



# Renovation ready

The surefire way to avoid reno-related dramas is to do your homework. Here's our quick guide to planning the perfect build

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**L**IVING IN A HOME that is perfect in every way is a homeowner's dream, but getting it that way can be quite a challenge. You need a well-honed list of plans and ideas, an accurate budget and a dream team of builders and designers. Bear in mind that, even with all your ducks in a row, the unexpected can come along, blow your budget and give you home-reno headaches. The key to staying ahead of the game is to plan, plan and plan some more.

## Before you start

Whether your renovation is a single-room makeover or a full rebuild, the final outcome is a balancing act between needs and wants, so consider carefully. Is this your forever home? Are you planning to have children? Do friends and family stay regularly or is working from home an option? These, and more, are all things to think about before your plans even make the paper stage.

## Who to choose?

Architects can cover all aspects of a renovation, from interior design and finding builders to landscaping. A full service can cost around 10-15 per cent of the total price of the job. Building companies offer many of the same services as an architect, but by providing their own builders, they can keep costs down. "Clients stay with us until



*Make a list,*  
pin it up where you'll see it regularly and add to it when new possibilities strike you. Once you've figured out your needs, it's time to consider your wants, such as walk-in wardrobes, extensive storage or a standout island bench for the kitchen. In the early stages, take inspiration from magazines and architects' websites, while compiling colour swatches and favourite objects to form your own personal style.

the project is complete, so we are less concerned with making a profit at the design stage," says Robert Zdravec of Peter Bell Homes. For less complicated jobs, it's often cheaper to engage a draughtsman to provide construction drawings for development approval, and a builder to make them happen. Even smaller projects can be time consuming, so bear that in mind if you are planning to project-manage the job yourself.

## Do your homework

"The average cost for building a detached house is around \$1000 to \$1100 per square metre," says Harley Dale of the Housing Industry Association. This relates to a home built from a standard plan. "Renovation costs vary greatly depending on the size and number of rooms you include, and whether there are any wet areas, such as kitchens and bathrooms,"

your builder is registered and has home-warranty insurance to cover defective or incomplete work. They also need workers' compensation and public liability insurance.

## Planning 101

Planning requirements vary according to where you live, so before you start, contact your local council to ascertain exactly what's needed for your prospective job and seek advice on which permits or applications need to be lodged. It's also a good idea to talk your plans over with your neighbours, particularly if you are extending or embarking on a long job, so that any potential objections can be resolved before council is involved. Necessary requirements can range from energy and water-saving regulations to environmental impact statements, with additional paperwork required for work in conservation areas or on an older

**"Think about employing a designer - they'll ultimately save you time and money," ~ Mal Corboy, designer and Hettich ambassador**

says David Hallett of Archicentre. "Also, with extensions, the original building may need work as well." The best way to get an accurate idea of the cost of your project is to hire a quantity surveyor, who will calculate the cost of construction as well as providing a costing of materials. A builder can also provide a detailed quote. When unexpected problems arise, your budget can take a hammering but having contingency funds in place can soften the blow. "If your job is well documented with detailed drawings and specifications, five per cent of the total cost would usually be adequate," says David. "If you have signed a contract based only on basic building permit application drawings, you should allow at least 20 per cent to cover extra costs."

## Finding a builder

Personal recommendations, either from friends, neighbours or your architect, are hard to beat, and the Master Builders Association ([masterbuilders.com.au](http://masterbuilders.com.au)) provides a list of qualified builders. Interview at least three about their experience, availability and price, and check their references - most homeowners will talk about tradespeople's behaviour and any complications. Make sure

property. A landscape plan may also be a requirement. "A lot of government fees are based on a percentage of the overall building cost," says Robert. "Council fees are generally between \$2000-\$3000."

## Money matters

Check the plan has ticked off all your requirements and read the building contract carefully. Review the costs, making sure you have a clear picture as to what's included - prime cost items, such as tapware and tiling, may not be part of the budget, or there might only be a small amount allowed for them. A contingency sum is essential to deal with issues that may only arise after building has started, such as burst pipes. The contract outlines how long the job will take, and on large jobs, the builder will supply a timetable that leaves flexibility for bad weather and unforeseen circumstances. Should you stay in the house or rent a place? The builder can work faster with you out of the way, but rental costs add considerably to the budget.

## And now for the fun part!

If you've decided to work with an architect, such decisions as interior design, selecting fittings and placement of powerpoints, will

all be planned.

"If you use an architect, everything is taken care of for you and finalised before the builder's quote is accepted, let alone before work starts," says David. Even if you're not the project manager, you need to be available if any problems arise and the builder needs a quick answer. For those who want to have a more hands-on experience but are not living on site, try to visit regularly, but check with your builder beforehand.

When it comes to shopping for essentials, the golden rule is, do it early, so that items are delivered and ready to fit. Consider where you want to put electricity sockets and switches, and if you want a built-in sound system or an alarm, as wiring will need to be finalised in the early stages - check the exact schedule with your builder. While it's important to compare prices and research products for the big-ticket items, don't forget about little essentials, such as cabinet handles and doorknobs. Think about your colour palette, too. It can be refined throughout the process, depending on the light and space of the rooms, but if it needs to dovetail with anything fitted earlier - such as your flooring - it pays to plan ahead. **hb**

