



Ten Simple Tips for Planning a Successful Home Remodeling Project

Featuring the ten most important things to consider when you are planning to remodel or add on; from how to choose which project to do, what is an appropriate investment for your home, why it's important to have a master plan, to tips on choosing a remodeler and keeping costs in line.

Ross Clark,
Clark Construction of Ridgefield, Inc.



Hi!

I hope these 10 tips will be helpful for you!

Regardless of where you are in your remodeling journey, please feel free to reach out if there is anything we can do to be of assistance!



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Clark Construction's Ten Remodeling Tips for a Successful Home Remodel

1. Do the Right Project– Developing the Problem Statement

Most of us always have a remodeling wish list tucked away in our minds or on our night stands. At some point we decide the time is now, and we are ready to make our wishes come true.

As remodeling is a major investment in your home, take time to think through the possible projects. Whether or not to do a particular project is a big decision worthy of good forethought. To help you decide which projects to do, make a list of the shortcomings of your home. Weigh your wants and needs. Make a list of short term, 5 year and 10 year Must Dos. vs. Want to Dos.

Then evaluate. Consider which things will increase your home's value, and which projects will increase your quality of life. In today's economy you may not get a 100% return on your remodeling investment, but many of our life decisions are based on intangibles such as our personal needs and wishes.

We all have a \$ threshold when it comes to quality of life investments. While you could drive an economy car, you might prefer a BMW, Mercedes, or Tesla.

Likewise, with remodeling, it's a matter of weighing the options to find the appropriate balance for you, your budget and your home.

To help you with this decision making, it helps to do some research. Read blogs that address the "reasons why remodeling your kitchen, bath (or doing an addition) makes sense". Some of the reasons will resonate with you.



Ross's observation:

Over the past few years, the remodeling climate has evolved away from "make a statement" projects. Instead, we find that our clients focus on putting together projects that have a high return on investment in terms of real-world functionality, energy efficiency and personal satisfaction. The focus is on determining priorities and optimizing their projects to make the biggest difference in their lives and to get the best long term payoffs, both financially, and lifestyle wise.

1. Do the Right Project – (continued)

Research problem projects similar to yours and see what other people have done. Create a project on Houzz and save ideas from projects that are appealing to you. Don't overlook the old fashioned way; cutting out pictures from remodeling magazines. This is fun too!

Sharing the ideas that you have collected is a great way to start a collaboration with your designer. It provides a strong starting point for your shared journey. If he/she knows what you are trying to accomplish, their experienced eyes will often bring other ideas and solutions to the table. That kind of collaboration is truly exciting!

Tip: Check out case studies where the Design Team has provided unexpected solutions, transforming ineffective, undesirable or unappealing areas into practical and loveable living spaces, while ensuring a good return on investment (such as clarkconstruction.net/blog-page/Think-Outside-the-Box)

2. Have a Master Plan for Your Home Improvement Projects

By having a master plan there will be less of the "one step forward, two steps back" activity. We visited one homeowner who wanted a larger kitchen and had just built a screened-in porch. Unfortunately, the screened-in porch was located right in the spot where a kitchen bump-out should go. So, to accomplish the goal of expanding the kitchen, the homeowner had to decide between ripping out the porch or settling for a smaller kitchen design than what they wanted. This could have been avoided with a little forethought.

Look at the big picture. Make sure that you consider the total scenario; ... not only for now, but for the future ... include broader or unexpected needs that may not be obvious to you on first glance. Your builder can weigh in and help you out with good solutions, if you have let them know "what you are trying to accomplish" over the next few years. For example, you may wish for "space for the in-laws to come and live" or "a playroom for our kids".

Think through things like: Do you really need a screened porch or do you need a guest bedroom? Will you want to later expand your kitchen into that space that you are now considering for a sunroom? Are you having more children? Will you need a space for a nanny? How will your housing need change as your children grow or later as the nest is emptied? A home office? If you want to redo your kitchen in three years, is it worth replacing the counters now?

Often a **phased plan** is appropriate. This allows you to plan to implement projects over several years rather than doing a whole house remodel now. For example, this year do the bath, then when the children grow add a playroom. Then a couple years later add on a breakfast room and redo the kitchen. Thinking ahead like this minimizes the chance that projects that you do now will need to be undone later.

Why Have A Master Plan?

A master plan is the grand plan for your home improvement; a vision for your evolving master piece. Everyone should have one!

The master plan identifies the various projects that you want to do over time. You can break it down into multiple phases to keep yourself on track, and to budget your spending over several years.

A master plan allows you to prioritize your options and feel comfortable with the timing and choice of home remodeling projects.

With a master plan in place, you will be less likely to experience "one step forward, two steps back." You can see the big picture and ensure that you consider the total scenario, not just your immediate needs.

Knowing where you are going is always important, and a master plan provides the framework for prioritizing your options, seeing the big picture, and ultimately investing your money wisely on the right projects for you.



3. Keep the Remodeling Investment Appropriate for Your Home and Neighborhood

It's important to be aware of the financial implications of your remodeling choices. How should you decide what makes sense in terms of an investment?

Often people say that resale isn't an issue - but in this day and age, resale should always be a consideration.

Therefore, even if you plan to stay for a long time, add something special as a hook for potential home buyers. This may be a luxurious super shower for two or a to die-for island in the kitchen. You know these things when you see them. Once you see it, it's something that you (and prospective purchasers) can't live without. Additionally, curb appeal is always important. As they say, you never get another chance to make a first impression.

Talk to your local Realtor about comparables and know what they feel makes sense in terms of a smart investment budget for improvements. Know that if you are creating the "jewel" of the neighborhood. It may be harder to sell than a more "average" home.

It is often possible, with good forethought, to recover the full value or even more than what you put into remodeling.

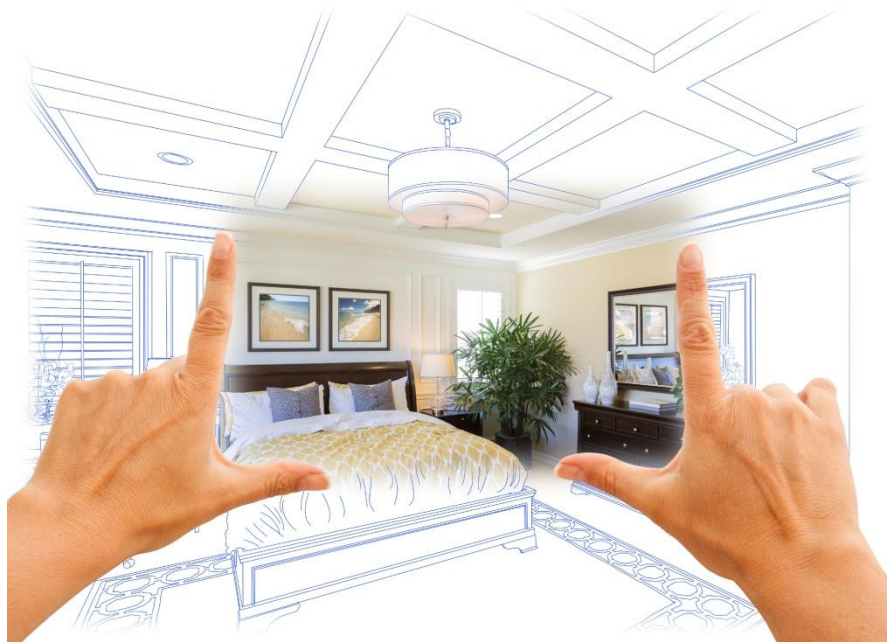
Use common sense to find the line between sensible investment and over-improving your home.



3. Keep the Remodeling Investment Appropriate (continued)

If your project is very large, you should consider if it makes more sense to move, before going too far down the remodeling road. You may love your neighborhood and be committed to the idea of having your home done "your way" but it's always good to have as much information in hand as possible.

Good forethought sets the stage for the opportunity to maximize your return on investment for a remodeling project. The interior arrangement should be appropriate for the size of the house and the typical living patterns, not only of your family but also of families that might later live in your house.



For example, decreasing the number of bedrooms should not be done without serious thought, as it may seriously affect your home's value and marketability.

While you will want to use common sense to **find the thin line between a sensible investment and over-improving your home**, your decision to remodel may not solely be a "numbers" analysis. Many projects are done for quality of life reasons. It is a personal decision as to what price tag is appropriate for making your home more livable or enjoyable. While some projects are obviously strong pluses for future home sales (a new kitchen, an upgraded master bath), other projects may not be so easily quantifiable.

If you've always dreamed of a fully marbled "over-the-top" master bath suite and you're in a financial position to do so, splurge! Swimming pools are said to be a poor investment in terms of payback, but if it gives your family years of pleasure, it's worth it. Make decisions that are right for **YOU!**

How Much is Too Much to Spend on Home Improvements?

Here's a dollars and cents way of looking at whether to add on, or to work within your existing four walls, a calculation often used when homeowners apply for a construction loan.

Divide the total cost of the addition by the number of square feet added and then compare that number to the cost per square foot of what homes in the area are selling for.

For example, a \$75,000 addition of 400 square feet would cost \$187.50 per square foot. Compare that figure to the price per square foot of recent sales of comparable houses in the neighborhood – if 3500-square-foot homes are selling for more than \$656,250, then the square footage number makes sense.

But keep in mind that determining if a home improvement project is worth it is often about making things more livable for the homeowner. This is an intangible, of course. While some projects are obviously strong pluses for future home sales (a new kitchen, an upgraded master bath), other projects may not be so easily quantified.

4. Keep Your Project Within Budget

Whether your budget is large or small, figure out what it is. Have an understanding also for your budget's flexibility (or lack thereof!).

Having a budget can be a benefit as well as a limitation because it forces each decision to be considered with an eye to its effect on the overall job.

Experienced prospective contractors can give you ballpark information to help you pre-qualify your project. Doing this upfront investigative work helps to reduce the chance for sticker shock when you get back designs and estimates from your builder.

Even if the initial figures seem high, don't be discouraged – you can work with your contractor to make value-based decisions that will bring your budget and your dreams a lot closer together.

Once you arrive at a mutually agreeable budget range, your contractor should work closely with you to keep your design within that range. (It's important to find someone who can do this!)

Good contractors will fully vet your project, and include as many "foreseeable" expenses as possible in their estimate. Unforeseeable expenses may include substandard or rotten framing, not-to-code plumbing pipes, repairs due to rot or insect damage, and many other concealed obstacles.

These conditions are most commonly found in antique homes. If you are doing major renovations in such a home, it's a good rule of thumb to set aside 10 -15% extra for the possibility that you may have some of these potential unplanned costs.

Another must to keep your budget in line is to keep a good accounting of the "while you're at it" during the construction phase. You may need to temper your appetite for these.

It's easy to get swept away in the thrill of remodeling. You may want to expand the scope of a project while it's underway and change the room adjacent to the one you're working on. But be careful, "While you're at it" costs can add significantly to a project. It's easy to get swept away in the thrill of remodeling. You may want to expand the scope of a project while it's underway and change the room adjacent to the one you're working on. But be careful, "While you're at it" costs can add significantly to a project.



How Do You Determine Whether your Budget Expectations are in the Ball Park?

There are gross measures, such as cost per sq. ft., that you can use to determine whether your expectations are in the ballpark or not.

Depending on the type of project you are doing this figure can range between \$100 - \$300 per sq. ft.

Often people spend the same amount on remodeling a bathroom as they spent on their last car.

Kitchens tend to be anywhere up to 10% of the value of the house.

Our experience on big projects is that when clients set aside some money to deal with "unexpected costs due to concealed obstacles", that after the scary part of the project is over and they find that they don't need to spend that money on concealed obstacles, that they spend this already allocated money on "while you're at it" items.

5. Choose a Reputable Remodeling Company

Remodeling can be a major investment so be sure to ask the right questions before choosing a company to work with. Seek out someone who is excited to be in the business, with a proven track record of providing stress-free, well orchestrated, home remodels. This will help to ensure that renovating your home will be an enjoyable journey and result in an awesome finished project.

The remodeler is the person to whom you will delegate the responsibility of ensuring that the experience matches your expectations. You need a good manager. There is no business where teamwork is more important. They have to be able to pull together people and resources to get the project done for you in a timely fashion and to your satisfaction. You want someone who will do everything possible to provide the least amount of disruption in your life.

With a great remodeling company, each day of a remodeling project should be a day where your expectations are met. Each day your home should be one day closer to your dream and vision.

Beware of contractors who say they are perfect, no one is. On remodeling projects, things often go wrong, problems come up. One of the differences between a good and bad contractor is how they address the problems as they arise. You want someone who can resolve them promptly, fairly and responsibly while keeping you in the loop.

Look for a remodeler with traditional skills of empathy and careful listening, one who will keep you informed; a good communicator.

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Choose someone who is courteous, steady and even-tempered. Select a company who will be around tomorrow to service their work. Ask a lot of smart questions. Look at their portfolio. Talk to their references.



"What is your approach to a project such as this?" is the most important question to ask remodelers.

The ability to listen and understand what you want are qualities to look for. You need someone who will help you to prioritize your wants and needs so you can achieve all your remodeling objectives and stay on budget. They need the experience to look at the big picture. A great design team will consider the total scenario; not only for now, but for the future, including broader or unexpected needs that may not be obvious to you on first glance.

Ask whether they will put together a conceptual budget to guide the process. If so, you'll get "early news about costs" - which avoids big surprises at the conclusion of the design stage. Will they value engineer it as they go along? This will give you the biggest bang for the buck. The design team will apply their practical experience and knowledge of previous job costs to your project. This saves you money and makes getting to the finish line more efficient.

6. Design Well

Look for a design team who has design talent as well as understanding of project costs and technical expertise to excel at the type of project you are considering doing.

You want confidence that the team you have chosen will not let the design run away from the predetermined budget range, without your go-ahead. When they have appropriate financial information at their fingertips, then you can weigh factors such as return on investment and

quality of life improvements into your decision making process. This ultimately allows you to make sensible choices that are right for you.

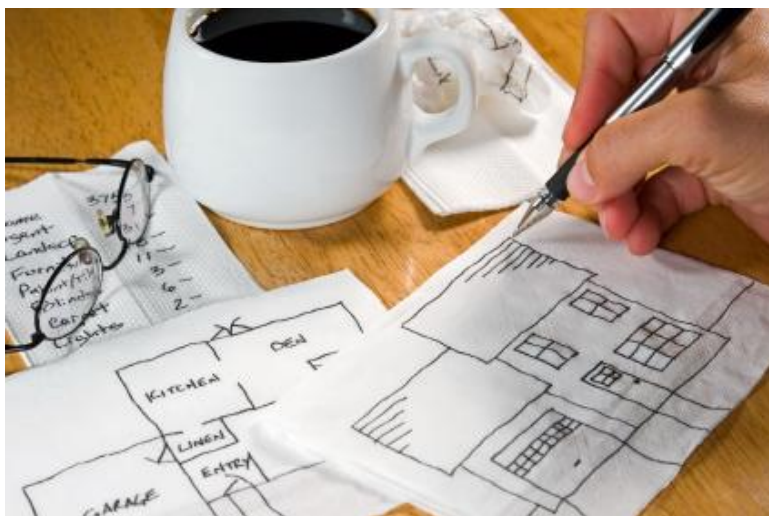
Spend enough time up front with your designer working through conceptual plans. Explore several alternative designs before settling on one. If you are adding on, also consider working within the existing four walls. One of the goals of remodeling is to come up with grounded solutions, making the most of the existing structure, when possible, to keep your costs down.

A designer will lead you through the process of considering and evaluating project options carefully. You will work together with the existing space and conditions to optimize use and function giving you the most for your budget. You will weigh the options presented to you until a satisfactory blend of cost and value is reached.

During this phase, take some time when you are at home to think about how you will use the space, and to make sure that the flow works sensibly for you. You may want to make the floor with delicate surface tape to reflect the new configuration. This time, This time, wisely spent, more than pays for itself in the finished product.

Work through as many of the details as possible at this stage. If you are redoing a kitchen, think about where you will store food, dishes, pots and pans, etc. If it's a master bath, where will you hang your bathrobe when you take a shower? The towels?

Once you have a conceptual plan you will be ready to nail down all the finishing details. Your designer's knowledge of current design trends allows him/her to be a good source for color and material recommendations. Together you can select interior features which harmonize with your home, creating an overall look and feel for your project that makes you and your family happy.



7. Plan Your Project Thoroughly: Get Detailed Specs

To keep costs down, and minimize change orders, all construction details need to be well thought out and specified. Putting off decisions until your project is underway or having allocations are both surefire ways to escalate costs and provide for expectation mismatches.

Decide what you are doing as well as what you are NOT doing. Work with a contractor who is accustomed to figuring out the details up front and make sure that those details are documented; if there are selections to be made after contract signing, make sure that what is included in the contract is clearly specified by make and model.

Construction details can either be indicated on the working drawings, on the contract, or a combination of the two. Plans and specifications should be all inclusive. They should contain information about every decision you have made regarding your project.

Everything should be specified, including make and models, so that there are no surprises once construction gets underway. Even cabinet hardware and paint color selections.

Recommendation:

Avoid surprises during construction by making sure the contract clearly includes material specifications and is accompanied by detailed drawings that show how it all goes together.

One way to reduce the likelihood of change orders is to have the work done by a "Design/Build" company where the person that you hire is responsible for the design as well as construction.

You simply tell them "I want a kitchen in this location of this size, with these features." They take responsibility for both the design and construction. That way you do not get caught between the designer, contractor, and architect."



A good set of working drawings will include the following: A site plan, demolition plan, floor and foundation plans, elevations, electrical and mechanical schematics, a cross section, and any unusual construction details.

Make sure that you understand all of the drawing details. Ask plenty of questions if you don't. Always remember, no question is a dumb question.

Allow your remodeler to be the expert and leave them the task of making sure you understand everything you need to know. And never feel like you're asking too many questions.

8. Make Changes Before Construction Begins

It can be very costly, both in dollars and in terms of the project's duration, to make changes after construction starts. Try to make all changes up front!

Design on the fly has a ripple effect on costs, regardless of whether you add or delete something. It is time-consuming for the contractor to change materials, specs and worker schedules that may not have flexibility, while work is underway. Additionally, the down time that results while everyone stands around waiting for late decisions and/or client changes comes with a price.

Your job can be brought to a complete standstill by changes made during production. The contractor schedules workers well in advance and may not be able to instantly reshuffle the worker's schedules.

Are Necessary Upgrades or Corrections to the Existing Conditions Included?

Has the contractor figured out if the existing building components are sufficient? If any upgrades are necessary, has he included them?

Some things you can check to make sure he has thought about are:

- Will you need a new subpanel?
- Is your HVAC system adequate to handle the needs of the space?
- Will you need to make any changes to meet current code requirements?
- Have they been included in the scope of work?
- Are there foreseeable issues with existing framing or structural support that need to be addressed in advance?

Recommendation: Before you sign a contract, make sure that your contractor has thought through the work that you will be doing and included any necessary upgrades or corrections.



9. When to DIY and When to Call in the Professionals

Potential clients often mention that they are considering being their own general contractor, because they feel that they cut out the middle man and save some hard earned cash.

For some projects, this makes sense. You may not need a GC to contract your driveway, or get your house reroofed. But for projects of complexity, it is a more complicated Decision. Often, you (and your family) may be happier and financially ahead to rely on the expertise of a professional remodeling team.



We'll quickly run through some thoughts on what being a DIY means, as well as what a strong contractor brings to the table, so that you can make an educated (and therefore, smart, decision) on which projects make sense to DIY.



Being your own GC

Being a GC is a full time job, whether it is finding and scheduling workers, overseeing the job, expediting materials, inspecting them, returning damaged or incorrect ones (regardless of whose fault it is), replacing them and solving problems on the job, or many trips to the lumberyard. You can weigh the value of your time in terms of deferred earnings or less free time that would otherwise be spent with family and friends.

Several clients have reported, in disappointment, that master bath projects have taken them a year to complete, stressed their marriage, and in the end, cost as much as we would have charged. You may think this won't happen to you, but be careful!

You need to come to grips with all the time it takes, what that takes away from your life, and also what you are forgoing if you don't have a strong GC on your team. DIY remodeling can be a recipe for disaster: a case of penny-wise and pound-foolish, and result in a drawn out project of lower quality than you would otherwise get.

We often hear about DIY problems that result from "lack of technical expertise". In the case of one addition contracted by a homeowner we know, improper flashing at windows, foundations and roofs caused serious leaking. The foundation geometry was not laid out correctly making it so that the walls above did not line up with the foundation below.

Such problems are not easily correctable after the fact, and are avoidable if someone with deep and thorough



9. When to DIY (continued)

technical knowledge manages the project.

So what does a qualified professional remodeler bring to the table?

- They have technical expertise, know how everything should go together.
- They get subs to show up and get them to do the right things.
- They know what the critical path is, and schedule tasks and materials accordingly
- They deal effectively with public authorities



Technical Expertise

Good contractors have extensive knowledge of and experience with different materials and methods such as masonry, carpentry, cabinet making, roofing, electrical, and plumbing work. They will make sure that your project is built right. They know what to look for at each step along the way.

Subcontractors

Secondly, there's nothing as important as the ability to get workers to show up. It is obvious why a plumber will respond sooner to a call from the contractor, a repeat client, than to a homeowner who may be difficult to work with, that he may never see again, who may not pay him easily or quickly.

Since the contractor regularly and repeatedly uses the services of his subcontractors, he will be able to exercise control over them. The average homeowner will only add to a house once or twice in a lifetime, whereas the contractor may be overseeing five different projects at once. These facts give the contractor leverage over the subs that a homeowner cannot possibly have.

Additionally, the tradespeople have ways of doing things that may save you a percentage of construction costs. If you over control, you may overbuild and not get the benefit of these insights. Alternately, the implications of under controlling the workers are obvious.

Orchestrating Your Project

Thirdly, top notch contractors **are skilled at orchestrating the team to get projects done in a timely fashion, expeditiously, getting in and out of your house as quickly as possible**, while getting top quality craftsmanship in on your project.

There are few fields where scheduling is more critical than in construction. Everything needs to happen with forethought, often with multiple trades working simultaneously, or the project may take twice as long as it should. Sequencing tasks well is of the utmost importance to having a job completed successfully in a timely manner.

Knowing the right time to get your subcontractors in, when to order the windows and doors, and even the right time to call the designer for a clarification or critical inspection takes skill and expertise. If the carpenter does not stay ahead of the plumber and the electrician, then the electrician may walk off the job. If the plumber and the electrician don't finish their work, the carpenter cannot move on. This causes the job to come to a screeching halt. Tensions rise on the job when the subs lose money due to excess idle time. Juggling between subs stepping on each other, idle time, and project duration is something that the contractor controls and manages.

Dealing with the Town Officials

Fourth, **the contractor can effectively deal with public authorities such as the building inspector**. Since they work with them on a regular basis, the contractor's staff has developed professional relationships with the various building officials.

9. When to DIY (continued)

These relationships translate into a job being completed faster and better. Knowing which hoops you have to jump through up front is important. During construction, knowing when to request input from the authorities is a critical component of scheduling. As a do-it-yourself homeowner, the last thing you want to hear is that you need to remove all the sheetrock you just installed, because you neglected to request the building inspector for an inspection.

The bottom line is that significant remodeling projects are complex, and the expertise to run them is not something we are born with. By all means, contract small jobs yourself and save yourself some cash.

But for projects of any complexity, you may be risking large amounts of money and time to take it on yourself. If you step into being a DIY general contractor, do so with as much knowledge and free time as possible, so that you can minimize headaches, hassles and the impact of your relationships with your family members.

How Does DIY Remodeling go?

For a few laughs, check out "Diary of a Mad Remodeler" It's a dramatized example of how Murphy's Law can and too often comes into play in Do-It-Yourself remodeling. Don't let the last laugh be on you!
<https://www.clarkconstruction.net/blog-page/diary-of-a-mad-remodeler>

10. Prepare for it, and Enjoy It

Remodeling is a chance to have your dream home wishes come true. You can have what you want rather than buying someone else's taste and living with it.

But remodeling is inherently disruptive. Good contractors minimize that by working smart and helping you keep your sense of humor! When the going gets tough and you can't find the coffee pot, keep in mind the beautiful finished end product at the journey's end.

Before your contractor steps in and starts your remodel, here are some simple suggestions that will help you survive the process with dignity, grace and a smile.

1. Go Out to Eat

If you're having a major kitchen renovation, look at it as a chance to try all of those new restaurants you've been meaning to try but haven't had the time! Check out their takeout menus online.

Whether you eat in or take out, this can be an opportunity for culinary exploration! Relish in the self-indulgence.



2. Good Prep and Protection

Make sure your home is well protected with zip walls to minimize dust incursion, and "floor protect" over trafficked floors.



3. Understand the Schedule

Your kitchen remodeler has a plan in mind for how the work will go. It's easier on you if you understand what's involved in the process, and how long each part will take. Know what work days and hours it's likely that the crew will be in your home. If you have specific requests, like no very early mornings, make that clear up front.

If you are trying to meet a milestone, such as hosting fifty people for a graduation party, you need to let your contractor know about this drop dead deadline. Good planning minimizes disappointments, and allows the team to meet your goals and expectations.

4. Communicate Well

The better the communication between you and your remodeling team, the smoother the remodel. Be clear about your needs and concerns. During construction, make sure you know how to get in touch with the person responsible for your project's execution, but also respect that he needs to get his work done, so constant interruptions will only delay progress.

How to Prepare for a Kitchen Remodel

You're so excited as you envision your new kitchen. You've chosen the design, picked out appliances and cabinetry, and made all the final selections.

Before your contractor steps in and starts your kitchen remodel, follow some simple steps that will help you survive the process with dignity, grace and a smile. As they say, the best offense is a good defense.

1. Prepare

A kitchen remodel is not like a surprise party. Take a little time to get ready for the forthcoming upheaval. Pack up your valuable items and mark the boxes clearly. Set aside the basic items that you can use in the interim.

Empty the food items from your cabinets. Consider donating non-perishables to our local food bank. Throw out old spices and anything that has passed its expiration date.

Separate and organize non-perishable food items into bins, so that things like snack foods, soups, coffee, and cereal are readily accessible.

Purge items that have seen better days. Be ruthless. If you didn't love it or need it before, you won't want to save a place of importance for it in your new kitchen.

2. Create an Interim Kitchen

Set up a temporary kitchen area. Have your old refrigerator relocated so you can still have chilled foods and beverages. Cook up some meals in advance and freeze them. Use your microwave to thaw and reheat them while your kitchen remodel is underway. Consider adding a portable induction cook top or even a camp stove to help with cooking.

Be sure you have a coffee station handy! Keep a stash of cups, coffee, and sweeteners in one area so you don't have to forego this daily pleasure.

Remember that you're going to need a sink for clean-up. If you don't have a utility sink in your laundry room or garage, now would be a great time to add one! Be inventive - for one client, we exchanged their bathroom pedestal sink for a utility sink for the project duration. Using your bathroom sink for the dishes will get old quick.

3. Make Your Nest

Choose a living area that keeps you, your kids and your pets out of the work area. Think about your access and day-to-day activities.

The craftsmen will seal off the work area with plastic and zip doors to minimize dust into other areas, but you may need more than that.

For one client, we added temporary doors to their living room so that they could have a self contained private space, accessed along a common work path between the kitchen and the front door.

4. Gather Up Take-out Menus

Turn your temporary dining inconvenience into an adventure. Make a list of restaurants you've been wanting to try. Check out their takeout menus online. Turn this time into a culinary exploration. Relish in the self-indulgence.

Keep your sense of humor!

When the going gets tough, keep in mind the beautiful finished end product at the journey's end.

Final Thoughts.

Most importantly, keep your eye on the finished product. A thankful heart is a happy heart.