,' says Jay Bhudia, chartered quantity surveyor at JB Cost Associates (020 8930 5631; jbcostassociates.co.uk). This can be created by an architect or a specialist quantity surveyor and will form part of your construction contract. It will be referred to by your project manager if there are any questions over how works should be completed, who should complete them and for how much. As the schedule contains cost details for each section of your project, this can be used to calculate the value of the build that has been completed. This valuation will help you assess how much to pay your builder, ensuring that you only pay for each completed stage. It also reveals important information about when to order the materials you'll need: you wouldn't want supplies arriving too early or too late to site. »



When planning a renovation or extension, it's worth consulting an architect. Their expertise and contacts book will likely prove crucial to the success of your project

5 Find a brilliant builder

Choosing a builder for your project is one of the most important decisions you will make. 'Look for an experienced tradesperson with a track record of delivering projects that are similar to yours,' says Johnson. Local recommendations from friends, family and neighbours are a good way to start your search, but make thorough background checks before hiring anyone. Speak to previous clients; visit a completed project and one that's in progress as proof of their credentials. 'Avoid making a decision based solely on the price you've been quoted, as often the best builder will not be the cheapest,' Johnson adds. Start by looking at The Federation of Master Builders' database (fmb.org.uk).

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6 Prepare the paperwork

It's vital to have a construction contract in place before any work gets underway and avoid hiring a builder or contractor that is reluctant to use one. Make sure it includes everything you would like done. This might include the supply of materials and the removal and disposal of waste. The document sets out the key responsibilities of both client and contractor, which should mitigate disputes arising due to a lack of clear guidelines. It also details how any disputes that crop up should be managed, and clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of each party. Try the RIBA Domestic Building Contract, which costs from £25 (ribacontracts.com).



A radical re-design with an extension and basement by Neil Dushenko Architects (020 7354 8106; neildushenko.com) gave a couple with young children extra living space

7 Choose the best manager

There are many options available when it comes to the project management of your build. You may wish to take on this role yourself, particularly if you have previous experience and the work is fairly simple. If you have hired an architect, they could take on all or part of the role. Or you could hire someone who specialises in this area. 'The project manager is a key member of the build team, especially where the renovation is complex and involves specialist consultants and contractors,' says David Roden, director at David Roden Architects (020 3282 7119; rodenarchitects.com).

If you manage your own project, it is still worth consulting with a project manager to help you at the beginning of the process. Be realistic about your level of experience and the amount of time you can devote, as project managing is time-consuming. If you hire a full-time person, expect to pay around five per cent of your total project cost on their fee. »



Floor-to-ceiling glazing allows plenty of light into this single-storey extension to an Edwardian house. The project was part of a renovation by West Architecture (020 7482 6849; westarchitecture.co.uk)

8 Check the quality

Ensure that regular inspections are made at key stages. 'Attend the site to confirm that the setting out and construction of all the elements is true to the design and specification requirements. The omission or substitution of any part can have a detrimental effect on the overall quality of the build, as can the misalignment of structural elements or masonry,' explains Rhona Waugh, director at Found Associates (020 7734 8400; foundassociates.com). To the untrained eye, structural errors are not as easy to spot as something such as bad tiling. So your architect or project manager will need to be on site for these stages.

'Stay on top of your spend, so that you can make quick adjustments to bring your renovation back in budget if you need to'

9 Use workflow software

It can be useful to have a visual representation of your renovation's timeline. A Gantt chart app (asana.com) provides a simple, graphic way to plot the progress of a project that makes it easy to see when a schedule is on (or off) course. You can also use this type of software to indicate whether the work is being carried out in the correct sequence.

'It should make clear key milestones and who is responsible for them. Otherwise, it's easy to overlook a small decision that may have far-reaching repercussions,' says Alex Bilton, director at architect ABHR_A (020 8769 1082; abhra.co.uk).



Architect ABHR_A moved the kitchen of this Edwardian home in Richmond, Surrey so that it overlooks the garden from a rear extension. A ridge skylight gives the space extra light



Plan a renovation project with a Gantt timeline bar chart and ensure that your renovation is taking place in the correct sequence. You can trial a digital Gantt chart for free at asana.com/gantt-charts

10 Stay on budget

Make sure that at any point in your project you know what you have spent, what you forecast you would spend and what the predicted end-of-project cost is. Update figures weekly and include all increases in cost as they arise. 'Stay on top of your spend, so that you can make quick adjustments to bring your renovation back in budget if you need to,' says Jonny Callard, director at chartered building surveyors Thomas & Thomas (020 7060 1899; tssurveyors.co.uk).

Include a contingency figure, 15 per cent of your estimated total project spend, and make sure all of the costs are confirmed before you start any work. GD