



INTERVIEW WITH KUNLE BARKER



Refurb Renovation News speaks with Property Expert, Journalist & TV presenter Kunle Barker about renovation projects

1. What determined your passion for renovation and design? Tell us about the moment you decided this was the career for you.

I always loved making things and was fascinated as a young boy by buildings. My father used to work for BT and would take me to the telephone exchanges which were these huge buildings with Victorian facades which hid a raft of electronics connecting us to loved ones through a miles of cables, lights and switches. I loved the fact you could not tell the buildings use just by looking at it. Then whilst studying my master's degree at the University of Leeds I decided to buy a house, live in one room and rent the other out. I spent the summer painting, fitting doors and even fitting the kitchen. It was hard work but the results were great as I fitted laminate flooring and Ikea furniture which was not what most student landlords were doing at the time.

2. *Illustrious Homes* have been hugely successful and you have conducted many high profile projects, what has been some of your favourite refurbishments and why?

Due to our reputation for working on period properties we were part of the team that renovated Headley Court, and were brought on to help finish the project in time for the opening by HRH Prince Charles. It was an incredible challenge but a project that I'm really proud of as the team really pulled together to make sure this rehabilitation centre for veterans was open on time.

3. Do you think renovating has become more popular in recent years? If so, what do you think the reasons are for this?

According to the Hiscax Renovations and Extensions Report 2018, the number of homeowners choosing to improve rather than move has risen fivefold since 2013 – up from 3 per cent of households to 15 per cent so the stats suggest that renovating is only increasing. One of the main reasons is the high cost of housing making it increasingly more expensive to move. When your stamp duty bill is more than the cost of an extension, it makes sense to stay put.

4. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect to consider before starting a renovation project?

How you use the space now and how you think you will use it in the future. Try to design your renovation with one eye on the future. If you are thinking of starting a family then make sure your renovation takes this into account.

5. With trends coming and going, is it common to get caught in the trap of forever redesigning and renovating and not actually enjoy the home?

Yes, but normally because you didn't ask the right questions when designing your space, so you probably haven't identified the problem that you are trying to fix, hence continually renovating...

6. What is your ideal project?

I love period conversations especially ones that mix period restoration with modern architecture. I'm a big fan of glass boxes on Victorian terraces – but only if they are designed and built correctly

7. You have co-hosted and been a part of many TV shows, has this benefited and extended your knowledge of the industry?

Yes, undoubtedly mainly because working on TV has given me a wider exposure to materials, manufacturers, and designers. One of the biggest benefits has been working with Alan Titchmarsh and my appreciation of how important it is to really consider your garden and outside space when you renovate your home.

8. With renovating/home improvement shows becoming more popular, do you feel that more people are seeing potential with their current homes, and becoming more open minded with changing up their homes, and confident in taking on a renovation project?

Yes, I think so. I've noticed more ambitious projects and not just in terms of budget but in terms of design ambition also.



9. What would you say to people who want to renovate their homes but are not confident and don't know how to go about it?

Speak to an architect in the first instance, they will help you to understand what you want to achieve and more importantly how to achieve it. Always take your time and don't rush into any project – this is how most problems happen

10. Do you have a signature design aesthetic or is each project completely unique?

Each project is unique and client led, although I have been told that reproduction period joinery is a feature of most of my projects.

11. In your view, do you think Brexit will affect renovation in any way?

Yes, uncertainty in the market will I feel mean that more people improve instead of move.

12. Could you share with us some of your top tips for making home improvements?

- Take your time
- Consider how you use the space and what you want from it
- Clearly set out your brief and articulate what a successful project means - budget/quality/time or a mix of all 3.
- Set a budget and don't forget to add a contingency (15%) for unforeseen circumstances
- If you use a builder check their references and view a live site they are working on.

Kunle Barker, Projects Director, IH Flagship



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