



Avoiding Home Improvement Headaches

Homeowners don't often think about renovating their homes in winter but it is a great time for searching the internet for projects that interest you. Some you can do yourself, others, maybe not. The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement has allowed homeowners to tackle small projects and learn things about their home, but for the homeowners that attempt to tackle major projects on their own, DIY has led to some major headaches. Renovating your home can be taxing on various resources and this makes finding a competent home contractor one of the most important decisions in preparing for a renovation of any size.

When deciding whether or not to Do-It-Yourself, there are some important considerations to take into account. First, what is the complexity of the project? Questions about licensing and permits, costs, and access to equipment are worth answering. Second, consider short-term safety and long-term health risks. Professional contractors have training in standards that most DIY-ers aren't aware of. There are several risks when installing or repairing equipment in your home including mold, carbon monoxide, electric shock, and water damage. Risking your home's integrity or your family's health are not worth the savings of doing it yourself. Additionally, the contractor will have insurance—this ensures that you won't be expected to pay if anyone gets injured on the job. Finally, what are the legal issues associated with this project? Consider that at some point in your life you may sell your home. Some DIY remodeling can increase a home's value, but any renovations that are not up to code put you at a disadvantage when you sell your home.

If you've decided that hiring a contractor is the right choice for your project, how do you go about narrowing down the pool of candidates? Ask for referrals from people that you trust like your friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers. Or contact a local realtor and ask questions about how well they communicate or if they complete work within budget and on time. Once you have some names, check online to determine how established they are as a company or if there have been any complaints filed against them. Additionally, you can check to see if they are involved with any professional association that has standards or a code of ethics, such as The National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Don't be afraid to ask questions about their insurance coverage or for references in your area. Trustworthy businesses will welcome your questions and be transparent about their policies and procedures.

After researching contractors, it's important that you get a fair estimate. Compare estimates from at least three contractors and make sure they cover the same work and materials, or that the cost has been adjusted for any differences. Look for the estimate that will give you the results you want for the best value. Once you've chosen a contractor and agreed upon the final plans for your project, it's important that you confirm everything in a written contract. While everything may not go exactly as planned over the course of the construction, this document will provide you with a blueprint for how the project will proceed.

As work begins on your home, keep a notebook filled with details associated with your project. Anything from paint chips to fabric swatches and product warranties to receipts. This will help you keep track of the remodel as it's happening and will help keep your renovations fresh for years to come by making it easy to find the right color of touch-up paint when you need it.