

17 renovation *regrets* & how to avoid them

Avoid these common mistakes for success, according to our experts...

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1 NO CONTINGENCY FUND

No matter how well-planned, a renovation is never straightforward. "Unforeseen elements like insufficient joists, substandard plumbing or electrics and inadequate insulation can be hard to budget for, until the full extent of the work required is uncovered," says Gareth Boyd, director of Ballymoney-based, 2020 Architects (2020architects.co.uk). "To protect yourself against the unexpected, it's always worth including a bit extra in your budget. Assign 10% of the overall project cost as a contingency fund; a few banks insist on it now too."

Walls and ceiling painted in Benjamin Moore, Sun Valley 350, MrCB.ie

Embarking on a renovation project can be both exciting and daunting in equal measure. Extending could give you the much-needed space you've always dreamed of, but mess up and you could potentially decrease your home's resale value. Whether you take on the renovation yourself or hire a professional, it's important you get it right the first time. To help you avoid making mistakes we've quizzed architects, designers and estate agents and compiled a list of potential pitfalls to avoid for success. Read on for what *not* to do...

Renovation and extension to a family home in South Dublin by Courtney McDonnell featuring oak laminate floors, natural pale oak cabinetry, curved joinery and quartz countertops



Photography: Peter Molloy

3 PRIORITISING DESIGN OVER FUNCTION

Renovating is expensive, fact. So, spend your hard-earned cash wisely. "While you might well love marble slab countertops and pivot glass doors, it's important to keep in mind the practicalities of such designs, especially where children and dogs are concerned, says Dublin-based architect Courtney McDonnell, (Courtneymcdonnell.com). "Consider the durability of your chosen materials, not just their aesthetics – and colour choices. Darker floors, kitchens and sofas can sometimes show up imperfections and dirt more than their lighter, more natural-hued equivalents. It's also worth avoiding too many sharp square edges in your furniture and joinery if there are kids in the mix."

2 INITIATING A RENOVATION TOO SOON

"We always advise our clients not to rush into the renovation phase too quickly," says Emma Delaney, senior interior designer at April and the Bear (Aprilandthebear.com). "Live in your soon-to-be dream home for that bit longer and you will then get to know the space before carrying out a big revamp. Take the time to learn how the light works and travels throughout the space; what spaces do you naturally gravitate towards, from morning until evening? Waiting that bit longer and getting to know your surroundings will lead to the best, well-considered design choices."

Spend time and money on bathroom design. Rose Cottage project by Ashen & Cloud



Photography: Jessica Glynn

4 NOT ENOUGH FOCUS ON BATHROOMS

"The dream kitchen is typically top of the list when it comes to a renovation, but from a build process, planning a kitchen is actually fairly straightforward. The same can't be said for bathrooms. As a result, many renovators underestimate the amount of work needed to design one. And if you have several, this can become a very stressful task once the build commences," cautions Susan McGowan, founder and creative director of design practice, Ashen and Cloud (Ashenandcloud.com). "If you haven't given your bathroom its design due diligence, you'll likely have to scramble to make decisions fast, which is not always easy when you have to balance the selection of tiles, sanitaryware and brassware – never mind creating something that has great design integrity."



Before splurging on the interior details, get the fundamentals right. Irish Town project by North Design

6 SCRIMPING ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

Prioritising fittings and nice furnishings over build is a common renovator's mistake. "The fact is, the majority of your renovation budget will (and should) be spent on the structure and makeup of the building; heating, plumbing, wiring, windows, insulation and correcting what may once have been done wrong," says Lauren Martin of North Design (Northdesign.ie). "Although we completely understand the temptation to save the budget for the finer finishings, we can't stress enough the importance of investing in the fundamentals first. Even if it means having to wait for that beautiful sofa you've had your eye on. After all, there's no joy in a new sofa in a freezing cold house."

7 OVERLOOKING THE LANDSCAPING

It's easy to get carried away with the interior aesthetics of a renovation, but what about the outside space? Incorporating your garden into your plans can make your home feel larger and more connected to the outdoors. "All too often at the end of a project, we find that the client's budget has been used up on interiors and soft furnishings and nothing has been put aside for landscaping. They've created this stunning home on the inside that looks out onto a mucky lawn," says conservation architect Lisa McVeigh, director of DMVF Architects (Dmfvf.ie) who advises setting aside some money at the planning stage to invest in quality, young plants and shrubbery with lots of time to grow.

5 NOT HIRING A DESIGNER

While it might seem like an unnecessary extra expense, having a designer on your side can be priceless, especially if you're a first-timer. "Most people know how to create wonderful mood boards using Pinterest, Instagram or magazines but the reality of bringing that vision to life isn't as straightforward," says interior architect Natasha Rocca Devine, (Theinteriorsnrd.com). "An experienced designer will have a good understanding of the stages of renovation, help with budgets, product sourcing, delays, deliveries and installation, saving you time, money and unnecessary stress."



Pocket doors allow for flexible room layouts and easy adaptation to changing needs. Project by Optimise Design

Photography: PJ Rankin

Photography: Ruth Maria Murphy

8 NOT PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

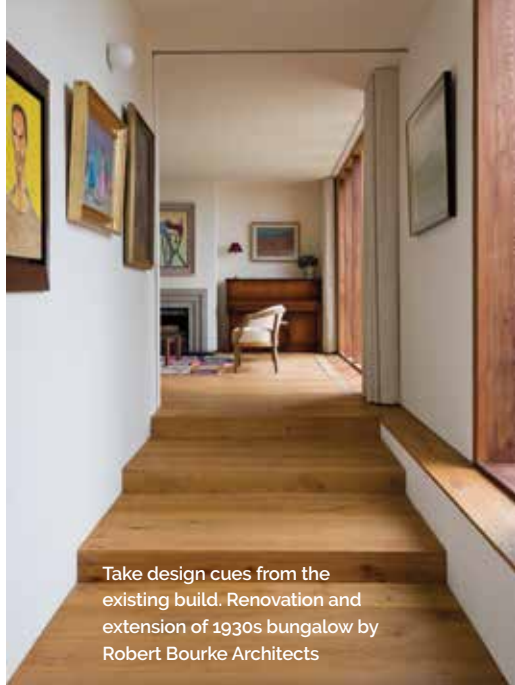
"It's very easy to design a home to suit your immediate needs, but it's more important to look to the future and try to work some flexibility into your plans," cautions architect Denise O'Connor (Optimise-design.com). "Consider incorporating a ground floor space that could be easily adapted into a bedroom at a later date, adding pocket doors to close off open plan living spaces when required or incorporating a Jack and Jill shower room between two children's bedrooms. This kind of forward thinking means your home will only need minor, if any, adjustments as your needs change over time."



Get the light right. Geri O'Toole's own kitchen design makes the most of natural light and statement pendant lights

9 NEGLECTING A LIGHTING PLAN

"Lighting plays a crucial role in interior design. The right lighting can transform your project from ordinary to extraordinary, yet, it's often an overlooked aspect of home renovations," says interior designer Geri O'Toole, (Geridesigns.ie). "The key to success is to plan a lighting scheme carefully from the outset and take time to choose the right fixtures. Don't let poor lighting decisions dim your design vision."



Take design cues from the existing build. Renovation and extension of 1930s bungalow by Robert Bourke Architects

Photography: Ste Murray

10 IGNORING WHAT'S ALREADY THERE

Often you can achieve a more harmonious renovation when you take your design cues from what's already there. "Every home has some hidden qualities that can be worked with, no matter what the age, style or size," says Dublin architect Robert Bourke (Rba.ie). "For example, a suspended timber floor, typical in many houses, could be lowered to create a dramatic level change if you have enough depth. A north-facing back garden may not receive sun, but don't write-off your front garden that quickly. With careful planting you may be able to create a great sun spot with good privacy."



Getting the right trades on board is key to renovation success. Project by Caroline Fernandes

Photography: Philip Lauterbach

11 CHOOSING THE CHEAPEST TRADES

The secret to a successful renovation is having the right trades on board. "Engaging a professional contractor and relevant trades will ensure that works are carried out effectively, safely and in line with regulatory requirements," says interior designer Caroline Fernandes (@Carolinefernandes_designs). "Always obtain references and take your time to request and review their previous completed projects. Your checklist for engagement should also include an agreement of the scope and standard of work, accurate written quotations and sign-off on a payment plan, all in advance of project commencement"

Photography: Piotr Zawistowski



Making the most of the period details, this Edwardian renovation project by Ventura Design

12 RIPPING OUT PERIOD DETAILS

"When it comes to renovating period properties sometimes the urge to remove everything and start from scratch is all too tempting. Resist. Your goal should always be to preserve your period home's character and charm. I always try to keep original flooring and mantelpieces where possible," says Arlene McIntyre, founder and creative director of Ventura Design (Ventura.ie). "With historic homes a budget should always begin with the bathrooms, windows and kitchen. Plumbing and electrics will also need immediate review. Be mindful too that original moulding work such as cornices, coving, internal doors and handrails on stairs will need expert restoration work in advance of any cosmetic design; it's never as easy as simply adding a new layer of paint."

13 UNWILLING TO COMPROMISE

"Irrespective of how much you plan, renovating an existing dwelling is not an exact science – and can throw up unforeseen issues once on site. As such, you need to understand and allow for changes, compromises and variations to be made, even to agreed works," says architect and RTE *Home of the Year* judge, Amanda Bone (Amandabonearchitects.ie). "It's worth noting that amendments may affect alterations to the project timeframe as well as the budget and overall cost."

If spending big on the kitchen, make sure you will reap the benefits, long term.
OM60NDBB1 Built in Combination Microwave Oven; OB60SDPTDB1 60cm self-cleaning oven; RS7621SLK1 Integrated Column Refrigerator, Fisherpaykel.com/ie



14 POOR BUDGET PLANNING

"Poor budgeting is a common pitfall," says interior designer Alena Chikurnikova (Alenacdesign.com). "The best way to avoid unexpected expenses or going over budget is to try to predict, step-by-step, how the project will unfold. Breaking a big idea into an action plan with smaller steps helps you see what contractors you need and what daily jobs will look like. Also, you should never hesitate to ask contractors what needs to be finished before they start; it will help you fill up the information gaps and revise the plan before commencing a project bigger than you anticipated."



Wallpapering might be a doddle but know your DIY limitations.
Wall papered in Samphire BP 4004, Farrow-ball.com

Photography: Paul Craig; Susan & Clive Tydesley case study

15 OVERSPENDING ON IMPROVEMENTS

Not all renovations will increase your home's resale value. "Investing vast sums of money on a project, especially when you consider how expensive construction costs are, and expecting a short to medium term return on your investment, is a common renovation mistake," cautions estate agent Sinead Beggan of McGuirk Beggan Property (McGuirkbeggan.ie). "If you're spending well over the ceiling price you need to be absolutely certain that the property is your 'forever home' and that you will see and experience the long-term benefits from that investment."

16 AN UNREALISTIC BRIEF

"If your budget is tight, be realistic about your wish list. If you have a brief that doesn't match your budget and you aren't willing to make sacrifices, you'll likely end up with a compromised, inferior design due to cutting corners in order to include everything on your list," says architect Courtney McDonnell (Courtneymcdonnell.com). "As soon as your architect has created an initial scheme, engage a quantity surveyor to produce a detailed cost plan. Take time at this stage to understand every cost and get your architect to advise on where to spend for maximum value and enjoyment. Typically, no matter the budget, there are always compromises to be made."

17 TAKING ON TOO MUCH DIY

Many renovators take on DIY to save money, but botched jobs can be more costly to rectify. "I'm a huge advocate for home DIY and upcycling (especially after filming the *Salvage Squad* for RTE) but often it can be harder than it seems online to strip walls or upcycle furniture," says interior architect Natasha Rocca Devine, (Theinteriorsnrd.com). "My advice? Ensure you have the right products, time and space to practice before you start on your own home as there is no room for errors."