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7 MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN

RENOVATING

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This guide has been prepared by Eric Bobrow and Enoch Sears and is for information purposes only. Every property should be inspected by a qualified designer prior to starting the design process.



WHERE TO START

Make sure you do the research before you start to dig

The most popular house styles today are still the classics from yesterday, villas, bungalows and art deco. Old houses have a charm of their own. The perennial struggle, however, is how to best live in them with our changing needs.

Charm doesn't always translate into livability. Often we need to improvise.

The challenge, How to do it right?

Undertaking major renovations is a bit like carrying out an open-heart surgery. Everything is exposed, there are wires and tubes, details to remember to put back together correctly and making sure everything is neatly stitched up at the end.

As architects, clients have often contacted us, when they have attempted renovations themselves or as a measure to save money have hired non-qualified professionals to do the work. Sadly so, to the detriment of the end result: i.e. a poorly executed renovation to an otherwise wonderful house, costing additional time, effort and money to put to rights, rather than getting it right from the start.

Deciding to renovate is a big financial, emotional and time-consuming investment. Make sure you have done the research, before you start digging. We have gone through this process with clients many times and have found that following are the 7 Mistakes People Make When Renovating.

The best time to eliminate these mistakes is before you start.



WHERE TO START

1. Location, location, location

Is this where I REALLY want to be?

Consider your location before you decide to renovate. Are you in the right location? Should you be across the street? You cannot move the mountain, but you could move to the other side of the mountain to get better sun, be closer to the school your kids go to, perhaps even closer to your favorite cafe so you do not have to get into the car every time you want to go for brunch. It may seem like trivial things but these small things successfully create or mar an overall life experience that can otherwise be convenient and enjoyable. To that end your home and ultimately the location of it is a huge factor in being able to achieve the same.

You hear about life coaches and we believe having the right home is very important for creating the life you desire and want. It is well worth your money to have a property evaluated by an architect prior to purchasing it to confirm its renovation or development potential.

A lot of older homes have the best locations, the most established gardens, lets face it, they were here first and despite maybe being completely run down and looking the worse for wear they could have all the qualities that can be hard to buy or build new.

A hundred year old tree is very hard to achieve over a two-year period, whereas a beautiful renovation over a two-year period is very realistic.



WHERE TO START

2. Deciding to invest

Intrinsic value versus capital value

Traditionally we value a home around the nuts and bolts it costs to build or renovate it versus the real estate value applicable for a potential resale. We count the number of bathrooms, car parks, bedrooms, and living areas and nominate a capital value to a property based on that. However in most cases these together are only a part of the puzzle that determines a building's worth.

The highest price received when selling a home can be a one bathroom property with terrible off street parking. One would often crash into the side of the adjacent woodland when trying to get in and out of the garage.

So then how and why would such a property be so valuable at times?

Such houses are rare examples that come from specific eras of your local city or country. The design and history of the place and the quality of the materials used, give such properties its uniqueness and as such it's resale value.

Logically a property might be assessed as being worth \$600,000.00. But with the intrinsic X-factor the property may be sold for \$700,000.00. The new owner pays this 'premium' for the X-factor and the 'feel' a beautifully renovated character home can produce when done correctly.

The key point is that the property has to be done right. The two differences between working with a great architect and an average one are: 1) How do you feel while living in the house, and 2) What you can sell the property for on completion.



WHAT RESEARCH TO DO

3. Heritage homes

Buildings weren't erected to be historic

We still try and breathe life back into character homes that are over 100 years old. Character homes have continuously been demolished, rebuilt and changed over the decades. Some have been lovingly restored several times, some have been transported on the backs of trucks to new locations as towns have grown and changed.

Character homes differ from modern renovations and treating the two the same is a huge mistake. Part of renovating an old character home is about rescuing an old building from obscurity and taking it back to its former glory.

Each region, town or city has its own architectural heritage. They all have stories to tell: the people who built them and those who used them. Taking the time to dwell into a building's heritage may reveal some unexpected discoveries, which could change the way you want to renovate your home.

Great architects should be able to capture the heritage from the past and translate it into the design for the future.



WHAT RESEARCH TO DO

4. Research architectural style

The devil is in the detail. Have you got the right devil?

Its saddening when specific architectural styles in buildings get devoid of their splendor and slowly fall into disrepair. Often they are in such a state that actually getting them back on track seems an insurmountable obstacle. It is however important to get it right.

Do not spend any money on pretty details, new corbels or doors or other detailing BEFORE you are certain they are of the same architectural style as the original house.

Deciding to veer away from an existing style of a house requires even more consideration of the design. If you are going to mix different period details or architectural styles in your design you are taking a huge risk. While experts can pull it off, more often your renovation can end up looking tacky.

Not all architects specialize in all styles. Find an architect who is great at explaining how character houses go together and what gives them their unique design appeal. If your architect does not understand architectural style of your home, do not hesitate to look for someone else.

The detailing of your planned renovation is crucial to a successful end result.



WHAT TO CONSIDER

5. Living with renovations

Are you ready to live amidst invaders?

Living in the mist of a major renovation can be one of the most stressful things you can do. It pays to be prepared and organize your surroundings so that you are better able to cope with the building process once it gets underway.

We all know the term 'my house my castle'. Imagine your castle being invaded by foreign knights, (builders), carrying swords and shields (skill saws and protective head gear) alongside battering rams (demolition equipment) siege towers (scaffolding) and an assortment of archers and various common army folk (electricians, plumbers and other sub trades) and you will have a fairly adequate idea of what it means being 'invaded' for a renovation project.

Be realistic about your own ability to cope with having to crawl over building equipment, timber framing stacked in the hallway, cooking on a hot plate for months on end and sleeping on a mattress on the floor. You may be perfectly happy to live amongst the sawdust and not want to be without it; however safety with respect to your family is another point to consider.

It may not be safe to have a two year old crawling around if you are cutting holes in the floor. The process can be very stressful for some children, they feel insecure as the thing they understand as reliable and constant (their home) is undergoing change.

It may pay to move out for a while to keep your sanity and create a bit of distance between yourself and your renovation project so that you are both happy to see each other after you finish.



WHAT TO CONSIDER

6. Emotive

The touchy feely side of architecture

How do you want your new house to feel?

Basically if you do not want to talk about the emotive response you wish to create in your renovation, put this booklet down right now and read no further.

One of the great but often unmentioned causes of both happiness and misery is the quality of our environment: the kind of walls, chairs, buildings and streets that surround us.

What is a beautiful building? What is home? What emotions would you like to feel as you arrive at and move through your house?

The **BIGGEST MISTAKE** is not to inform your architect of the emotional response you would like to get out of your renovation. This is the crucial overriding factor on any building project.

In general we should pay more attention to the psychological consequences of design when renovating, as it is the emotive side of architecture that will affect the lives, the happiness and ultimately the wellbeing of the people living in the homes created.

Emotion should be part of every design brief and rated just as highly as the more tangible aspects of building and renovating.



WHAT TO CONSIDER

7. Practical aspects

Sort the basics, do the budget

Building or renovating your home is a daunting task and there is always so much to do and so many decisions to make. However your basic requirements such as heating, cooling, electrical and security systems are areas you cannot afford to overlook. They need to be considered and implemented into the brief from a very early stage in order to avoid additional expense, frustration and time delays once works starts on site.

Do you have any particular lights, switches or lighting systems you want to use? What heating system should the house have? Do you plan to install inter-connected sound systems?

They all take up room and the space required must be worked into the early concept stages of your design, to make sure it will all fit. It is often difficult to know about all the services required, but a character home specialist will definitely be able to talk you through the requirements.

Last but not least: *What is your budget?*

It pays to be honest right from the start with both yourself and your architect. How much do you want to spend? If you are not clear on the amount you want to invest, it can be very tricky for your architect to guess. Be upfront, you are all on the same team. Be clear with your architect whether your budget is the construction budget or your overall budget for the whole renovation including consultant fees, consent fees, furnishing and landscaping. Remember to include government sales tax (GST).