



Ten Tips to Renovation Success

By

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Contents

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1. **Before You Begin**
2. **Only Do What You Can Afford Too.**
3. **Architects and Designers.**
4. **Choosing Your Builder.**
5. **A Written Contract Should Include the Following.**
6. **The Main Tasks.**
7. **Communication.**
8. **The Variation Process.**
9. **Contingency**
10. **The Renovation Checklist**



About the Author

(pic from website) Ross Collins established BRS Ltd in 2010, a company specialising in high-end renovation projects, based in Auckland. The company has over 200 years of combined building experience. Ross is also a Licensed Building Practitioner.



Before You Begin

The most basic of building work, such as tiling a patio or re-doing your cupboards in the kitchen, does not require building consent approval.

But many other types of work that are more complicated do require you to get a Building Consent. If the plans for renovating or altering your home include building or plumbing work then a call to the council is the first step.

Work that does NOT require consent is set out by the Building Act 2004 (Schedule 1).

Examples of work that DOES require a building consent:

- Structural building - additions, alterations, re-piling, demolition
- Plumbing and drainage (except the repair and maintenance of existing components)
- Relocating a building
- Installing a wood burner.
- Retaining walls higher than 1.5 metres
- Fences or walls higher than 2 metres, and all swimming pool fences
- Swimming pools
- Decks, platforms or bridges more than 1 metre above ground level
- Adding windows or doors.
- Some earthworks also require a building consent (check with your council)

BRS Ltd can help you identify the cost of the work you require to be done, give you an accurate idea of costs and point you in the right direction for getting formal plans drawn up for the work.

1. Only Do What You Can Afford Too

When renovating your home there will be a return on every dollar you spend, but the return will differ depending on what you are doing. Some renovations have a high return, like adding another room to your home or expanding and altering a living area. When you turn a three-bedroom home into a four-bedroom home, you will likely double the return for the money you spend, particularly in Auckland at present.

A premium kitchen or bathroom renovation, or an alteration that gives better indoor/outdoor flow will add considerable value to your home, but they cost too. This is where you must consider what you plan to do, its cost and what it might add to the value of your home.

Some renovations or alterations, however, can have a negative effect on the value of your home. This does depend on the amount you plan to spend and the property values of the area you live in. One example is the swimming pool – they are expensive, they require constant maintenance and have a danger factor for any home where young children are present.

What a lot of people don't realise is that you can also overcapitalise on any renovation or alteration project. Be careful and budget the cost of fixture and fittings for any building project.

2. Architects and Designers

There are an awful lot of things to consider when choosing your designer or architect. First and foremost, does the work of the architect or the designer you are considering choosing resonate with you? Once that has been established there are still several things to consider.

- Can the references given by the architect or designer be easily checked?
- Is the contract clear?
- What services are provided by each party within the contract?
- If worse, come to worse and you decided to change architects - are there any outstanding fees?
- Deal with a good communicator so your architect can share their ideas, and also clearly describe the stages involved in the renovation process.
- Do you want weekly updates, phone or email communication as a record of what is happening and what changes are being made? Will there be regular meetings, if so; do you want them weekly or fortnightly during the build?
- Is the renovation/alteration job you want done big enough to require an architect?
- Projects can take a long time, many months and even years. It's very important to think very carefully before appointing an architect.

The overriding question is this: Is your choice of architect going to add value to your project and is your property worth the investment of using an architect.

Again, BRS Ltd can assist you in finding competent draftsmen's or architects who will draw plans that take in to account both your ideas and your budget.

3. Choosing your builder

That builder is BRS Ltd. Choosing the right builder is absolutely critical to the success of your project and in delivering your dream home. The builder you choose is going to help you create the home of your dreams. You must choose a builder you can trust, that you can communicate with and one that you must feel comfortable being around and with sharing your ideas. After all, you are going to be dealing with this person a lot, making some hard decisions, perhaps making variations to the original plan and, of course, spending a lot of money.

During the renovation process, you will be working very closely with your builder. This is even more important if you are living on site during the renovation process – which is not recommended but sometimes has to happen. Word of mouth is always a good place to start, have any of your friends or relatives used a builder they would recommend to you.

Have you seen renovation work you like? Ask who did it and contact them. Does your architect work with anyone in particular or recommend a builder they use regularly. These are all good places to start when trying to find a builder for your renovation project.

Before you sign a contract with the builder, you need to look at the work history of those on your short list. If possible visit other jobs they have done, or that they are working on at the moment. This is a quick and easy way to see if you like their level of workmanship, craftsmanship and their attention to detail.

Any building work you are undertaking that affects the structural integrity of your home or its weather tightness is called Restricted Building Work and you need a Licensed Builder to carry out the work or to supervise the work and ultimately sign the work off in the end. The Licensed Building Practitioners (LBP) scheme was introduced in November 2007 and from 1st March 2012, all building practitioners must be licensed in order to carry out or supervise work (on homes or any small/medium sized apartment buildings) that is critical to the integrity of the building.

Ross Collins, the owner of BRS Ltd, is a Licensed Building Practitioner and ticks all the boxes when it comes to choosing a builder. He has huge experience with Villas and Bungalows; he has seen all their problems and knows how to deal with them. Ross has great communication skills so you are always fully informed and he knows how to work to budget.

4. A Written Contract Should Include the Following

The importance of a contract cannot be overstated. For your own protection, you must have a written contract between you and your builder. The builder, as main contractor, is responsible for organising all the sub-contractors. If you are managing the project, yourself (perhaps under a labour-only contract with the builder) you will have to arrange contracts with each of the sub-contractors, i.e., electrician, plasterer, painters and plumbers.

A contract does not have to be written to be legally binding. If all the terms and conditions between you and the builder are clearly spelt out and recorded in writing then it means there is far less room for any argument to arise about who is responsible if something goes wrong or if there is a dispute due to confusion over what should have been done.

A contract can take many forms, some people rely on the written quote while others may accept a list of tasks that is given to them by their builder – both are contracts. This is acceptable provided everything goes according to plan. But if something goes wrong, this very simple form of contract is unlikely to provide nearly enough detail about the rights and responsibilities of the builder and yourself.

You can go to www.nzia.co.nz to see 8 examples of contracts for you and your builder.

5. The Main Tasks (a summary)

After deciding you want to renovate, but before the build starts, there are several preliminary steps to ensure your project goes well.

- Arranging finance
- Organising the design
- Organising a builder (who, in turn, will organise the sub-contractors)
- Getting Consents
- Managing construction

6. Communication

So you have decided to renovate and create the home of your dreams. You've got a design (or idea's, at least), an architect, you've contracted a builder and work is about to start. Now everything has even more importance placed on it as your money is being spent every day.

Your vision, communicated clearly to your architect and builder will result in your dream home becoming a reality.

What is critical to the project now is communication;

- Between you and the architect
- Between you and the builder

You are all interrelated and you are all involved in making the project a success.

That's why Step 4 above is so important. A builder who makes you feel at ease and who will listen to your concerns is crucial. If you trust your builder, it is easy to talk to them about any concerns you have and vice versa.

If you have a clear vision of what you want your dream home to look like, then that is a great start. But if some aspects of the build are not clear to you then that's where your trusted builder will be able to answer any questions you have. Good communication between the team you have put together will result in your house morphing into the dream home you have always wanted.

Here are a few useful communication points to note;

- **Understand the Lingo** – Speak the "same language" when talking to your builder or architect, it reduces confusion and any possibility that your vision is not realised. If you are ever unclear on any issue, then ask.
- **Communication when issues arise** – Any relationship has problems, so communication is the key to reducing this. Never feel you are nagging your builder if the job is taking longer than you expected or the agreed time, ask what is going on if you have not already been told.

- **Listen** - Real communication between two parties means *listening*. Being an effective communicator starts with listening and that is especially true when building your dream home. Having everything in writing can assure everyone is listening to one another and that everyone involved in the project is on the same page.

7. The Variation Process

A variation is a change to the original contracted work that all parties have agreed too. A variation will involve either an addition or reduction in the value of the work being done.

Any and all variations should be put in writing, signed by the person contracting the work and the contractor – and before any work on the variation starts. There is only one exception, work that is required urgently where it is not practical to put the variation in writing due to time constraints. A document outlining the variation should be received by you within five business days of the meeting date that agreed to the variation. Any changes, no matter how large or small, must be discussed with your contractor. Do not involve sub-contractors (they are the responsibility of the builder). All changes must be agreed and then documented in writing.

Any variation that is made to your project will result in the contractor changing the time frame of the project. If any conflict relating to an agreed variation or a variation that has not yet been put in writing and signed off by both parties occurs, then the contractor is unable to force you to pay for the variation.

The failure to fully document changes to your original contract is usually the main cause of disputes between you and your builder. Managing your variations accurately and in writing is a must.

8. Contingency Sum

A Contingency Sum of some sort is a prudent move when undertaking any renovation project. The building process may discover unforeseen challenges not noticed during the initial home inspection prior to building starting. There may be issues with the building structure impossible to see externally that may have occurred over the years and decades the home has been standing.

In many cases, a Contingency Sum is needed to cover un-anticipated costs that occur. A Contingency Sum should be considered early in the home renovation process as part of the overall budget. A Contingency Sum can range anywhere between 5% and 15% of the initial budget for your overall home renovation plans. This is necessary to insure that any and all extra costs, including inaccurate prices or missed items are covered and paid in full.

A Contingency Sum can save most home renovators money in the long run. A

Contingency Sum saves time, work, and money in the long run because there is no panic about where the money to buy new materials will come from because you've already planned ahead for just such an occurrence.

9. The Renovation Checklist

Get pen and paper and go through your house room by room. Identify the common problems within each area of your house and then list what you want to do to change them. For example, the checklist for the Dining Room may identify the following issues; a tired and outdated or old decor, shabby paint or wallpaper, cracks in any block work. There may also be a chance to modernise fittings with more power points, light switches and lighting. If your home is cold and damp then insulation may be required, structural issues like indoor/outdoor flow may also add to the Dining Room upgrades you wish for that will turn your house in to a home.

If you take the time to go through your house and identify all these items it gives you a list of renovation goals that you can take to a draftsmen or architect who, along with the selected builder, will turn your house in to your dream home.

BRS Ltd is here to help you achieve this. Call now on 09 579 2320.

