

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM HOME WORK

Assemble a top-notch team of professionals and get your remodel right the first time.

BY LAUREN SIEBEN



Whether you've decided it's time for a kitchen update or a whole-house overhaul, home renovation is no small feat. Unless you're an ambitious (and confident) DIYer, you don't have to go at it alone. By taking the time to carefully choose and assemble a team of expert contractors, you'll keep your project on track and on budget and avoid the most common — and often costly — remodeling pitfalls.

MKE Lifestyle tapped Chris Egner, president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) Milwaukee and a master certified remodeler, for expert advice on what homeowners should consider as they begin planning a remodel.

BRING THE PROS ABOARD EARLY

Once you've scoured the Pinterest boards and Houzz forums and honed a vision for your project, ask friends and neighbors for contractor recommendations, or search NARI's member directory and peruse the online reviews.

The earlier you bring in the experts, the better, says Egner. "There's all the pretty things we see when a project is all done, but then there are also structural issues, mechanical issues, code issues, all behind the walls," he explains. "The sooner those issues are uncovered, the better it is from a planning and budgeting perspective."

And setting a budget right away is key, Egner stresses. Don't be secretive about your bottom line as you start talking with builders and designers.

"Sometimes consumers think the contractor is just going to use the whole budget," Egner notes. "But things cost what they cost. Contractors have to be competitive ... that's why you use a recommended professional."

Egner also suggests gathering quotes from a minimum of two or three contractors — and acknowledging that you are entering a long-term partnership — before deciding whom to

hire. "Find a contractor you're comfortable with, somebody you can communicate with, because you're going to be working with those people for a very long time," he stresses.

HIRE A HEAD HONCHO

Any major undertaking needs a project manager, and your home remodel is no exception.

A general contractor is a remodeling professional who oversees the entire project and brings in subcontractors to perform specific tasks. For example, your general contractor might work with an electrician at the start of a kitchen remodel to install new light fixtures and ensure the wiring is up to code. As the project goes along, he or she may bring in drywall experts, carpenters, painters or other skilled tradespeople, depending on the scope of the project.

Another option is to work with a design/build firm rather than a general contractor. Design/build firms provide a one-stop-shop approach: You'll work with a single construction and design team that collaborates from the very beginning and remains in constant communication throughout the design and construction process. If your project involves major structural changes, your general contractor or design/build firm may also bring in an architect or engineer to draw up blueprints and engineering plans.

Whether you opt for a general contractor or a design/build firm, be sure to do your homework before you commit. Ask for referrals, chat with past clients and flip through samples of the contractor's work.

"Anyone not willing to show or give that information, that's somebody you should walk away from," Egner advises.

CHOOSE YOUR DESIGN — THEN COMMIT TO YOUR CHOICES

If you have a flair for design, you may be unfazed when it comes time to pick

your finishes, but even aspiring HGTV personalities can suffer from decision fatigue. That's when a professional interior designer makes sense. Just don't wait until halfway through construction to bring the designer into the team.

Egner suggests making final selections on all your finishes, from flooring to ceiling fans, as early as possible. In some cases, something as small as a faucet could require special mounting brackets that need to be installed before the drywall. If you wait too long to finalize your finishes, you could end up with an expensive headache.

"The earlier you can incorporate an interior designer in a large project, the better," Egner says. "Some of their decisions may affect construction, so that can also help keep things on track with budget."

WASTE NOT

Renovations tend to generate a lot of waste, but with a little bit of planning, you can help the planet and avoid countless trips to the landfill.

Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Walker's Point, Wauwatosa and Greenfield accepts donations of appliances, furniture, cabinetry and building materials. You can drop off materials yourself or schedule a free pick-up at your home. More information is available at milwaukeehabitat.org.

WasteCap in Milwaukee also accepts tax-deductible donations of appliances, countertops, cabinetry, flooring, masonry and other building materials. Before making the trip, check the full list of accepted materials at wastecap.org.

You might be able to earn back some of your expenses by selling cast off but valuable building materials such as Cream City bricks or discarded granite countertops. Check out Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace and your neighborhood buy/sell group to see if there's a market for the remnants of your remodel. **MKE**