

—Remodeling Guide—

6 ESSENTIAL DESIGN ELEMENTS



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More of What You Need to Know to Successfully Plan for a Home Remodel



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Essential Design Elements

What You Need to Know to Successfully Plan for a Home Remodel

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Key Terms



FIXED PRICE CONTRACT: This is a legal document that guarantees a fixed price project, that covers a thoughtfully designed and planned out scope of work. Typically it includes detailed plans and a comprehensive specs that includes most if not all selections completed.

FREE ESTIMATE: This is a number some remodelers will give you that as a “contract price” used to win the job. After the job starts they will use Change Orders to reflect the real costs of allowances and “items not included” in the document, but it will be too late as the work has already begun. We never ask our clients to commit to a “Free Estimate.”

BALL PARK RANGE: This is not a single number, but a spread or a cost range we usually share with homeowners at the end of the initial “Discovery” meeting so they have some idea of what the project typically requires in terms of budget.

BUDGET: A summary scope and list of items to establish a preliminary cost for a project.

COST PER SQUARE FOOT: This is more useful in new construction and has limited usefulness with certain remodeling such as decks or additions. It is the total cost of a project divided by the number of square feet of the project. Useful for some budgeting exercises. (Example: \$150/sq. ft., vs. \$300/sq. ft.)

EQUITY: The value of your home less what you owe on it.

FINISHES: The hardware and materials applied to your home in the end phases of a building or remodeling project. Examples include countertops, light fixtures, floor covering, cabinets, and appliances. (The term stems from “finishing touches.”)

SCOPE OF WORK: A document that specifies the exact work to be accomplished, including the finishes and other materials. It is part of the building contract and is used as a guide for the people doing the work.

SPECS: Also part of the building contract and contains specifications for the materials used in the build. Used as a reference for producing a budget.



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Can I Get It For Less?

When it comes to finishes, many homeowners have noticed that products such as light fixtures and sinks can be purchased at retail stores such as Lowe's or Home Depot for less than the builder's price. This is because these chain stores have the benefit of buying in bulk. In contrast, the contractor may purchase only a single item from a given manufacturer and thus will have to pay more for it than the chain stores do.

“Before you start, determine who is supplying what product: you, or your builder?”

Moreover, builders tend to offer less selection than the chain stores and are often unable to show buyers samples of the finishes. While it may be more fun to shop around and to examine physical fixtures at the store, you may end up making a purchase based mostly on looks. When you buy directly from the builder you have the benefit of their past experience.

Builders can help you pick out a product that will look nice, last longer, and perform better. You may be able to save money by buying from a chain store and delivering it yourself, but doing so can interfere with the job schedule. Late delivery of a fixture, for example, can stall other processes and prolong the renovation, thereby increasing the time you are out of your home.

Although it may be cheaper initially to buy from an alternate source, in the long run it is more cost effective to have the contractor buy for you. The product often lasts longer because builders tend to make purchases based on quality and durability.

Buying from the builder-contractor will be less confusing and avoid potential headaches resulting from the mix-ups that can occur when two parties are both supplying products. The builder will handle the scheduling and delivery. If you have a strong preference for buying particular brands or models through a supplier other than the buyer's, something can always be worked out.



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How to Pick Colors

Picking the color scheme for your newly renovated home can be a rather daunting task, especially for those who have never done it before. Luckily, your builder should be there to help you through the decision-making process. A designer may also be hired.

Ofentimes a builder has an in-house designer, avoiding the need for you to hire one. There are a number of things you must consider when picking your colors. First, think about which colors you feel you could live with and enjoy.

“choose colors that will not date your home or easily lose their appeal.”

Second, although popular colors may be desired, you also want colors that will not lose appeal or date your home. People often don't realize that the colors of house paint, appliances, and clothes change according to fashion. A designer can help pick colors that will stay in style longer. If in ten years you tire of the colors you chose, however, or they go out of style--good news! It is just paint and can be redone with new colors.

Even better news—Murphy Bros. has its own Paint & Fine Finishing department with specialists that can help you make color selections!





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My Brother-in-Law is a Plumber

Great, he may be able to help you with your remodeling. But consider whether he is in fact the best person to work on your project. This is something you should address with your builder at the contract stage. It is important that every tradesman be certified, and this includes family. Make sure he is a residential plumber with experience working on renovation projects.

“Using friends or family on your remodel can save money, but is it worth the extra stress and risk?”

For example, if your brother-in-law is a commercial plumber, then he is not necessarily an expert at residential jobs and he may make mistakes. Commercial and residential construction involve very different skills, and to get the job done right it is important to hire the renovations expert.

So rather than save money, you may actually lose money and time by using your brother-in-law. You might even lose your brother-in-law if he can't do the work properly and you have to fire him!

On the other hand, he may be just the right person for the job. Working with family can be stressful, so it is important to have the builder handle hiring and employment details. Don't try to hire and schedule family members yourself. If you are not happy with the completed job, feelings may be hurt. The builder can help you decide who is best for the job.



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Interior Designer or Just Wing it?

It is first important to understand what interior designers do. They help you design the layout of furniture and other final stages of your renovation. They work with you to choose countertops, flooring, fixtures, appliances, cabinets, doors, and many other finishes. They have the expertise to perceive and avoid clashing colors or styles and to ensure that all the selections go well together.

They can also help with the purchasing of furniture and extras. Deciding whether to hire an interior designer comes down to how much time you have and how much you want to invest. If you don't have a lot of time to spend picking styles and finishes, it is a good idea to hire a designer. You should also take into account how comfortable you are selecting finishes and colors yourself.

If you have a hard time making decisions, a designer can help you decide or simply make the decision for you, as you like. Sometimes the builder will have an in-house designer to aid with selections. An interior designer is one of the few people on a renovation job whose services are optional. While not always necessary, it is often helpful to have them on board.

“It really comes down to your decision making skills.”



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This Isn't HGTV!

You may have seen remodeling shows such as “Flip This House” or “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.” In these shows they take a decrepit old house and in one week turn it in to a sparkling new one. This kind of remodeling is absolutely not realistic in the real world.

The shows make renovating seem uncomplicated and quick. The producers accomplish this by planning each project a year in advance and working with huge budgets. After considerable planning and organizing they have a huge team come in and work around the clock. On top of that, the projects often get special consideration from inspectors because of their public exposure on television. If you add organization time to the build time for TV remodels, you will find that they in fact take longer to complete than regular projects.

In real remodeling, builders spend less time planning and more time building. They have smaller teams that work fewer hours each day. And they work with a much smaller budget. The result is a more personal feel to the project accomplished by a local builder who can give you a quality remodel for a reasonable investment. Life always appears better on TV, but we all know that's not the case.

“What you see on TV is only the tip of the iceberg.”





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Looking Ahead with Universal Design

Universal design describes design aspects of a home that allow it to be used by anyone, regardless of physical limitation or disability. Designs can include wider halls and doors to accommodate wheelchair access, or perhaps a ramp to the front door in addition to stairs.

In a universal design, the correct placement of outlets and switches facilitate easier access. Bathrooms and kitchens are laid out in a way that makes them easier to use. Other small changes are made to make your home more accessible and usable by everyone.

This type of construction requires training and certification by the homebuilder.

“Your family may not require universal design, but it makes a house more marketable.”

Certified builders are known as a Certified Aging in Place Specialists (CAPS). The CAPS designation is a good qualification for your builder to have in case you wish to apply universal design to your remodel.

As times change it is often necessary to update your home to meet your or others' needs. Universal design can improve the resale value of your home because it becomes usable by a larger population. The design can be incorporated into any home.



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