

Heed advice and avoid reno rip-offs

Consider referrals and be thorough in the contract

By **JENNIFER YANG** for Metro Toronto, Thursday May 31, 2007

A common tale is that of the home renovation gone bad: You sign up with the first contractor you meet and suddenly your costs are ratcheting up at lightning speed as your house remains in shambles.

Contractors are hired in good faith and homeowners just don't have the background knowledge to recognize when they're being ripped off. "As a group, homeowners are a very abused group," says Jay Charendoff, an architect and home renovation adviser in Toronto.



Avoid living in a nightmare by heeding some basic advice:

Learn from someone else's mistakes. "Talk to friends that have gone through this exact project you're about to embark upon," advises Nancy Peterson, founder of www.homestars.ca, a website for word-of-mouth company recommendations. Once you do find a contractor, dig up their performance record. "Interview companies and then check out their work," Peterson says. "Personally go and visit a couple of their clients."

Check out your local homebuilders association. Associations have their own standards and code of ethics and they'll work to keep their member companies in check. "Any complaints done in writing, they will investigate," explains Lou Frustaglio, chair of the Canadian Renovator's Council and owner of a home renovation company.

Know your own house. "I think sometimes homeowners will focus on lifestyle issues before first considering the basic needs of the house," says Don Johnston of the Canadian Home Builders' Association. "If your foundation is falling apart, that's something you should know of before installing a new bathroom." Consulting a home inspector before you start can be useful; you don't want to discover later on that your house can't support the renovations you've already begun.

Be thorough in the contract. "The more vague the contract, the easier it is for someone to try and add on costs," says Frustaglio. Don't just say you want tiles; stipulate that you want ceramic floor tiles at \$3 per square foot. Communication is also important, says Frustaglio. Hiccups will occur and contracts will need to change, but the more back and forth there is between you and your contractor, the fewer surprises are served up on the bill.

Don't be seduced by a "guarantee." "A guarantee is really just a word," says Charendoff. Besides, he adds, there's no way of knowing if your contractor will even be around in two or three years time when problems crop up.



Home Renovations

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Take all the right steps to ensure your home renovation turns out beautifully.

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