

Right Remodeling

By J.C. Marsch

The Expert Advice That Could Save You Big

When it comes to getting the inside track on anything in life it always pays to talk to those who are already there - the professionals that know the ins, the outs, and the secrets to success. With this in mind, we sat down with some of the best in the remodeling business to pick their brains. Our question was simple. If your own mother asked you for advice on a remodeling project, what would be the first thing you would tell her? Here's what we found out:

While it's tempting to micro-manage a project that is taking place under your very own roof, knowing when to defer to the more experienced hands of your contractor could spell its key to success.

Our Expert:

It's blunt, but a lesson we've learned after a great many years of experience - the "control freak" that wants to manage his own project is someone we run from pretty **quickly**. Remember, a good contractor has already seen most of the mistakes that homeowners inadvertently walk right into. As a result, it's a lot easier for us to project when a customer decision will be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Communicate your wants and needs clearly from the start, but do not be afraid to trust your contractor's judgment. After all, that's why you hired him!

Mark Scott - MARK IV Builders, Inc.

Working toward a vision for newly remodeled space is great, but jumping in blindly headfirst is not. Start with an overall plan that neatly integrates one phase of your project into the next. In other words, don't set yourself up for disappointment. Nothing dumps ice cold water on a project quite like the realization that what you paid to have drawn on paper, cannot, in fact, be built for anywhere near your proposed budget.

Our Expert:

One common mistake I see is people who will choose an architect, pay for a **full** set of custom plans, then think they will simply put the job out for bid, let contractors compete with one another for their business, get the lowest price, the best work, and live happily ever after. Unfortunately, this is seldom truly the case.

More often, the owner hires an architect, pays for a complete set of plans, shows the contractor the plans, they discuss budget range with the contractor, the contractor says they can't build it at that price, and the owners are stuck with beautiful plans they cannot afford to build. It's not that the architect should be painted as the villain, but building is a team effort. Owners should have the builder on board during the design phase to help manage costs. In fact, this is the essence of the design-build concept. Waiting to choose the builder as a product of a competitive bid may not yield the desired results.

Bill Lukens - Rosemark DesignBuild

Your preference and aesthetic sensibilities are certainly the focal point of any remodeling project, but don't forget to consider how your finished product will interact with the environment around it.

Our Expert:

One of the key things to think about when you are deciding to remodel is first, how will the work itself look once it's done, and second, how it will look in the neighborhood. One of the biggest problems we see in remodeled homes is that the designer and client do not take into consideration the surrounding homes in the neighborhood. If you're remodeling a 1950s rambler, in a neighborhood full of 1950s ramblers, you don't want to suddenly plant a huge "starter castle", to coin a phrase from architect Sarah Susanka. The home will not only look out of place, but ultimately, not prove to be as valuable as if you'd taken the time to do a really clever design that fits into the neighborhood. Great design should accomplish the client's space requirements in a functional, practical, and beautiful manner. When hiring an architect or design/build firm, make sure the firm agrees that keeping your remodeled home thematically in tune with the neighborhood is a valuable perspective.

Bruce Bowers - Bowers Construction Group, Inc.

Before you undertake an aggressive plan of home renovation, ask yourself some very tough questions about where your house falls short.

Our Expert:

More often than not, the clients who sit with us have very sound and compelling reasons for remodeling. For example, their neighborhood is perfect, they love their house overall, but their old kitchen cramps their style, or they need a home office or bedroom addition to help keep pace with life. There are, however, times when remodeling may not be the ultimate solution. It's not completely uncommon for a homeowner to invest in a new kitchen only to realize that now their bathrooms need updating, and after that, comes yet another aspect of their home that just does not feel right. Ultimately, after investing hundreds of thousands of dollars, they come to the painful realization that it was the home itself that was the problem all along - the eight foot ceilings felt suffocating, the core layout was no longer a good fit for their lifestyle, and so on.

Remember, virtually any and all "flaws" in a home are correctable, but sometimes it's a question of diminishing returns. For example, if your home is valued at 700K, and it will take an additional 500K to truly iron out its flaws, you're already at 12 Million. Under certain circumstances, the smarter play is to find a re-sale nearby at or very near your 700K, but without the same fundamental drawbacks as your home. Then, at easily half the cost, you're in position to update your "new" home to perfectly match your tastes.

Mark Rose Rosemark DesignBuild