

## EXTERIOR RENOVATION PLANNING GUIDE

### WHERE TO START

Exterior remodeling can be a challenge even for experience renovators! This handy guide will help you prepare yourself for the rewarding process of exterior renovations. As always, an experience designer to help you conceptualize the look you are dreaming of is highly recommended to save you time, help you avoid common mistakes and save you money in the long run.

The key to successful exterior remodeling is in planning. Knowing how to start a renovation and exterior remodel of your house begins with having a clear vision of what you want to achieve, understanding the renovation process and contracting with a reputable company that produces quality work.

There's a lot to do before signing an exterior renovation contract, though. You'll often hear the term "due diligence" used in business investments and transactions. That simply means you've done your homework and understand where your best value lies. It's the same principle used in remodeling the exterior of a house. You identify the priorities that will deliver your best renovation value, then plan how to achieve them.

It's a tremendous help for remodeling beginners to have a clear guide. Having a resource to walk you through the necessary steps to take before starting an exterior remodeling project is more important than having a how-to manual on doing the actual construction work. More beginners get themselves in renovation trouble from failing to properly plan than any other cause.

### SETTING YOUR VISION

So, where do I start remodeling a home? You also need a clear vision of WHY you want to renovate your exterior. There are many reasons that can motivate you to renovate your exterior. They might include:

- Maintenance or repair: You might experience a leaky roof or the wind's torn your siding. You might just want to be preemptive in renovating your exterior before damage happens. Either way, you need to get on it before things get worse.
- Outdated appearance: Perhaps your home is older and reflects an out-of-date style. You want to freshen it with a modern appearance. That might entail new windows or doors. New gutters, trim or even some shutters are small items with big value. How about stone veneer?

- **Family dynamics:** There might have been only two of you when you moved in, but now your family additions require extra space. You might renovate to include extra room. You might want to include a deck or maybe a porch.
- **Eco-friendliness:** If your home's exterior is suffering heat loss or gain, you probably want to reduce your energy costs by remodeling. Energy-efficient products offer significant savings by consuming fewer resources, which is good for the environment. There also can be tax advantages to this renovation angle.
- **Marketability:** Nothing sells a home like curb appeal. You can greatly improve your marketability by remodeling your home's exterior. This may bring a higher sale price by making your home more attractive.

No matter what your motive for remodeling the exterior of your house, you must have a clear vision of your goals. Once you clearly know your overall purpose, it's time to get on with the planning process. A step-by-step priority layout will guide you through the planning.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

Failing to plan is planning to fail. You need to have that vision of where you'll end up before you start any physical renovations. The two biggest failures beginners suffer that shatter remodeling dreams is failing to be realistic in their expectations and not setting an accurate budget.

The first thing to do when remodeling a house is to make a list. You have to be honest with yourself about what you want to achieve and if you can actually afford it. Include these three groups in your list:

- **Must-have priorities:** These items are the core of your vision. Without them, the project is senseless. That could include having your windows replaced, or you might prioritize your doors, siding or roof. You may just want to focus your attention on a fresh coat of paint on the walls and trim.
- **Like-to-haves:** Think about what you'd like to have added during your remodeling but can live without for the time being. For example, a new roof might be a must-have item, but you'd like to get the gutters and downspouts replaced while you're at it. But if the budget won't allow, you should strike those items from the list and save them for later.
- **Dream items:** If you can extend your finances, don't be afraid of dream items like adding a portico. Are stone veneer accents too much to ask? How about window header accents to go along with capped trim or screening in that porch? Let yourself dream but keep reality in mind.

Now that you know your exact remodeling purpose and have narrowed down your necessities, it's time to get specific about money. Unrealistic financial ability is a disaster waiting to happen. Begin by knowing your purchasing limits and your capability of handling that financial load. Do this before going any further in starting designs, picking products and especially before contacting contractors.

You also need to take a hard look at value. You might be in an immediate situation where your roof has

to be redone. But maybe you can put off cosmetic remodeling until you've saved extra money. Something to consider, though, is current economic trends. It might be to your advantage to go ahead and renovate this year before prices rise and an upcycle restricts labor and material supplies.

## BUDGETING

The key to setting a successful remodeling budget is to be detailed and realistic.

Set your budget with line-by-line expenses. You need to break down your anticipated costs in detail. Make these line items your budget checklist. Just like your "must-haves" list, anticipate every expense you might incur during your exterior remodeling project. Some suggestions are:

- Permits and licensing
- Utility fees
- Demolition and waste
- Landscape disruption
- Specialty tools and rentals
- Actual materials
- Labor costs
- Designer Costs
- Accessories like house numbers, lighting, mailboxes
- Management fees
- Consultant charges
- Design and drawings
- Financing costs
- Unexpected events

Unexpected events are common in remodeling jobs. You never know what you'll find when you pull off old shingles. You might have rotten sheathing that must be replaced. Once your windows are out, you might find water-damaged sills. Removed siding could reveal nearly anything.

Make sure you allow a cost overrun contingency in your remodeling budget. Ten percent is a good rule of thumb. Whatever you allow, it's vitally important to have wiggle room for inevitable cost overruns.

Being diligent and thorough in setting a realistic budget is your best return on time when remodeling. Many cases of cost overruns aren't truly a matter of going over budget. They're the result of under-budgeting in the first place.

## TAKE YOUR TIME

Time is your friend. The more time you take in carefully planning your process, setting a proper budget and sourcing the right materials and renovation contractor, the more successful you'll be.

The truth in remodeling is that everything takes longer than you think.

Here are some time management suggestions:

- **Target your renovation season:** Unless you live in a climate that's warm year-round, your renovation will almost always be in spring, summer or fall. Choose when you'd like the project done, then move the calendar back six months and start your planning. Give yourself half a year to plan and use it to decide exactly what you want, source the available materials and shortlist the contractors you'd like to work with.
- **Hire a home inspector:** These professionals can be exceptional investments, as they'll give you an honest and independent opinion of your home's condition. Inspectors will catch things you won't as a beginner remodeler. They're also good sources of solutions and for prioritizing what needs to be done soon, and what can wait.
- **Research your products:** A big challenge for beginning remodelers is that there are so many different products and so much information available. The Internet is an excellent tool. Trade shows and exhibitions are informative. So are supply houses and product distributors.

Nothing beats talking with renovation contractors. They're the real industry experts. Many have years of invaluable experience in remodeling exteriors.

The best use of your planning time is in selecting your renovation contractor. Start early on this, and you'll be rewarded with minimal stress and a smooth job.

## SELECTING A CONTRACTOR

Here's what to look for in a contractor who complements you:

- **Experience:** Find a remodeling contractor who has the experience to handle your work. That's vital.
- **Expense:** you're going to get what you pay for. Be very careful with cheap prices. Contractors who stay in business have to charge to cover their costs and overheads. They also have to make a profit. Just make sure the contractor is competitive for the service they deliver.
- **References:** Don't rely solely on references a contractor provides you. Do your diligence and check out previous projects. Talk with past clients and see how it went. Things don't always go smoothly, but it's how a contractor handles sensitive situations that's really telling. Another reference source is the renovation contractor's suppliers and sub-trades.
- **Licensing:** This is critical. All renovation contractors should be state-licensed and certified to perform

your work. Do not consider someone who hasn't been officially approved. Make sure your contractor is covered by workers' compensation insurance and is currently in good standing. Also, make sure your contractor has a local business license and has a registered tax number. If a contractor can't provide you with these essentials, there's a high likelihood something will go wrong.

- **Contracts:** All reputable remodeling contractors will provide you with a detailed contract that identifies the scope of work, the time frame, the costs and the payment process. Make sure you get it in writing, as verbal contracts are difficult to enforce.
- **Warranty:** A professional renovator will stand behind their work. Each contractor will have different terms and conditions, but they'll be upfront on what they'll cover and for how long. Good contractors also use quality building materials that are under a manufacturer's warranty. Spend time researching what a contractor recommends.

