



Need More Space At Your Place?

7 Steps to a Successful Home Renovation



Seven steps to a successful home renovation

Thank you for downloading this resource. It is designed to guide you through the home renovation process, providing tips and tricks that will make your building journey easier in the long run. By embracing these strategies, you'll be giving yourself the best shot at a smooth and seamless construction experience. If you have any questions, or would like to know more about the process, please do get in touch with the details at end of this e-book.

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About the author:

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His company – Family Home Designers & Builders specialises in second storey additions on Sydney's North Shore.

1. Want to renovate your home but don't know where to start?

Starting any challenge is always difficult, but none more so than a home renovation. If you aren't already involved in the industry, immersing yourself in the world of construction can be daunting and difficult. However, by asking the right questions, you can ensure a smooth and successful building journey.

The first thing to consider is what type of questions to ask. I have been designing home renovations for over 20 years, and I am often asked, "What suggestions can you make to improve my home?" It's a great question... but not the right place to start!

Before finding solutions, we need to know what problems these changes will be solving. Therefore, in my design process I need to find what the real problem is before I suggest solutions. Here's what to think about before starting your home renovation:

Explore What You Need In Your Renovation Design

Broad questions can often bring up issues that you've either forgotten about or aren't as obvious. Questions that could be asked might include:

- Why are you doing this?
- Are you happy living in this neighbourhood?
- How long do you plan to live here?
- What frustrates you most about this house?
- Are there enough bedrooms? Are they large enough?
- Is there enough living space? Is there a private living space?
- Is the kitchen comfortable and efficient to work in?



More detailed questions might include the following:

- Does the kitchen overlook the outdoor area as well as the Living area?
- Do the living areas flow out onto the outdoor living spaces?
- Is the house comfortable to live in? Is it too hot in summer? Too cold in winter?
- Is there enough natural light in each room, particularly the living areas?
- Do the main living areas face north? Do they get sunlight?
- Is there enough storage space?

With these answers in mind, your designer and builder will be able to formulate a clear picture of just what you need, resulting in an end product that enhances your lifestyle instead of hindering it.

2. Have You Considered Alternatives?

The big decision if you are serious about renovating your existing home is whether to add rooms above or extend out. There are advantages and disadvantages to both solutions:

Building up

This would usually be the best option if you don't have a lot of yard space or if you need additional bedrooms. Building up can often be more economical than building out, because you don't have to pay for expensive excavation, footings or sub floor walls. Building up will also improve the street appeal of your home. Most real estate agents agree that a 2-storey home would be valued at more than a single level home.

Building out

Building out would be a good option if you have enough back-yard space, and you require additional living space or an extra bedroom. Most of the ground level extensions we have built are for an additional Family Room and/or kitchen space. The advantages of a ground floor extension are that it doesn't require stairs and can open up living areas to the outdoors. The disadvantage is that it will take up yard space and the work will damage existing lawns and gardens near the building area.



A ground floor extension under way, showing how the gardens around the building site can be damaged by machinery and site preparation work.

Renovating your home might not be the only solution, or even the best solution. If you can't stand the thought or the hassle of tradesmen traipsing through your home, there are other possibilities.

A great design and building advisor will likely take you through the process of deciding on alternatives. The main alternatives include:

Knock down and rebuild

Sometimes this is more financially feasible than doing major renovations, and it removes the limitations of the existing home.

However, this is dependant on your specific home, your new design and your block of land, so before committing to a renovation, discuss the knock down rebuild option with a builder who specialises in new homes.

Sell and buy elsewhere

Sell this home and buy another that has all you want in it. If you are happy to move from your neighbourhood, this can be a great option.

However, it is not always easy to find the perfect home that satisfies all your requirements.

Selling and buying elsewhere is a costly exercise. I recently went through this exercise and lost over \$140,000 in the process.

It can also be an added stress - can you buy the perfect home and sell yours at the same time?

Don't do anything

A simple freshen up might be adequate for the moment. If you can put up with living with the current limitations of your home, you don't have to do anything for the time being.

Further down the line, you can choose to make changes room by room or by section of the house.



Whatever you do, make sure you consult a professional designer or builder who will help you evaluate the best alternative in your particular and unique situation.

3. Have you spoken with all interested parties?

I once made the serious mistake of thinking that as an architect, I was the best person to design my own home. I very quickly realised that it was my wife's home too, and she needed to be consulted on all the design decisions I was making.

As the owners, it is useful to hear from all interested parties – not just your spouse, but also your children, and others who live in or visit the home (parents, close friends) before finalising the design.

Children?

Yes. They live in the home and sometimes their fresh and unconditioned perspective can be eye-opening and unbiased. Children see things simply and often their opinions can play a huge role in your home's final design.

It's also worth considering what your lifestyle could look like in two, five or ten years. As your children grow, they will need spaces that adapt to their changing needs. So, what was meant to be a playroom may need to be transformed into a study, or gaming room, or guest room in a few years. This versatility should be considered in the design process so that changes don't need to be extensive down the line.

Once you've consulted all parties, you will be able to formulate a comprehensive design that caters for all parties.



Case Study

One client wanted me to design a special room for their eight year old son so he could set up some of his play equipment in it. When I spoke with the boy we realised that he just wanted a small space to build a “cubby house” in. We were able to accommodate this space under the stairs and he was thrilled.

4. How do I choose the right designer?

Once you have decided that renovating your home is the right solution for you, you will want to find the best person to help you design the most useful, cost effective and beautiful home renovation. The right person will help you navigate through the many challenges of designing a home and help bring your vision to life.

Generally speaking, there are four different approaches you can take. You can...

Design it yourself.

Engage an architect.

Engage a building designer or drafter.

Engage a design and construction specialist.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these options.

Designing it yourself

Designing your own home can be fun and exciting if you have the basic skills and tools.

You will need a plan of the existing home drawn to scale, some skill in drawing, or using a computer drafting programme and some knowledge of construction.

You need to know how a floor is constructed so it is properly supported, how a roof works and how walls are used to support both. Knowing about load-bearing walls will also save you engineering costs.



It is a real advantage to know optimal room sizes and proportions, where stairs work best and how large windows and doors should be for ventilation, light and aesthetics.

Engage an Architect

Architects are trained to design buildings, so often specialise in larger commercial projects. Many are not experienced in home design, so it's important to find an architect whose projects you have seen and admire.

Architect-designed projects tend to cost a lot more than conventional projects because of the cost of building unusual details. Many architects are not familiar with building costs, as their focus is on the design. It can be disappointing if, when the building quotes are received, they are outside your budget.

A good architect should have excellent knowledge of construction and provide a practical and aesthetically pleasing plan that sits within your budget. Engaging their services is the best option if you want an iconic design or a particularly difficult or complex building.

Architects fees can be as much as 10% of the building cost if they also manage the build.

Engage a Building Designer

Building designers, like architects, are trained to design buildings. They should have a working knowledge of construction, but I have seen many plans where it is obvious that the designer has little idea how a building is put together, making construction difficult and costly. They are not expected to have the imagination or design flair of an architect. Most will simply prepare drawing as per your instructions, without questioning your ideas.

Designers and drafters tend not to be familiar with building costs as that is not their focus or experience.

Engage a Design and Construction Specialist

A design and construction specialist will have good design flair, and also be familiar with building techniques and construction costs. They can produce a realistic budget before proceeding with detailed plans and costly approvals. What's more, many D&C companies will include the design cost in the overall cost of your project.

Because they also build the project, they will accept full responsibility for any design challenges that may arise, avoiding complex and costly discussion about who is to blame for poor plans. During the design process, you have the opportunity of assessing whether you enjoy working with this builder, and whether you want him to build your project.

Again, if a design and construction specialist is the preferred option, check out some of their projects before committing to a design.

Design Checklist:

Based on my 26 years' experience designing and building homes, I believe a good design should address the following criteria:

- a) It should be aesthetically pleasing. You should be the judge of this – NOT the designer. A good looking home will be worth more than an ugly one, so aesthetics is important.
- b) The plan should be practical and functional. Is there a logical placement of rooms? Do the living spaces flow well from one to another? Does the outdoor area open up from the Family Area? Are the bedrooms in a separate zone?
- c) The plan should be energy efficient and use sustainable materials. This is important as it will save you money in running costs.
- d) Is it financially feasible. There is no point spending a lot of money preparing detailed plans and obtaining approvals if the cost of building is going to be way over your budget. Establish a credible budget first.

5. Do I need approvals for my home renovation?

Just like any large project, a home renovation can require a number of approvals. If your project is minor internal changes, it may be classified as 'exempt development' and not require any planning permits or approvals.

However, if your project involves structural work and/or additions, you will need either a development Approval (D.A.) from your local council, or a Complying Development Approval (C.D.C.). You will **ONLY** be granted a C.D.C. if your project complies with all the requirements listed by the relevant state government.

It is good practice to make an appointment for a "pre-lodgement meeting" with the local council if you suspect there are any issues with your project.

If your project involves a D.A. or a C.D.C., you might also require some of the following approvals:

- Rural Fire Services Approval – if you are in a bushfire hazard area (Flame Zone)
- Heritage Approval – if you are in a heritage conservation area or your home is heritage listed.
- Water Board Approval – if you are making any additions to your home or are adding any bathrooms or toilets.
- Building over Sewer approval – if your building is located above or adjacent to the Boards Sewer.
- Finance Approval – if you are needing to borrow funds for the construction.



It would be wise to consider which approvals you will need to obtain before embarking on your project, as this will determine when you can start building. A good designer or builder will outline all the approvals you will need to obtain as well as the costs associated with them during the process, incorporating these into your budget and timeline.

Some approvals only take four-five weeks (e.g. C.D.C.) while others can take many months. Heritage homes are particularly complicated as they can require ongoing negotiations – one project I was involved in took almost two years!

6. I'm ready to build. Who should I choose to build my home?

Deciding on a builder is arguably one of the most important choices you'll make in your construction journey. A bad builder be a nightmare, resulting in a poorly made home, unnecessary levels of stress and a drawn-out process. On the other hand, a great builder will be a pleasure to work with, delivering a seamless process and an outstanding family home that will last forever.

So how do you know?

The best case scenario is to choose a design and construct service, as without a doubt, the best company to build your home would be the one who designed it. This is because:

- The designer would be familiar with all the issues and requirements, having discussed these with the owner during the design process.
- The designer would also be familiar with any potential construction issues that were encountered during the plan preparation process.
- The designer would already have built a working relationship with the owner during the design and plan preparation process, and a good working relationship is the key to having a smooth construction process.

If your designer is not a builder then this will be not be an option, and you need to find the best builder for you and your project.



I always recommend asking yourself: What qualities are you looking for in the builder you want to work with?

- Is quality workmanship the highest priority?
- Am I looking for honesty and integrity?
- Can I communicate well with this builder?
- Do they listen to my concerns and treat me with respect?
- Are they reliable? Did they turn up for our meetings on time?

Other considerations would include:

- Does this builder want to work with me and have capacity?
- Are they experienced in my type of project? Have they built something similar?
- Do they have good references?
- How many projects are they currently working on?

Notwithstanding the above, don't be afraid to trust your instincts. Going with your gut is important in any decision-making process.

It is usually a warning device to be aware of who to avoid choosing and can be used to eliminate prospective builders from your list of options.

You can pair this with personal recommendations or references- any builder worth their salt will have the details of previous clients who you can ask questions of.

While there may be a temptation to hurry the process along, taking your time with this decision is essential. You'll want to make sure you get a feel for each builder before making your final decision.



This family is very excited about the second storey addition under construction at their home!

7. Which building contract should I sign?

Hopefully the builder you choose operates with integrity and honesty throughout the construction process. However, this doesn't mean you shouldn't carefully review your building contract. After all, you could be signing your life away!

The first thing to understand is that there are several different types of contract, and you need to be sure that the one you sign is the most appropriate for your project.

The easiest way to start this process is to establish who produced the contract – was it custom prepared by the builder or is it an industry standard one?

Some of the industry standard contract options are:

- Housing Industry Association:
 - o NSW Small Works Contract (for jobs under \$20,000)
 - o NSW Small Works Contract (for jobs \$20,000 - \$50,000)
 - o NSW Residential Building Contract for Renovations and Additions
 - o NSW Residential Building Contract for Works on a Cost Plus Basis
- Master Builders Association
 - o Head Contract Cost Plus (Residential)
 - o Residential Building (BC4)
 - o Residential Minor Works
 - o Small Residential Renovations and Additions
- Department of Fair Trading
 - o Home Building Contract for Work between \$5,000 and \$20,000
 - o Home Building Contract of Work over \$20,000



It's also best practice to cross-check your contract with the government standards. For contracts over \$20,000, you can find this information on the Fair Trading website.

How to Work with your Builder

The success of your home renovation project will largely be determined by the relationship you have with your Builder. Good communication is vital to this relationship. Some steps to ensure a healthy working relationship include:

- Ensure you have a Pre – Construction meeting to check that he is working with the latest version of plans. Anything not documented on the Plans or Specification or Scope of Work will not be built, and it would be a mistake to assume something will get done because somebody said so.
- Organise to have at least one formal meeting per week with your Building Supervisor/Manager. You need to be kept informed of the weekly schedule and have a forum to discuss any issues as they arise.
- It is critical that all communication be channelled via the Supervisor/Manager, as there can only be one “Boss” on the project. Communicating directly with the tradesmen is to be avoided, as they are only familiar with their portion of the works. Only the Supervisor has the full picture and schedule.
- Be prepared for the tradesmen entering and working in your home from 7am until after 3.30pm. Your daily routine might have to change to accommodate this – particularly your morning routine.
- Remove furniture that may be in the way of the workspace, and cover anything that might get damaged. There will usually be a lot of dust generated by a building project, so cover up sensitive electronic equipment. (e.g. Television, computer)



- Take down any pictures or wall hangings as the vibration may cause these to fall and break.
- Protect floors, especially polished timber floors.
- Resolve any issues as soon as they arise. Leaving unresolved issues will only compound the feeling of frustration and angst. Unless you tell the Builder what your concerns are, he will not be aware of them. Anyone can make a mistake, and the sooner it is addressed the easier it will be to rectify.

Conclusion

Renovating your home can be a lengthy but rewarding process. It requires a lot of planning, preparation, paperwork and patience, but the end result is more than worth it. By arming yourself with the right knowledge and professionals, you'll be able to ensure a smooth and enjoyable journey, with an outstanding new home at the end.

Should you wish to discuss your renovation requirements, please get in touch.

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Before



After



A before and after of a project at Castle Cove



*Before and
after a job at
Castle Cove*



Completed Major Renovation at Pymble





Before and after photos of a Major Renovation project at Pymble





Second storey addition at St Ives



New kitchen and family room addition at Pymble



New kitchen at Pymble



New deck and curved roof at Bilgola Plateau

