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# Makeover

# How to renovate with less stress

Do not start a building project until you read our guide, says **Claire Carponen** 

one are the days when people upgraded to a new house every few years. Moving home is now so expensive the cost rising faster rate than house prices over the past decade that many homeowners opt to improve rather than move. Despite a plethora of home-improvement shows, from Kevin McCloud's Grand Designs to [Sarah] Beeny's Restoration Nightmare, it can be daunting embarking on a renovation project for the first time. Whether you plan to extend your kitchen, knock down a wall or refit the bathroom, here are ten things you should know before you start.

# Get a survey done

Accurate drawings of your home will allow you to see where it is best to add space, so get a measured survey (it costs about £600 for an average home). "People tend to want to extend outwards, but it might not always be the right option," says Michael Holmes, a spokesperson for the Southern Homebuilding & Renovating Show and author of *Renovating for Profit*. It is also (usually) less pricey to build upwards, as it does not require building foundations.

# Think creatively

Find out what neighbours have done to maximise space, or ask a builder for ideas. A small loft can become a bigger space by adding a mansard roof or dormer window, or you could remove the existing roof and add a new storey. A standard conversion on a terraced house should add a 15 sq m room. It will cost from £1,000 per sq m (plus VAT), or from £1,200 per sq m if the roof needs changing.

#### Do your sums

First find out whether your project will add value to your home. Ask local estate agents for the average price per square metre in your area and compare it with the price of your proposed project. Expensive projects such as basement conversions make financial sense only in very high-value areas.

#### Get your plans sorted

You can use a design and build contractor for a simple loft conversion or minor extension. There are also companies that specialise in basement conversions and glass box extensions. For grander schemes, hire an architect (architecture.com) or an



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architectural practitioner (ciat.org.uk) to draw plans.

#### Integrate space

For extensions, plan how you are going to integrate the old space with the new. You may have to remodel entirely to maximise borrowed light and create a good layout. Holmes says: "The more successful projects are the ones where people have been brave and knocked down the back and side walls to create a large open-plan living space." You will need a structural engineer (istructe.org), but if you're hiring a builder, it will be included in their quote.

# Work out your budget

Take time to do this, adding at least 10 per cent on top for unforeseen works. Be realistic about prices. Get an estimate of material and labour costs from mybuildingproject.co.uk and builders merchants such as Travis Perkins and Jewson. If hiring a builder, ask for a written quotation (this should be free), ie, a fixed price. Also ask whether it includes VAT. Agree on what has been written down; be specific about what you want so there is no room for confusion. Write down any extra costs that crop up along the way to avoid a nasty shock at the end.

#### Pick the right tradesmen

Ask friends and family or check rating sites such as ratedpeople.com or mybuilder.com. Rebecca Rowlands, of Oakfield Home Improvements, says you should ask to see examples of previous work and references: "The key is to make sure they do the same work as you want for your home." Get three or four quotes. Establish a good relationship with your builder. "Arguments usually start when communication breaks down between the client and builder," Rowland says. Request a gas safety certificate for any gas work carried out and a NICEIC certificate for electric work. Keep all the guarantees for new appliances and the completion certificate from building regulations.

# Do you need planning permission?

Minor works such as a simple extensions should not require planning permission, but check planningportal.gov.uk/ permission/commonprojects/extensions or call your local planning office. Your application should be processed within eight weeks (from £185). Structural

changes, including loft conversions, may require building control approval.

# Ways to make savings

Managing the build yourself could save you about 15 per cent, according to Holmes, but you will need to be confident and used to managing people. With so many trades involved, he adds, "if you don't get the timings right it will [cost] you more money". A simple design and self-sourced fixtures and fittings can save money. But make sure they arrive before the workmen start in case any bits are missing.

# Work out a payment plan

Agree a payment plan with your builder and write it down. Pay no more than 10-20 per cent of the overall job cost upfront (unless it's a Grand Designs-style project). Space out the payments as the work is completed.



Renovating can be more daunting than Sarah Beeny, right, makes it seem