

Add Value to Your Home with These Remodeling Projects

If you are exploring ways to instantly increase your home's equity, then it's likely you've already considered making some renovations. However, it is important that you know that not all home renovations will increase your bottom line in the long run. Before you invest in an upgrade, make sure you do your research so that you know your hard work will pay off. Need some guidance? Add value to your home with these remodeling projects:

Fireplace. No matter what style your home is - from traditional to minimalist contemporary - you can find an array of fireplaces to complement your design aesthetic. Additionally, you can choose between gas and log-burning. With all of these options, there is sure to be a number of ways you can add to your home's value with a fireplace, and there is no other way to add the type of ambiance a fireplace can bring a home.

Kitchen. A kitchen remodel can be the priciest remodeling project you may undertake. However, it also offers the most return, as this is the most valuable portion of your home when it comes to appraisals and market analysis. There are many ways in which you can remodel a kitchen, from installing granite countertops to replacing old appliances with energy efficient versions. Just keep in mind that, generally speaking, today's real estate market values spacious kitchens that open to a living area.

Master bathroom. Next to the kitchen, the master bathroom is a remodeling job that can add the most value to your home. Consider luxury items like a bidet, whirlpool tub, heated towel bars, wall-mounted television and custom tile if you want to go the extra mile in creating a master bathroom that will really make your home's value soar.

New windows. Dated windows can drag down a home's aesthetic appeal and energy efficiency, in turn lowering its value. Invest in double-paned windows with a UV coating. To really get the most bang for your buck, replace small windows with large, picture windows in the living and dining areas, as well as in areas where you'd like to accentuate the home's architecture.

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All about Green Building

These days, there is a lot of pressure to go green, and that pressure extends from private homeowners to large corporate entities. How do general contractors address the subject of eco-friendliness? You might be surprised to find out the number of ways. Read on to learn all about green building:

What is green building? Also referred to as sustainable building and green construction, green building is an earth-conscious method of planning, constructing, maintaining, renovating, operating, and demolishing construction projects. The process of green building involves each and every stage of a building's life cycle, and must begin with the initial planning of the space.

The green building team. In order for general contractors to be successful at maintaining the high standards of green building throughout the entire lifecycle of the construction process, they must work with a number of qualified, eco-conscious professionals. This green building team includes architects, engineers, sustainability experts, environmentalists, and the clients, themselves.

Green building materials. Some building materials are more earth-friendly than others, and some are specifically manufactured with resource preservation, recycling, and biodegradability in mind. General contractors with a mind for green building have access to things like recycled stone and metal, paper-based paneling, compressed earth block, recycled industrial goods, sustainable plant products, solar paneling, eco-friendly roof shingling, and energy conserving appliances, among many others.

Other points for consideration. In addition to using green building materials, general contractors who engage in sustainable building must also be conscious of the energy used to manufacture building materials, as well as the waste produced in the manufacturing process. Also, the energy used to maintain the building, the energy usage of the building (and its components), indoor air quality, soil erosion, water conservation, waste, and environmental impact must be considered during all phases of green construction.

How to find green builders in your area. Simply search the web to find general contractors in your area who adhere to green construction standards. Additionally, you may check in with your local builder's association for a list of sustainable building general contractors in your area.

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How to Choose a General Contractor

Your home is the most likely to be the biggest investment you will make in your lifetime. Don't make the mistake of putting your home building or remodeling project into the hands of just anyone. There are many general contractors out there competing for your business, all claiming to be the most reputable and the best fit for your job. Unfortunately, not all general contractors are created equal, and choosing the wrong one can cost you a lot of time, money, and aggravation. Follow these tips for how to choose a general contractor:

Ask for references. Any reputable general contractor will be able to provide you with some references of other happy clients. Call these references to get the inside scoop on the general contractor in question. In addition to finding out how well the job was completed, you should also make an effort to learn as much as you can about the contractor's timeliness (was the project completed as scheduled?), reliability (did the contractor and construction team show up to work as planned?), resourcefulness (were a variety of building materials and price point options provided?), and communication (was the contractor easy to talk to and open to suggestions?).

Online research. You can find a lot of very valuable information about most general contractors with just a simple online search. Sites like Yelp and Google Places allow customers to post their reviews of businesses, and there is perhaps no better indicator of a general contractor's quality than word of mouth.

Licensing and insurance. Any contractor you choose to do business with should be licensed to work in your area, and insured for at least the amount of the value of your project. Don't be afraid to ask the general contractor directly for proof of both. In some cases, this may be your only protection in the case that the worst does happen and you must seek compensation for shoddy or unfinished work.

Consultation. It is important that you interview a number of general contractors before settling on the one for the job. Prepare a list of questions to ask and then sit face to face with each contractor to discuss your project and your questions. Following a consultation, a general contractor should be able to provide you with a job estimate. You can compare estimates, as well as the information you get during interviews, to choose the right general contractor for your project.

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How to Find Reputable General Contractors in Your Area

If you have a home building or remodeling project that you need professional help with, then it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work researching. Finding a general contractor won't be difficult, as there are many contractors out there, ready to take on your project. Unfortunately, not all general contractors are created equal, and one wrong move during the decision making process can equate to mounds of wasted time and money down the line. The important thing is that you know where to look to find quality professionals. Here are some tips for how to find reputable general contractors in your area:

Word of mouth. The best way to find a general contractor you can trust is to ask the people you trust the most for their recommendations. Approach friends and family members who have recently hired a general contractor for their own home building or remodeling project and ask about their experiences.

Realtors. No matter where you live, you can be sure to find a multitude of realtors in your area. Some of those realtors specialize in new construction, and you can bet that these realtors know the names of at least two or three top-notch general contractors. Search the web, or browse through your local phonebook listings, to find local real estate brokerages and realtors that may be able to help you compile a list of prospective general contractors for your project.

Builder's Association. Any reputable general contractor will be listed with your local builder's association. Call the builder's association hotline, or drop in, to speak with someone about acquiring a list of qualified, currently licensed general contractors in your area. Additionally, your local builder's association will be able to refer you to general contractors who specialize in your type of project.

Online. Search the web to find general contractors in your area. In addition to business names and phone numbers, the web also provides you with a number of valuable resources when it comes to researching general contractors. Read customer reviews and better business bureau ratings right from the comfort of home, without even having to pick up a phone.

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Mistakes to Avoid When Renovating Your Home

A home renovation project can increase your happiness and overall well-being by improving the aesthetics of your surroundings, and it can also increase the value of your home. However, a mishandled home improvement job can cost you loads of time, energy, money, and aggravation. To make your remodeling experience a happy one, keep in mind these mistakes to avoid when renovating your home:

Choosing the wrong general contractor. Before you hire a general contractor, and especially before you sign a contract or hand any deposit money over, make sure you do your research. You should never go with the first general contractor you find. Conduct internet research, speak with references, and sit with potential contractors for a thorough face to face interview before making this all-important decision.

Cheapening out on the materials. It is perfectly understandable that you should want to save as much money as possible over the course of your home renovation project. After all, your home is most likely the biggest investment you will make in a lifetime, and remodeling can be very expensive. However, there are some corners that you just shouldn't cut, no matter how much money you can save, and building materials is one of them. Why? Well, cheap building materials are often poorly made, which means they won't last nearly as long as their sturdier counterparts. This means that any money you save now will result in an obligation to spend more money on premature replacement and repairs down the line.

Not double-checking measurements. The old saying goes, "measure twice and cut once." If you don't pay homage to this piece of wisdom, you could waste a lot of time and money on needless mistakes. This applies to every part of the construction process, from space planning to installation.

Forgetting about safety. When your home is a construction zone, it can be easy to focus on the inconvenience of having to step around things and much harder to remember the danger presented by those things you are stepping around. Loose nails, dust, broken glass, electric tools, splinters, and saws can all cause some serious damage. Make it a point to protect yourself with things like gloves, goggles, ear plugs, heavy boots, and helmets when inspecting the site of your home renovation.

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Most Popular Home Renovation Projects

Want to add some life or space to your home, or simply increase its market value? If so, then you should consider taking on a home remodeling project. When it comes to home improvement, you are only limited by your imagination. Want some ideas? Read on to learn more about the most popular home renovation projects:

Sun room. This is sometimes called the all-seasons room, and is really just a room with a lot of windows. This space can add some drama to the indoor and outdoor aesthetic feel of a home, and it is also a great place for the entire family to gather for meals, games, socialization, and quiet reflection on nature.

Luxury bathroom items. For many homeowners, the master bathroom is a space for privacy, relaxation, and peace and quiet. For this reason, one of the most common home renovations today is the addition of luxury items in the master bathroom. These items include bidets, whirlpool tubs, steam shower enclosures, massaging shower heads, heated towel bars and floors, custom tile work, and more. Basically, if you could picture it in a high-end spa, then it would be a great feature in a remodeled bathroom.

Kitchen remodeling. This is perhaps the most expensive renovation project you can take on, but it can also add the most value to your home (not to mention improve your quality of life). There are many components to a kitchen remodel, and you may limit your project to any one, or combination, of them. When planning your new kitchen space, consider lightning, appliances, countertops, cabinets, back splashes, islands, eating nooks, storage and display shelves, and flooring.

Outdoor space. There are a great many things you can do to an outdoor space to either completely update the look or alter the way you use the space. Popular outdoor home renovation projects include pool and hot tub installations, fire pits, barbecue grill setups, outdoor kitchens, cabanas, screened in patios, decking, and more.

Floor coverings. Out of all the home improvement projects listed here, floor coverings are perhaps the most simple. They can also change the look and feel of your interior space in a dramatic way. Explore all of your options, from wood planking to mosaic tiling, to find an update that speaks for you.

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Questions to Ask Your General Contractor

Are you facing the tough prospect of hiring a general contractor? If so, then you are probably already aware that you have your work cut out for you. Fortunately, the time and effort you put in now can go a long way in saving you a lot of time, energy, money, and hassle in the long run - not to mention it could lead to a job well done. Just how do you go about screening prospective professionals for your home improvement project? Here are some questions to ask your general contractor:

Do you have the appropriate licensing? Any general contractor who wants to do business in your state must be licensed by the state licensing board. General contractors must prove their knowledge and skill to obtain licensing, and any contractor who cannot produce for you proof of licensing is a contractor that you should not be working with.

Are you insured? Your general contractor's insurance is your assurance against things like fraud, shoddy work, and project incompleteness. Don't be afraid to ask exactly how much the contractor in question is insured for, either. You need to know that your general contractor is insured for at least what your project is worth. Any reputable professional will be able to give you this information, without question.

What is your workmanship guarantee? This is a very important question that many homeowners forget to ask. Your general contractor of choice should guarantee the work done on your home, and should have no problem putting that guarantee in writing. That way, if something does go wrong or you don't get the results you expected, you know that you can hold your contractor accountable for fixing it.

Who is in charge? It is perfectly understandable for homeowners to assume that the contractor they hire will be the person who shows up to the work site every day to manage the employees. However, that is not always the case. You need to find out, before you do any hiring, who you can expect to be in charge of your project. You will have to be able to maintain close contact with that person, and as well, that person should know every intimate detail of your project.

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Services Offered by a General Contractor

When many people think of general contractors, they envision the task of constructing a building from start to finish. However, while it is true that general contractors must be familiar with all stages of construction, it is also true that you may hire a general contractor for any of a variety of smaller, or more specialized, projects. Here is a description of the services offered by a general contractor:

Flooring. This is one of the most common and least complicated home improvement projects there is. A qualified general contractor can provide professional help through the entire process, from choosing the best flooring materials to installing them.

Window and door installation. People often hire a handyman or remodeling contractor for these smaller home improvement tasks. However, a general contractor is just as capable of handling the job. What's more is that general contractors often have their own suppliers and installers, which means that hiring a general contractor for this type of job will save you time, and in some cases, money.

Plumbing. Sure, you can hire a plumber to fix those leaky pipes, but a general contractor can also oversee your plumbing repair job, as well as completely new plumbing installations. Additionally, general contractors often do bathroom and kitchen renovations, which involve plumbing work.

Roofing. You can save a lot of money when you choose to hire a general contractor, rather than a roofing contractor, to install a new roof or fix your old one. That is because you can purchase all of your roofing supplies through the general contractor, who gets them at a discounted rate. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for small roofing jobs, like shingle replacement, to turn into much bigger jobs when it is discovered that the roof may not be structurally sound. If this happens to you and you're working with a general contractor, then you can rest assured that even the unexpected bigger job is in competent hands.

Home additions. Whether you want to add a completely new room to your home, or enclose your garage and turn it into a livable space, a general contractor is the professional that can help you accomplish your vision for your remodeled home.

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What Should You Expect to Pay a General Contractor?

General contractors may provide a wide array of services, including kitchen and bathroom remodeling, plumbing, roof replacement, flooring installation, garage conversion, new home building, and home additions. As you can probably guess, the variant nature of general contractor duties, as well as the fact that no two general contractors are alike, means that it may be hard to guess at how much a general contractor's services will cost for your particular project. What should you expect to pay a general contractor? Read on to learn more:

What are your charges? There are some obvious costs when it comes to general contractor fees. First, you can expect to pay for labor, on an hourly basis. Secondly, you can expect to pay for the materials required to complete your project. However, there are other fees that may be worked into your general contractor's bid. They include things like gas, waste disposal, and equipment rental. There is no way to be sure of exactly what you are paying until you ask your contractor, and that is something you should always get in writing.

Flat fee charging. Some general contractors opt to charge on a flat fee basis. This means that you, the customer, are given an exact number of how much the job is going to cost you, before you approve any work. The benefit to this way of charging is that you know what to expect and can budget accordingly. However, the drawback is that sometimes a home improvement project may take less time or manpower than the contractor had originally thought, and so you could end up overpaying for a job that the contractor and building crew were able to breeze through.

Percentage of cost charging. Rather than charge a flat fee for services provided, some general contractors prefer to charge you a percentage of the total cost of the job. Depending on the amount of hands-on work your contractor does (i.e. whether or not things like installation and carpentry work are contracted out to subcontractors), this percentage may be anywhere between 10 and 50 percent of the job.

Just the numbers, please. So, what does all of this information mean to you? Well, to put it quite simply, you can expect to pay somewhere in the ballpark of \$300 to \$400 per day for the services of a general contractor. Of course, that amount can vary greatly based on a number of different factors, but you can at least use these numbers to set a tentative project budget.

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What You Need to Know about Building Regulations

As a homeowner, it is likely that you will need the services of a general contractor for any of a wide array of home improvement projects. What you need to know is that there is more to completing your project than just the materials and construction aspects. Everything your general contractor does to your house must be in accordance with local building regulations, or else you could find yourself in a time and money-consuming battle with the courthouse. How do you protect yourself from unnecessary hardship when it comes to remodeling on the right side of the law? Here is what you need to know about building regulations:

What are building codes for? The purpose of building codes and regulations is to protect both you and the public from dangers that can result from hazardous construction. Building codes provide specifics for safety measures related to ventilation, building materials, fire protection, light (windows), heating and cooling, sanitation (waste disposal), and energy conservation.

Which building codes pertain to you? Because safety and hazard issues may vary from region to region (in accordance with weather conditions, natural disaster likelihood, etc.), there are no nationwide building code standards. That means you must look to your local government to find out about building code regulations, and which might pertain to your particular home improvement project. For more information about building codes in general, and to find a builder's association in your area, visit the website of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB.org).

Building permits. If your home improvement project falls under any of the categories that are affected by building codes, then you must obtain building permits from your local government before beginning any work. Basically, a building permit is your permission to have a general contractor build or renovate your home.

Who is responsible for getting the building permits? This is a question you should ask your general contractor, before you agree to any work. Different general contractors have different policies when it comes to filing for building permits, and this is one issue that you want to address before you hand any of your money over to a contractor.

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