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Tips for Trouble-Free Renovating

Renovating your family home can be stressful. Budgets blow out, plans get changed and amenities we take for granted get, quite literally, ripped from our lives.

But if you're well prepared and have a thorough understanding of what you're in for, renovating can be a positive experience. Here are our tips for trouble-free renovating.

1

Take Control

Sometimes it can seem easier to let the builder or designer take over all aspects of designing your renovation. Just remember, they don't have to live with the results. Only you know exactly how you want to live, what your family requirements are now and in the future and where the limits of your budget lie.

So take the time to talk to everyone involved in the process and make sure they understand your vision. If you're not happy with the direction of the project, say so. After all, you're the one paying the bills.

2

Get Visual

Knowing what you want is one thing; finding a way to articulate it can be much harder. Browse renovation websites, look through property listings, cut out pictures from glossy magazines – whatever helps you explain your dream renovation.

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Know The Rules

It's the draftsman's job to consider any relevant town planning and overlay restrictions in your area. But it doesn't hurt to research these yourself, before you start the design process. Pinning your hopes on a design that requires complicated approvals and dispensations is a sure fire pathway to disappointment.

Finding out about the rules in your area is easy. Start by doing a quick search of planning overlays in your area by going to www.land.vic.gov.au, and obtaining a property report. Then Google “building regulations part 4 for [your council]”. This will give you all the regulations that govern extensions and buildings in your area. If you’re really keen, you can find even more information at the Building Commission website (Practice Note 47 contains explanations of all the sitting regulations).

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Get A Soil Report

If you’re buying a block of land for a new house or a development, get a soil report before you buy. It may uncover extra costs you weren’t aware of and will help you develop a more accurate budget for your build.

If you’re doing a second story extension, a soil report will help determine the depth of new footings required and whether there’s a need for underpinning of existing foundations. Better to know these costs up front rather than later, once you’ve already committed cash to the project.



Of course, if you use Drafting Edge, we can organise all the soil report requirements on your behalf.

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Draftsman, Architect or One-Stop-Shop?

The answer depends on what, exactly, you’re after. When selecting a design professional, remember to keep your budgets at the forefront of your considerations: extra costs in design and documentation will eat into the budget available for building.

Architect

All architects must complete an architecture degree and undertake mandatory work experience to qualify as a registered architect. Architects can offer design and documentation skills and project management if required. Using an architect is, however, usually more expensive than alternative options.

Draftsman

A draftsman can handle all aspects of design and documentation. Most draftsmen have undertaken a tertiary course and will have years of experience in their field. In order to prepare building plans a draftsman must be registered with the building commission which requires comprehensive experience, expertise and construction knowledge to pass and to maintain accreditation.

Draftsmen can often provide the same skills and services as an architect for a lower price, however some will simply draw your ideas onto paper. When considering a draftsman, make sure they have the practical experience relevant to your project and have the skills to offer the creative expertise you require.

One-stop-shop

Some builders will have designers on staff that can prepare the required documentation for building. This can be a convenient option, just keep in mind that many in-house designers will tailor the designs to what the builder is capable of, not necessarily what you really want. Often one-stop-shops will retain the copyright to the designs, making it difficult for you to get cost comparisons from other builders as nothing is for free, so you will pay for the cost of plans and permits via a higher building price if you proceed.

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Choose Your Design Professional Wisely

Your designer, architect or draftsman is the vital link between your dreams and the reality of your renovation. Choose wisely. Here are a few questions to consider:

- Will I feel comfortable working with this person for a number of weeks/months?
- Does he/she understand me? Do they really 'get' my vision for the project?
- Does he/she have a thorough understanding of local council restrictions?
- Does the quote include everything I need? Has it addressed planning issues?
Am I getting value for money?
- Does he/she have experience in this particular type of renovation/extension/ building?

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Choose Your Supporting Consultants Wisely

Most building projects require additional consultants – engineers, surveyors and soil experts for example. While many companies, including Drafting Edge, can organise these consultants for you, some clients prefer to engage consultants themselves.

If this is your chosen path, make sure you know what to ask for. If you request the wrong service, you may end up paying more for extra site visits and if the information provided is not up to scratch, construction costs may be higher.



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Choose Your Builder Wisely

Builders turn the dots and lines on your building plans into a reality. Whether that reality matches your original vision is largely dependent on the quality of the builder and the relationship you have with them.

Once your plans are complete, talk to as many different builders as you need to to feel comfortable you have found the right person for the job (and make sure you're talking to the builder and not just the site supervisor or project coordinator). Ask to see previous projects they have worked on, talk to their past clients.

Every builder is different. Some are very hands-on, others subcontract out various stages of the building. Both models can work; just make sure you are comfortable with their chosen approach.

Importantly, take care to understand what is – and what isn't – included in your quote. Not surprisingly, it's the omissions from quotes that can cause the biggest arguments down the line.

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Understand How Payment Works

Most builders ask for payments in stages (for example deposit 5%, base 10%, frame 15%, lock-up 35%, fixing 25% and completion 10%). Within the building contract and via negotiation these values can be altered, however it is advisable to get professional advice before you agree to make changes to the payment schedule as the current values are fair to both parties. Before committing to a contract you should understand when the builder needs payment and ensure you can meet them. If there are any disputes you should contact the Building Commission.

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Should I Stay Or Should I Go?

Moving out while renovations take place is often easier, but for many people it's prohibitively expensive. Staying can work; just be sure you know what to expect and understand how your life will be disrupted.

If your kitchen and bathroom are being replaced, you'll need to get used to microwave and bbq dinners and using a port-a-loo (the novelty quickly wears off!). By its nature, building can be a messy process – there will be dust and mud. Also prepare for periods without water.

If your renovation is a first floor extension your life won't be disrupted as much – usually it's only towards the end when the stairs are put in that you'll have to adjust your lifestyle.

On the plus side, staying while renovations take place means you'll see your house evolve in real time. You'll also be well placed to make last minute adjustments to the build.

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Getting The Timing Right (For You)

There's no magic answer to the question of timing: the best time to renovate is when you're emotionally and financially ready. Renovating can be pretty intense, and while the results can be amazing, there are plenty of stories of projects ending in disaster simply because the owner wasn't prepared for the upheaval.

There are pros and cons for each season. Starting in summer, for example, means less rain-affected days but also means you may lose some time over the Christmas break. In any case, most larger jobs will spread over several seasons.

The best tip we can give is to get your plans prepared and discussions with builders underway before you even set a start date. Plans and permits can take over 12 months and building lead times can also be many months. Much better to wait a while to get the perfect outcome than to compromise on your design or your builder just to meet a pre-set start date.



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Visit Your Building Site

If you move out while building takes place, make sure you regularly visit the building site. Not only will you be able to check progress against deadlines, you'll also be able to address any on-site dilemmas and suggest last-minute adjustments. Adding a window to take advantage of a view at frame stage will be much cheaper than making the change later.



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Overcapitalising

It's a term that's frequently bandied about and often scares people away from perfectly viable renovations. When you consider the fact that most houses will double in value every 7-10 years with only basic maintenance, it's hard to overcapitalise in the long run.

If you're looking to sell in the short to medium term, or you're particularly concerned about adding extra value to your house, consider ways to renovate so your house jumps into the next price category. Adding bedrooms, for example, will always add significant value to your home. But in general, any renovations that are done well will increase your property's worth.

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Renovate Or Move?

If you like your suburb, get on with the neighbours and live close to the things you love, we reckon renovating is your best bet. Why? When you move, you can lose up to \$100,000 in agents fees, advertising charges, solicitors bills, moving costs and stamp duty. It's a lot of money to throw away.

If you put that same money into your renovations, you can get the additional space, extra quality and improved lifestyle you're after, while significantly increasing the value of your home. In other words, the money isn't put to waste.

Of course, if you hate your neighbours, well, you might just need to move!

Remember, these tips offer general advice only; each project is different and particular needs must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. To discuss the specific requirements of your project, get in touch with Drafting Edge on (03) 9578 1595 or email bakerg@draftingedge.com.au