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Questions & Answers
For a Successful Remodel
Part 2
Designing & Planning

This guide is provided courtesy of:
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This guide is designed to help you, the homeowner, make informed decisions about remodeling based on objective information. It will help you identify critical information you need to know and the questions you need to ask when evaluating potential remodeling contractors. Part 1 answers 3 fears all homeowners have when selecting a remodeling contractor. Part 2 explains the designing and planning of your remodeling project.

This guide is organized in sections to reflect the actual phases of a remodeling project. This will help you to understand what to expect during each phase of the process.

There are six critical phases of any remodeling project. They are:

1. Designing and Planning the Project
2. Selecting the Right Remodeler
3. Proposals
4. Understanding the Contract
5. Project Management
6. Enjoying the Finished Project

Understanding these six critical phases of remodeling will give you the confidence to select the best remodeler for your specific project and ensure your satisfaction.

Phase One: Designing and Planning Your Remodeling Project

The first question to ask is whether your primary objective is to increase the monetary value of your home, or to improve your personal living space. This simple determination will help structure the scope of the project and avoid making common and costly mistakes.

Are you making a financial investment, an investment in lifestyle, or both?

Financial Investment: If you are thinking about remodeling your home in order to improve its value for resale, there are a few things you should consider. Here are some questions you need to ask yourself before you make a commitment to remodeling:

- How much am I willing to spend on improvements in order to sell the house? The cost of remodeling should be appropriate for the expected value of your house. You don't want to get into a project that costs more than the return you wish to achieve.
- Will my investment in remodeling actually increase the market value? To sell your house quickly you need to focus on designs that appeal to the average buyer. A competent remodeler can help you with an appropriate design, based on his experience, which will increase the overall value of your home.
- How long before I want to sell? A realistic schedule for completion is mandatory. The last thing you need if you are selling your house is an ongoing remodeling project. Be sure your remodeler can give you a written schedule with a realistic time frame for completion.

Investment in Lifestyle: If increasing the market value isn't a primary interest, then you are probably interested in improving your home's appearance and functionality for your own enjoyment. This is a much easier project to plan because an appropriate design can be anything you want and are willing to pay for. Involving a talented and competent design/build remodeler is invaluable at this point to ensure your project is designed to meet your aesthetic and functional demands.

Knowing What You Want

Once you've decided on the type of project, it's time to determine exactly what you are looking for in the end result. You need to consider colors, textures and styles, as well as traffic flow and functionality. If you don't already have a good idea, then start by gathering pictures of homes and rooms that appeal to you. A design session with the right remodeler can go a long way towards helping you with a plausible, functional design. Looking through magazines and websites can give you some great ideas, and will help your remodeler picture what you want.

Getting the Design You Want

Before you can get a price you must have a design. Whether you hire an architect, a designer or a design / built remodeling contractor, you must have professional drawings with corresponding, detailed cost projection. Most contractors can build something based on what they think you want, but a Certified Remodeler ® (CR) has very specific training and experience in design, planning and functional. A CR will help you plan and design your project based on several hours of consultation and questioning in order to understand what you really want in appearance and function. If you use a CR to help you design your project, the results will show it.

There are three basic ways a contractor can handle the design:

1. Subcontract or outsource design and drawings - In this situation it is likely the designer never sees your home. The designer works from notes and descriptions they get second hand from the contractor. The probability of a clean, aesthetic blending of the new structure with the old is greatly reduced and the result is often a very noticeable "add-on" look that doesn't really match your existing structure and decor. During the construction phase any changes have to be reworked by the designer, and that most often results in significant delays.
2. Design to Bid - In this situation you pay to have a designer or architect create the design and drawings. You then have contractors bid on the project based on those drawings. This situation is better than the previous one, but problems often develop as a result of poor communication between the architect and the contractor once the drawings are complete. It is the responsibility of the contractor to interpret the drawings and then build the project. Misinterpretations of the original design can be frequent and pronounced, forcing you to manage and coordinate communications between both architect and contractor. If you choose this approach be sure there is a good working relationship between the architect and the contractor. It will have a significant impact on your project.
3. Design / Built - In this approach the same firm will design and build the project. This virtually eliminates the problems associated with the other approaches and streamlines the process, and is the preferred method. All professional risk stays with one firm, and

you won't have to mediate between the designer and the contractor. There is no need for you to be the "go-between" to address any issues. This is the best process for ensuring that the project is completed as it is designed.

Estimating the Cost

It is almost impossible to accurately estimate the cost of a project without first having a detailed plan. The cost of any remodeling project can vary dramatically depending on its complexity and the quality and types of materials you choose. The only way to know that you're getting the best value for your money is to be sure your remodeler uses a thorough estimating process which can accurately cost out the design as specified. This will reduce or eliminate the "fudge factor" or the change orders that usually occur with most remodeling projects.

Phase Two: Selecting the Right Contractor to Help You (Your most important decision)

Hiring the wrong contractor can be a nightmare of expensive change orders, sloppy work and projects that are not done right or never seem to end. Each year there are well over 1,000,000 complaints and lawsuits filed by unhappy homeowners against contractors. By choosing the right remodeler you can eliminate those "money pit nightmares" so commonly associated with remodeling. But with over 17,000 licensed contractors in Nevada, how can you find the ONE who is right for you?

Here are 7 questions you need to ask any contractor before you ever get a bid:

1. **Where are you licensed and do you pull all necessary permits?** There are over 17,000 licensed contractors in Nevada, and an unknown amount who are not licensed or are inactive. A license means they are properly registered with the city, county, state and meet all legal requirements. If they ask you to get your own permits, or suggest permits aren't necessary, then you need to move on to the next firm. A licensed contractor will have at least \$1,000,000 in liability insurance, worker's compensation and upon request provide you with a final lien waver.

Our License Number is 44163 and we pull all necessary permits for every project we do.

2. **Do you have a written policy for managing change orders?** Change orders should be minimal if the remodeler has a thorough planning and budgeting process. The national average is 20%-25% per project. If they don't know the answer, then move on.

At Village Builders change orders represent less than 5% of our total revenue because of our detailed design and estimating processes.

3. **Will I receive a written contract?** Always ask for a written contract that clearly defines the scope of work, the cost and time frame for completion. Surprises in the remodeling business can be extremely expensive. Avoid problems by getting a written contract and be sure to review the contents in detail.

For a more thorough discussion of contracts and what to look for, see "Phase Four" of this booklet.

4. **What kind of warranty comes with the job?** Ask them if they offer a written warranty for the work they do. Responsible, legitimate remodelers will have warranties for their work and materials, and will honor all manufacturer warranties.

We provide a 1 Year warranty on all work we do as well as honor all manufacturer's warranties.

5. **Are your finish carpenters employees or subcontractors?** The finished product is what you'll see the rest of the time you live in your home. Attention to detail is of paramount importance in finish work. That part of any project is too critical to the finished product to be left to subcontractors.

All of our finish carpenters are full time employees who know and understand our values, procedures and the importance of the final appearance. Any subcontractors we use are licenced, bonded and insured to insure professional results.

6. **Do you have a pre-construction logistics walk through?** Making sure the flow of people and equipment is well thought out might minimize disruptions to you and your neighbors.

Our plan is so specific we know where the dumpster and the "port-a-potty" go before we ever start the project.

7. **What specific precautions will you take to protect my floors, furnishings and landscape?** Thousands of dollars of damage can be done to your home if proper precautions are not taken to protect it.

At Village Builders we have specific procedures and specifications designed to protect your home, yard and furnishings. For example, if we have to walk on hardwood floors we use padded runner coverings to prevent scratches and unnecessary wear. A protective film will be applied in all areas where our employee's will be walking on carpet. To minimize dust, we install "Zip Walls" separating the construction area from the rest of the house.

Phase Three: Comparing Proposals

Once you've used the questions from the previous section to help narrow the field, you'll have an opportunity to consider different proposals.

Cost of project Considerations

Too often consumers select a contractor using price as their main selection criteria. They get three bids from various contractors and then choose one using an arbitrary formula like going with the middle, or taking the lowest bid. We've seen it all. This happens when price is the only understandable information they have. Using price as the primary selection criteria can have a lot of risk. Too often we've been called in to clean up after someone else's "low" bid because they didn't have the expertise to do it correctly the first time. Unfortunately, it's out right incompetence, and sometimes its poor bidding practices that don't factor in all the details of a project. Using price alone to select a contractor is a very risky proposition. Use the questions in the section on selecting a Remodeler to help you get enough information to identify a remodeler

you can trust to give you an accurate bid, and how to tell the difference between one bid and another using all the pertinent data, not just price.

Phase Four: Understanding the Contract

Before you let anyone loose in your home to start a remodeling project, you should have a written contract that clearly defines the scope of the project and the cost. There are four major sections you should see in any remodeling contract:

1. **Specifications:** The specifications are the detailed, written descriptions of what will occur and what materials will be used for every aspect of the project. This protects you from getting inferior products or workmanship. You will want to review these to make sure they match the plans and that everything is included in both the plans and specifications. This could include the brands and part numbers for the fixtures, or the appliances to be used. Other examples would be the grade of lumber or the paint code numbers for the brands and colors of paints you want.
2. **Plans:** The plans are a visual or graphical representation of what exists now and what it is suppose to be when the project is completed. The plans should match the specifications detail by detail. You don't want to leave anything up to interpretation.
3. **State Required Residential Construction Contract Disclosure:** The State Residential Construction Contract Disclosure Form is something all contractors are required by law to give you and to have you sign. Contractors must keep a signed copy for their records.
4. **Terms & Conditions:** The Terms & Conditions are specified by the contractor and establish the agreed to conditions that govern the agreement you are making. Payments and change order management should be included as specific line items.

Review all the terms and conditions carefully and ask specific questions about anything you don't understand. Always read contracts carefully before signing. Your remodeler should be willing to review the document line by line and explain any part of the contract.

Phase Five: Project Management

So now you have a remodeler you are comfortable with, your design is exactly what you want, you know what you will be spending, and the contract is signed. Now what can you expect? Here are some critical issues to consider:

Communication: Communication between you and the superintendent or project manager becomes essential so you can stay informed throughout the process. Hopefully, you and your Remodeler will have already designated a communication center on site where you will be able to find any pertinent, up to date schedules, changes or other bits of critical information. Cell

numbers, pagers and office numbers of your superintendent and other critical contacts should be clearly posted. You should also provide your superintendent or project manager with your appropriate contact information. Try to exchange email addresses as well.

Safety and Security: Be sure to get keyed locks or lock boxes for safe and easy access. You want to be sure the contractor only allows approved personnel in your house during the agreed upon times. Workers should show-up on time and they shouldn't show up when they are not supposed to.

Protecting your landscape and furnishings: Make sure the remodeler is aware of valuable furnishings or plants you want protected. Demand they take special precautions as necessary. Make sure all flooring, drapes and other coverings are adequately protected or removed. If at all possible remove any items from the area to a safe place not affected by construction. This should be part of a pre-construction walk through.

Site cleanliness and neatness: Require that the site be cleaned daily. Workers should sweep the site and remove waste and materials whenever possible. At each major stage of the project there should be an overall site clean-up.

Scheduling: The superintendent should be visiting your site on a daily basis to ensure things are going as scheduled so there should be minimal unexpected schedule changes. Ask for regular, written updates on scheduling so you can prevent any unnecessary surprises.

Phase Six: Enjoying Your Finished Project

Whether you wanted a new kitchen, bath, game room, bedroom or an entire second floor addition, the final result is what really matters. Taking your vision and building it into a finished reality is what a Certified Remodeler lives for.

If you've followed our recommendations, you shouldn't be surprised at the end result. It should be exactly what you wanted, on time and on budget. But before you make your last commitment and sign off on the project, have the project manager take you through the entire project for final review and approval. This is your last chance to catch anything out of order or not to specification. Make sure every little detail is considered.

If you've taken the time to review this document, you should be well on your way to getting exactly what you want, with minimal headaches and hassles.

If you like the approach you've seen in this document, then Village Builders might be the right remodeler for you. We invite you to call, or come by our office. We trust this information will help you in making the very best decision for you. If we can be of service to you or anyone you know please give us a call. We would love to add you to our list of references after we complete another successful project.

Helpful Resources

Nevada State Contractors Board
National Association of Home Builders
Nevada State Attorney General Office
Washoe County Building Department
City of Reno Building Department
City of Sparks Building Department

Telephone

775-688-1141
202-266-8200
775-684-1100
775-328-2020
775-334-2063
775-353-2306

Web Site

www.nvcontractorsboard.com
www.nahb.org
www.ag.state.nv.us
www.co.washoe.nv.us
www.cityofreno.com
www.ci.sparks.nv.us

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