

Assembling the Right Remodeling Team

BY DAVID BRYAN

You've thought about it for months (or maybe even years). In your imaginings, the project has gone from simple to palatial and back again. But now, the decision has been made. You are going to remodel. The next step, however, is not as easy as reaching for the phone. There are so many options and choices.

Where should you begin . . . a big home center? An architect? A contractor? Do it yourself? For many people, your remodeling project is going to be much more complex than anything you've taken on before and you're fiddling with what is probably your largest asset, your home. Because of remodeling's complexity, many home remodeling projects end in process without being fully informed. Homeowners end up unhappy with the experience. Homeowners who can choose from all the options and who have had a great remodeling experience are v

For the purposes of this article let's assume you want to work with professionals, either an architect (being your own contractor requires a lot of information — not just an article) or a contractor. Design and construction. Integrate these two halves will make

FINDING A FIRM TO DESIGN YOUR PROJECT

So let's start with the first half, finding a firm. An architect, a designer or a builder (many offer house design services) to develop a design and specifications. A good designer will help you realize your dreams, but will also challenge you. You may have your heart set on an idea, but the architect notes that you have sufficient budget. Within the existing four walls — it's just a matter of redesign within the walls may be possible. This can save you money.

While you will want to rush into all the excitement of the design process (after all, you are defining your dreams here — pretty heady stuff!), be sure to stop and discuss your budget. If your designer or architect does not have the ability to accurately budget your project (and unless they regularly build projects, they probably don't), then involve a builder early on to give you budget feedback — and regularly re-involve them throughout the design process. A common remodeling pitfall is to invest thousands in

the design process, only to learn you can't afford to build the project.

FINDING THE FIRM TO BUILD YOUR PROJECT

Now it's time to select a remodeler (unless you've already been working with a design/build firm, in which case you're already there). The best choice is to find a company that does mostly or only remodeling. They will be able to understand, and provide services for, the special considerations of working in a home that is occupied with people (and especially children and pets). Ask a handful of questions that will give you the right information to choose a qualified remodeler — and the same questions should also be asked as you choose your design professional.

Before we go further, we should discuss price vs. value. You can get competitive bids to find the lowest priced contractor and remodeler and, if you're lucky, everything

your project will finish with cost overruns (initiated by changes) and a design that is not as envisioned. Or, you can focus on a firm that are professional and experienced. Cost should be a secondary consideration. A major issue, many homeowners find to be the deciding factor. Though it may be in the end your money may focus as much on professionalism as you'll get a better design (good for your dollar pretty far), you'll estimate that isn't as likely to result in overlooking oversights, your project will be on time, and your remodeler will make you as happy as their final

design and someone to build it, you need to understand what the process will be. The dictionary definition should be the process that will adversely affect your family, create significant dust and noise, and require "take-out food". Since this is a fairly realistic view of the process, then you need to ready your mindset. If you look at the construction process as a hateful event you have to endure, then it will be. If you view it as an adventure, akin to camping out, then the process will be fun. So, armed with some more information, you're ready to go . . . enjoy the adventure! ■

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