



About the Renovators' Council

The Ontario Renovators' Council of the Ontario Home Builders' Association was established to meet the specific needs of the home renovation industry. In addition to this Consumer Guide, the Council also prepares magazine and newspaper articles that are intended to inform the consumer about developments in the renovation industry. Projects displayed in this brochure were completed by members of the Ontario Renovators' Council.



For more information about the Council and its activities, you can write:
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A Home Owners' Guide to the Standard Renovation Process

The Ontario Home Builders' Association

Planning YOUR RENOVATION

The first step in any successful renovation project is to develop a clear set of goals. You should be keeping several points in mind while you're setting out these goals.

FORM

How do you want the renovation to look?

FUNCTION

What do you want to do in the space you're creating or redesigning?

COMPATIBILITY

Is this project going to blend in with the rest of your house or will the project look like an add-on? Consider structural factors such as load bearing walls or beams together with existing locations of plumbing pipes, and heating ducts that may put limits on what you can do.

Be prepared to take some time answering these questions. The extra days you put into planning at this stage could save you weeks or months later on. It will also make it easier for you to select a renovator.



Finding A PROFESSIONAL RENOVATOR



Now it's time to decide on a renovator. A professional renovator can handle every aspect of the job including the design work, obtaining permits, ordering parts and materials and contracting special trades.

A subtradesperson works in a specific trade such as plumbing, heating, electrical or drywall installation. A renovator may end up contracting out some of the specific jobs to subtrades. This is called subcontracting.

Subcontracting is common place in many renovation projects and your renovator's most important job is to see to it that all the materials & trades come together smoothly to achieve all your renovation goals.

You may have friends or colleagues who have had renovations done and can recommend a renovator. We recommend that you contact your local Home Builders' Association for the names of professional renovators in your area. Members of the association are supported by the Ontario Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Renovators' Council.

Once you have the name of a renovator, contact him to set up a time to meet on a one-to-one basis. Be sure anyone involved in the renovation project is on hand to discuss the plans with the renovator. Also, try to keep distractions (eg: pets, children, telephone calls, etc.) to a minimum at this meeting. You are setting out the foundations to a complex relationship and it is wise to limit the confusion.



THE INITIAL Meeting

The first meeting enables you to get to know a renovator and discuss your plans. The most important thing at this point is not to feel rushed. You're still laying the groundwork for your project and a little extra time and attention at this stage can pay dividends in the long run.

When the renovator arrives, pay attention to little things such as:

- Did the renovator arrive on time?
- Did he or she have a professional appearance?
- Did he or she seem to respect your home?
- Was he or she willing and able to give direct answers to your questions?

Keep in mind that you'll be opening your home to the renovator you select for a period of several weeks or months, so look for someone you want around your home on an extended basis.

✓ Customer's Responsibilities

- know what you want to accomplish
- list your priorities
- set out a realistic budget
- research products and designs before the meeting

✓ Renovator's Responsibilities

- be on time
- provide information about your company and services
- comment on the customer's ideas, especially in light of the stated budget
- outline the next steps for the customer
- supply references and photos of work



THE Estimate

This is where you narrow down your choice of a renovator. Each will present a proposal that includes an estimate along with a specifications list and maybe a few rough sketches. A fee may be charged for this service.

The one thing that is difficult to judge from a proposal like this is the overall quality of workmanship. The best way of telling if a renovator can do what he promises is to check his references. Look at past projects and talk with homeowners.



Some people skip this step because they figure renovators will only give them positive references. But some renovators may feel poor references are better than no references, while others may even try to bluff with false references — so be sure to check.

✓ Customer's Responsibilities

- check references before the second meeting
- make specific comments about what you like and dislike in the proposal
- let renovators know where they stand, don't keep them on the hook

✓ Renovator's Responsibilities

- make sure proposal reflects what the customer wants
- provide an estimate that is as accurate as possible
- get any additional information necessary to produce a final quote



THE FINAL Design & Quote

This is the last step in selecting a renovator. Once you are satisfied with the references and estimate its time to get a firm quote. To provide this, the renovator must have a design.

The design sets out the specifications (or specs). This is a written “recipe” for the job. Along with the plans, they explain what is to be done in enough detail so that two renovators working from one design would turn out the same finished product.



There will usually be a fee for the production of the design. This fee is usually applied to the total cost of the project.

Rather than have the renovator prepare the design and plans, some customers will hire an architect, designer or draftsman. If you decide to do this, you will have to have your renovator prepare a quote based on this design.

✓ Customer's Responsibilities

- make sure the specs (especially as they relate to the quality of products) are accurate
- make your final comments (likes and dislikes) on the proposed work to be done
- pay for the design work
- make your final decision and hire a renovator

✓ Renovator's Responsibilities

- make sure the design is accurate and complete
- specify levels of finish and quality of products
- make sure the project can be completed as described
- indicate the earliest possible start-up date
- estimate how long the job will take to complete

Changes are easy to make on paper
but are very difficult to do in the physical form.
Remember that from now on, changes will
probably cost money, so keep them to a minimum.



Salvage Disposal of refuse is becoming more difficult and costly. It's a good idea therefore to discuss opportunities for recycling and reuse of building materials. The general rule of thumb is that the renovator will remove any debris related to the project, so if there is something you want to save (such as a mantelpiece), be sure to mention it.

THE Work

With all the preparations carefully completed, this stage should be fairly straightforward. As described in the contract, the physical work should closely follow what was written. You still, however, have a role to play in a couple of important areas: preparation of the job site and ongoing project coordination. And while it does not arise very often, the issue of “unforeseen conditions” may require you to make some additional decisions about the project.

Site Preparation

Before any work crews show up, remove furniture and other items from the work area. Anything that cannot be moved such as rose bushes outside or broadloom in an adjoining room should be protected. Arrangements should be made for a washup area, a place for materials and tools storage as well as refuse bins, washroom facilities and hydro.

Unforeseen Conditions

A thorough initial house inspection will turn up most problems but some things such as unusual construction details, hidden electrical or plumbing chases and isolated cases of decay will escape even the most experienced eye. These are classified as “unforeseen conditions” and are areas that would have been impossible (even for an experienced renovator) to predict. These conditions or problems are with the existing structure and, for one reason or another, will hamper the safe completion of the renovation project. If it is a serious problem the renovator may have to charge a fee for the proposed changes and/or upgrades.

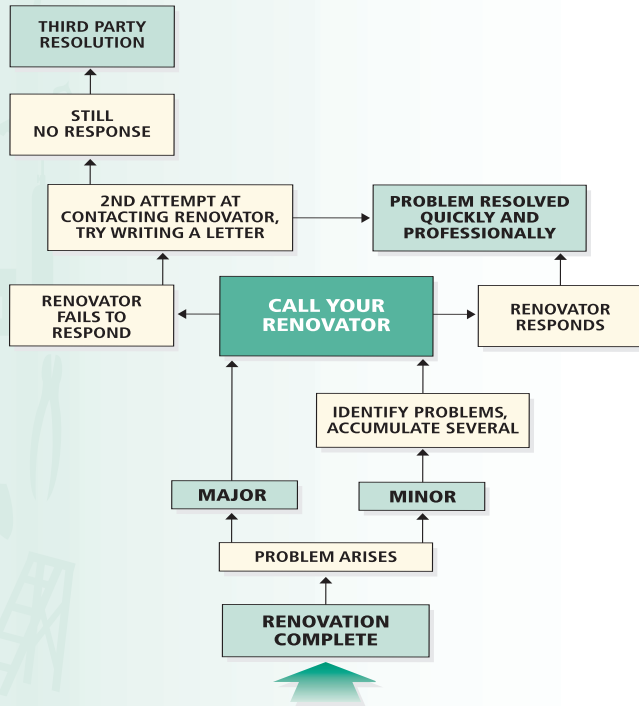
✓ Renovator's Responsibilities

- keep disruptions such as noise and dust to a minimum and keep all areas tidy
- respect customer property and give regular progress reports
- identify unforeseen conditions as soon as possible and provide reasonable solutions



WHAT TO DO IF A Problem Arises

This section of the guide explains what you can expect after all the work has been done. If a problem arises, following the advice in this guide and the decision making process depicted below, will help you understand what to do next. This is often half the battle.



Your renovation projects may encounter some minor problems. This is the nature of renovation work. When you add something new to something old, not everything is going to fit snugly and smoothly but don't be alarmed. The key to professionalism is quickly and effectively resolving and correcting problems.

Careful selection of renovator + well written contract
= reduced chance of problems



Communication

One of the keys to any successful renovation project is effective communication. The customer and renovator should be in regular contact with each other and any changes or unexpected developments should be discussed as soon as possible and verified with a change work order.

If a problem arises, remember to remain calm in dealing with both the problem and your renovator. The renovator should respond within 24 hours but may give you advice on what to do in the meantime.

Expectations AND WARRANTY

What can you expect when the project is complete? Quite simply, you should expect whatever is written in your contract, so your contract should be specific. Even the most skilful installation cannot make an economy product look or perform like its top-of-the-line counterpart so gauge your expectations accordingly.

If a problem arises after the project has been completed, what should you do? Unfortunately, the answer may not be so cut and dry. Like manufacturers, professional renovators also warrant their product. A warranty may be as simple as one or two sentences in a contract or as complicated as a several page, legal document. Most renovators will have a minimum one year warranty on new construction but you should check with your renovator to see what kind of service he or she offers.

The warranty service that you get will come from three sources: the renovator's own work force, the sub contractors that he used on your project and the manufacturers or suppliers that supplied the products installed in your home. Obviously, different time periods for repair may exist depending on where or who the renovator has to call. You should include this time allowance into your expectations for resolving a problem.

When dealing with a manufacturer, keep in mind that warranties will vary from product to product, windows and doors; roofing materials; flooring; etc. will have different warranty periods. Although manufacturers will honour customer claims directly, try going through your



renovator first. This is more convenient and ensures that the renovator is aware of problems associated with products he is using.

A good idea is to keep all warranty cards associated with a project together in a safe place. Ask your renovator to save all the cards for you and then put them together in a folder. Should something break down, this will save you time and aggravation.

Post RENOVATION SERVICE

A renovation job does not end when the last nail is hammered in or the last coat of paint applied. Every renovator has a different type of after sales service but the common element is customer satisfaction.

One of the first things you should do before all the workers have gone is to schedule a “walk through” of the project with your renovator. Keep a list of small items that have yet to be finished, like sections of baseboard missing, face plates for switches, last minute wiring, etc. Catching these small items that can easily be forgotten is important while the workers are still in your home. A reasonable time frame should be given to complete these items.



When everyone is gone and you and your family are settling back to your normal lifestyle, you may find problems that either weren't there before or you didn't catch on your walk through. With any renovation project, little things can be expected. The best thing you can do is divide your problems into two categories; MINOR and MAJOR problems.

A MINOR problem would be one that is not urgent and causes you some inconvenience or doesn't look complete (for example, a broken tile or a piece of missing trim). These are all things that you can live with until a worker can come back to your house. The easiest way to handle MINOR problems is to make a list of them as you notice them.



When you have accumulated several on your list, call your renovator and let him or her know what you've found. You can then arrange a time for a worker to come and fix them all at once.

A MAJOR problem is one which requires immediate attention (within 24 hours), and if left undone or unfinished would make the problem get worse, or make your house unlivable or unsafe. For example, no heat, a leaky pipe or fitting, a drywall crack that seems to grow every day, uncovered electrical wires or unusual sounds when you turn on a new light or motor.

It's a good idea to ask your renovator to explain how to operate new controls and devices and also find out what you should be doing for proper care and maintenance of new products.

ADDITIONAL Assistance

Most problems can be solved with a simple telephone call. The Ontario Renovators' Council and the Ontario Home Builders' Association are here to help. However, if you are unable to resolve a problem, third party assistance may be required. Offices like the Better Business Bureau and the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (MCCR) are in place to help you after all other avenues have failed.

SPREAD The Word

Many renovators depend on “word-of-mouth” and references. If you are dissatisfied, tell your renovator. But if you are satisfied, don't let it stop at that, tell him or her and let others know how pleased you are.

Often, your renovator may ask if you will provide a reference for a possible customer. If he or she has provided you with excellent service and value then please tell any potential customers as well as family and friends.

Following the tips set out in this guide and understanding standard renovation practices should ensure that your project goes smoothly and provides you with a home to make you proud.

