

Planning for Remodeling

BY EVERETT POLLARD, NORTHCAPE DESIGN



You like your neighborhood. You have a great commute. Your kids are in good schools and their friends live close by. You cringe, however, when you examine your house. It's dated and cramped. You start to imagine what your house would be, if only....



“If only” is what remodeling is all about. Remodeling can:

- **Add space.** An addition with a new bedroom, bathroom or family room can ease family “traffic jams.”
- **Upgrade a kitchen or bath.** New cabinets and fixtures can make those areas a pleasure to use and can add value when you sell.
- **Get the best use out of the space you have.** The way you live in your house has changed over the years and remodeling can make the existing space more efficient.
- **Save you money.** Today’s building products and systems are far more energy efficient. Even projects that add space may not add to heating and cooling bills.

Often remodeling can pay for itself.

If your house is smaller or simpler than the rest of the neighborhood, bringing it up to date may increase its value enough to reflect most, or even all, of the cost of the improvement. When you compare the expense of moving with the cost of remodeling, you may find that remodeling is a more affordable way to get the house you really want. A professional remodeler can help you decide whether or not remodeling makes sense for you.

Whoever plans your remodeling project will need lots

of information that only you can supply. The process will go much more smoothly if you have a clear idea of what you want. Take time to assess your current house. What do you like or dislike about it, and why? Make sure to include everyone in the family in this process. Make a list of things to change, add or take away, then rank each item on the list in order of priority.

A little research will help you find solutions. Look in magazines that show new and remodeled homes and save the pictures that appeal to you. Start a separate file for each area to be remodeled. These pictures will give your remodeler a good feel for your tastes and preferences. Home shows are also a great place to gather information about new products and services. >>>>



A renovation by Northcape Design transforms an old yellow Colonial (top) into a dream Adirondack lodge (bottom). The new addition includes a garage, a guest suite and this gorgeous billiards room (left). Note the huge double-hung windows interspersed with stone columns that provide a great view of Lake Sunapee, N.H.

All photos courtesy of Northcape Design; Photos by Roger Wade

Don't worry if you don't come up with the perfect solution for your house, and don't try to decide every detail ahead of time. Your designer and remodeler will have a wealth of experience to draw upon for ideas.

How Do I Get Started?

One of the first questions that your designer or remodeler should ask is, "What is your budget?" While you might be hesitant to share that information, quote a range anyway, and try to be forthcoming! If you have picked a reputable, professional designer or remodeler, you have not given anything away. It is a quick way for them to assess early on whether they can give you what you want within your budget.

For budgeting purposes, keep in mind that the most expensive remodeling projects are those that involve expanding the footprint of the house. Less expensive are those that reconfigure existing space, and even less expensive are projects in which all the walls, plumbing and heating fixtures stay where they are. The best way to figure out if your budget range is realistic is to run it past good remodelers. They will be quick to tell you if you're in the wrong ballpark. And, if you are, don't despair. A design professional or remodeler can suggest less expensive alternatives or divide the project into smaller phases. Almost all successful remodeling projects are the result of a series of compromises between the initial dream and the final budget.

Do you need an architect or design professional? That depends on your location, and the size of your project and budget. Some towns require plans that are prepared by an architect. Check with your local planning and zoning office for the particular building and zoning requirements for your area. Most small scale remodeling projects — such as kitchen and bath remodels — can easily be put together by an experienced remodeler and a cabinet supplier. Larger jobs might benefit from a complete set of construction plans and the input of a design professional.



Before: A bathroom in need of some updating



After: A half wall and beam — as well as lighter trim — helps open up the space.



After: New tile in the shower and a new sink modernize the bathroom.

Some people think that acting as their own general contractor is a good way to cut remodeling costs. But few homeowners realize the complexity of the contractor's job. Your contractor must understand not only today's building construction, but the techniques that were used decades ago; plan the job, step by step; obtain or prepare drawings and

apply for building permits; hire good, reliable subcontractors (who may have worked with him on many projects); schedule (juggle) all of the elements: material delivery, labor and subs, inspections by building officials; and allow for the inevitable unanticipated delays. When you hire a professional contractor, you don't just pay for the labor and ma-

terial, you also receive the contractor's ability to save you time and aggravation.

Finding a Remodeler

How do you recognize a good remodeler? Responsible, professional remodelers share these good qualities:

- They return phone calls promptly.
- They arrive for appointments on time — or call in plenty of time to explain and reschedule.
- They are polite, considerate and careful around your home and furnishings.
- They have vehicles and equipment that reflect positively on their professionalism and work ethics.
- They carry contractor's liability insurance and worker's compensation insurance if they have employees.
- They can provide references and examples of previous work.
- They will be able to give you — before the job starts — a schedule of when it will start and approximately when it will end.
- They will provide written specifications and a contract that spell out the scope of work.
- They will not proceed with any work outside the contract without a written change order that includes a description of the changes, the cost and the impact of the changes on the schedule.
- Their contract should include a procedure to resolve disputes between the owner and the contractor.

So, where do you find someone like that? Your friends and neighbors are your best resource. Try to find homeowners whose projects were similar to yours. Most homeowners are more than happy to recommend a remodeler that did a good job for them. (And they are also happy to warn you about contractors that they would not hire again!) Lumberyards, real estate agents, interior decorators and bankers are other sources to contact for recommendations.

Choose several remodelers and make appointments to discuss your project. The conventional wisdom is to get at least three bids or estimates. This method for choosing a contrac- >>>>

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Photos by Bill Fish Photography

Is it possible to change a vinyl-sided, 1 ½ story cape into a vacation home? Before (left) and after (right) photos show the amazing transformation.

tor almost always backfires. In fact, a big difference between bids usually means that one of the bidders has misunderstood something important or made a major mathematical error. Choosing a contractor with a very low bid may lead to an unsuccessful, premature conclusion of your project.

In the final analysis, choose a remodeler that you feel comfortable with and can trust. You will have a long-term relationship with this firm, so make sure that they will pay attention to your concerns and respond to your personal style.

Starting a Renovation Project

Before the construction can begin, your contractor will prepare a contract. Some remodelers guarantee only the materials costs and bill for their time on an hourly basis, working on a “time and materials” contract. Others prefer to add a fixed percentage to the cost of materials and labor and this is a “cost-plus” contract. The total cost for the project is not fixed with these agreements, but the remodeler should be able to estimate your total cost fairly closely. On larger projects, many contractors work with a “contract sum” agreement. This establishes the total cost of the project and payments are made according to the “schedule of payments” attached to the contract.

The next step is often a preconstruction conference with you, the remodeler, the lead carpenter or foreman, the designer (if any), and perhaps the major subcontractors. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the project schedule and ground rules. This is the time to decide what parts of the house are work or material storage areas, and what areas are off limits. Review your remodeler’s



Great new entertaining space: An updated kitchen opens into the family room, which flows to the deck.

policies on crew behavior and let him know what you expect. While most have clear guidelines concerning things like smoking (not allowed inside), radio use (low volume), phone use (local calls only), bathroom use (port-a-potty) and daily cleanup, these may be modified to reflect your needs.

Coping During a Renovation Project

The job is starting! You’re excited, but are you ready to deal with the disruptions to your house and to your routine? If your project involves remodeling much of your existing house, you might consider moving out temporarily. The novelty of camping out in your own home will quickly fade in the face of the loss of privacy, diminished accommodations, the dust and the noise. Here are some thoughts to help you cope:

- Good communication prevents most problems, so make sure you and your remodeler agree on a system for staying in touch. Often the lead carpenter or foreman is the best contact person. A single worker or subcontractor will not have the information or authority necessary to make changes or assess how it might impact the project as a whole.
- Share your concerns with the contact person immediately. What is a minor adjustment now might be a major expense later.
- Don’t panic! If you discover what you think is a major problem, get all of the facts and discuss them with your remodeler. A good remodeler knows there will be problems, and knows how to solve them.

- Expect that the project will feel like it is taking too long. After the initial demolition and framing, there will be times when it seems like not much is happening. It is difficult to schedule a project seamlessly without any down time. Discuss this with your contractor. Most remodelers factor in some down time in every project.

If you did your homework and chose wisely, you can expect to be pleased by the end result. The added comfort, convenience and space will enhance your lifestyle for years to come. ■

Everett Pollard is the president, vice president of sales, and senior designer for Northcape Design (www.northcapedesign.com) in Sunapee, N.H. Everett graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration from the Whittemore School at the University of New Hampshire in 1971. He completed 2½ years of civil engineering and numerous courses in art and architecture at the same time. Before founding Northcape Design in 1987, Everett was a partner in the construction firm of Marro & Pollard, Inc. for 12 years.

Contract Checklist

All contracts should include:

- A detailed description of the work.
- A list of specific materials to be used.
- A schedule of progress payments showing how much you pay at the outset and when further payments are due.
- An explanation of the change order which deals with changes or extras not included in the original agreement.
- A procedure for handling disputes between the contractor and the owner.
- It may include a description of what is not included, such as "the homeowner is responsible for carpet installation" or "the homeowner is responsible for removing personal items and furnishings from the work areas."
- A federally mandated rescission clause, enabling you to cancel the agreement within three days of signing it.



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