

Ten Costly Mistakes in Renovation

What is involved with residential renovation & construction today? First, this can be expensive, and efficiency depends upon the architect. Second, it is complicated, with many trades and contracts. In order to eliminate mistakes, corrections and costly revisions, we need to look at ten common mistakes- where the lack of consideration has financial consequences.

1. Budget

The single biggest mistake in renovation is about understanding the comprehensive costs of the project. Preliminary estimates are non-binding guesswork, without contractual obligation. If you need an accurate budget, engage a contract-based bid by a licensed, reputable contractor with clear design documents and specifications. A project budget can be divided into three specific subcategories:

- a. construction budget of the renovation
- b. application process with inspection/review fees, taxation, and permit issue
- c. professional services necessary to complete the project

Do not underestimate your comprehensive project budget, since this is not just about the building, but how the structure relates specifically to site, and what your professional services must comply with- for approval and permit processing. This involves foundation conditions, soils work, geologic and grading and drainage requirements. Furthermore, site required application services such as zoning, planning, energy conservation measures, water use/ reclamation, utilities, environmental concerns, landscaping & construction safety mitigation will add to the project budget.

2. Timetable

The second, most common mistake is underestimating the schedule and timetable of a project. Scheduling and defining the renovation planning program, the permit application, the submittal process and the bid and construction negotiation, these items all have significant impact upon your budget, your project schedule, and costs. The shorter your timetable, the lower your project costs. Plan ahead with precise schedules and milestone dates, and expect unforeseen delays.

3. Scope of Work

Defining a clear scope of work is singularly the most important project cost you define. Make certain your architect has all the required specification details. For instance, kitchen cabinetry, appliances and finish materials may vary from \$20,000-\$200,000, depending on finish/ appliance selection. Define your specifications list clearly before your bid process invite.

4. Communication & Trust

Hire licensed professionals qualified in their experience with your project parameters. References should be verified. Defining your project in the earliest stages of design gives your architect a functional design layout. This communication requires trust in your professional ability. Initially every project is about appearance and function. The rooms, adjacency, dimensional sizes, volume and light are about your lifestyle as applied to a conceptual layout. Obviously, the better the communication between architect and client, the more trust is rewarded in the solution.

5. Project Sustainability

How durable are your finishes?

How long are specific warranty guarantees ?

How does energy efficiency really apply in cost ?

How well does this living lifestyle change adapt to your specific conditions ?

Everything decided as being sustainable is relative, and comes at a specific cost. For instance, a \$100,000 solar array purchase (even with the 30% Fed & State tax credit) which provides \$10,000 in utility savings/year may NOT be sustainable. Life cycle costs of application/energy 'savings' are critical to effective implementation.

6. Appearance

A project budget is easily doubled in residential remodels by replacing windows, doors and the roof materials. Appearance-wise, you have greatly improved both the aesthetic appeal and functional requirements, but you have not changed the actual use. Everything in architecture is about the appearance and function of the built form. The difference between a beautiful building and a poorly designed structure, is the visual impact defined by the appraised and equity value. Beautiful buildings have greater, strikingly visual appeal, and always carry higher comparative value.

7. Site adaptation

Inferior site adaptations and poor construction methods need solutions. This is very costly to correct under current building code requirements. How we address renovation requirements depends upon a project-by-project review process. Site analysis and the application of specific design requirements defines a structure that is more resistant to seismic forces, fire, flood and other natural catastrophes. Remedial improvements unseen, often are costly improvements few will notice. Both the creative design and effective site improvements will define your budget, timetable and the construction methodology.

8. Construction complexity

Project complexity is based on the design approach an architect makes. Some love complexity, which varies by character and design personality. In renovation "keeping it simple" with one specific work area, will lower construction costs. The smaller the area in demolition, the less your renovation costs. Simple solutions work best, both in appearance and in functional lifestyle application. A complex, large working drawing set in permit defines a higher construction cost.

9. Valuation

Every building has a specific value, between asking, offered, and actual purchase price. The greater your renovation without new area added, the less effective these construction cost improvements are.

10. Perception

Everything in design is about perception, especially in architecture. Why are you doing this? The rewards for your efforts must be more than monetary goals. How we use a building, how we feel inside, how lifestyle is influenced by design, these factors play practical roles in the evaluation process. There is excitement in the achievement of building worthwhile art. Build wisely and enjoy this process, since at over \$200/square foot in construction costs, who can afford even small mistakes ?