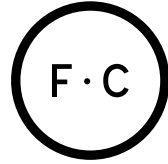


BUILDING TRANSPARENTLY



# FOCUS CONSTRUCTION

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RENOVATION WORKBOOK



# SO YOU'VE DECIDED TO RENOVATE!

A lot of people don't realize how much important work is done on a renovation before anyone picks up a hammer.

Being sure of your present zoning requirements and limits, having achievable goals and knowing what your capabilities are in terms of time and budget go a long way in terms of making your renovation a success. In fact, we might say "plan three times, measure twice, cut once."

In order to help get you started, we've put together this renovation overview. It's full of questions we frequently get by people considering a reno, and designed to help people anticipate and understand the many things that are sure to come up before and during a project.

## 01 | How do I find a good contractor?

Assuming that you aren't already a house-builder, one of the first steps you should take is to find a reputable contractor to help you make good decisions up front. That will help set expectations and ensure your renovation comes in on time and on budget.

There are a lot of contractors out there, large and small. Ask friends or relatives if they have a recommendation. Check building sites in your neighbourhood. Ask trades you trust for referrals. Interview at least 3 prospects before deciding.

**Here at Focus, we think that there are three main things to look for in choosing one that is right for you:**

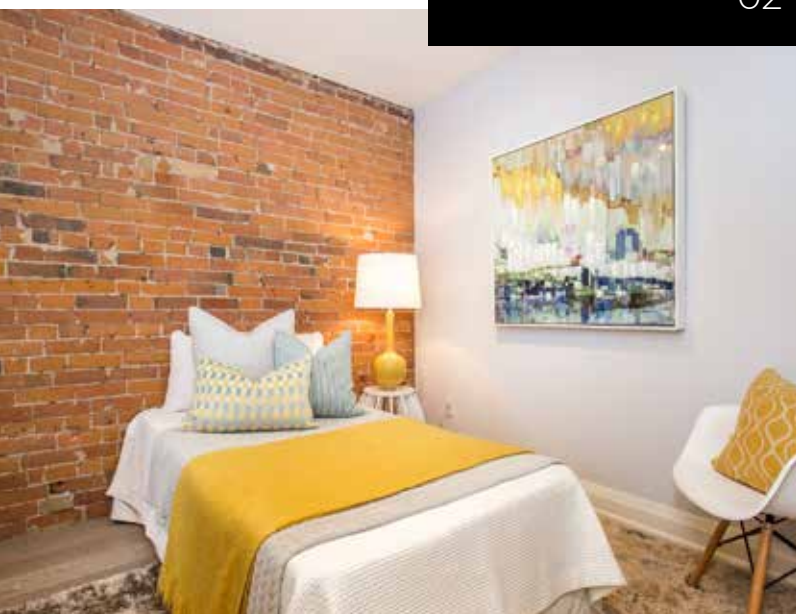
1) Make sure the contractor has experience doing the type of job you want done. Go and look at their past work and don't be afraid to ask for references. Make sure you call those references.



2) Openness. Ask about the details of the job. What will the order of things be? Don't be satisfied with vague assurances like "things will get done." When will funds be paid out and for what? Transparency is critical to a good working relationship.

3) Lastly, your contractor has to be comfortable with how engaged you want to be in the work. If you're going to be hands-off, is that ok? Will they be OK if you are an active homeowner on site daily? Your working styles and communications expectations have to match.

## 02 | How do I even know what is feasible?



Understanding how to get to '*what you want*' from '*where you are*' means a realistic look at both and a basic understanding of a few things:

**How do I review my existing assets?**

Sometimes a tricky part of the job is figuring out what to keep, what to remodel, and where to just tear down and start over. Want a second story? For almost all houses this is possible; it may just require some structural strengthening and an engineer to



determine that. Want an extension off the back or side? Same issue. Can you expand the footprint? New foundation, extra foundation or just footings? These are planning things with which your contractor can help.

### **What will my municipal or provincial government allow?**

Bylaws about height, setbacks, driveways and a dozen or two other things are different all over every city. In some places, individual lots even have their own rules based on their size, shape or location. It's important to investigate at your local city hall's building department to see what is allowed (and what you may want to go to committee of adjustment for) before you start your planning. If you own a heritage-designated structure, you will have even more red tape to navigate – start early, as it can take many months.



### **Should we just take it to the brick and start over?**

It is always easier and quicker to do it this way, but sometimes certain aspects of the original structure should be kept, or you may not have the budget or the time. Heritage buildings will also have restrictions on what may be demolished.

### **What if I want more than is allowed?**

If you stick exactly to the bylaws, planning will move a great deal faster. If, however, you are immovable on certain things (typically regarding height, coverage, easements or setbacks), it might be worth applying for an exemption to those bylaws and going through committee of adjustment. This will be ~2-6 month process.

Keep in mind all your neighbours will be invited to come and give their opinion on what you want to build. If there is a precedent set in the neighbourhood, there's a much better chance that you will get your minor variance approved.

The cost will vary depending on engineer and architect bills but you should expect somewhere between \$3k-\$10k.

## What else should I consider?

There's an old expression that you should never have the nicest house on a street (since the eventual value of your home is determined by the neighbourhood, not just the house itself).

To some degree this is true, and you should consider whether you should be looking for an opportunity property in a more upscale neighbourhood to renovate.



## 03 | What budget do I need?

It all depends on what you want, what your structure and lot will allow, how many toys you want and what structural work you will need to enable what you want. There will be unforeseen costs and good and bad places to spend money. Your contractor and realtor will help you out with all of it.

### Is square footage always a good measure of cost?

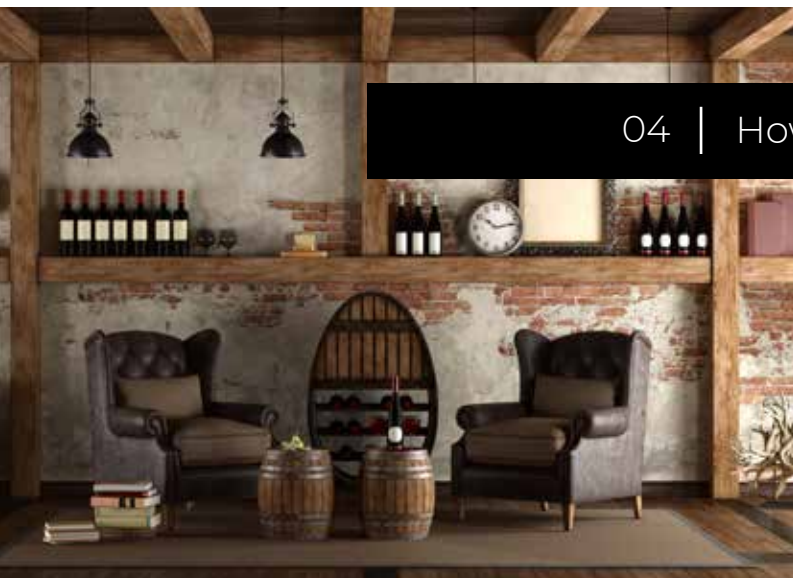
It's not a perfect way to predict cost. Rather, it's a useful tool to estimate overall cost in general. For example, if you choose to use expensive materials in finishes and fixtures (bathrooms and kitchens), this number can be misleading.

### Is there a way to do a reno in 2 phases?

Many people want to consider this, as they wish to

remain in the house during the renovation. While saving on moving-out costs, you are incurring greater cost due to the fixed costs of getting crews assembled onsite and working.

Once the crews are working it is more cost effective to have them do all of the work in the whole structure. Think painters, electricians and drywallers. A short-term rental is usually the best option.



## 04 | How long will this take? What's realistic?

**Obviously, the bigger the job, the longer it will take.**

Remember, just getting permits can take as long as 6 months – long before any construction begins. After that, you can count on anywhere from 2 to 12 months until your new home is ready.

## 05 | What's 'smart spend'?

**Smart spend** is considering how you will spend on the structure, fixtures and finishes in your new home. **Money spent in kitchens and bathrooms** on quality fixtures is generally a good spend, up to a point. Money spent on solid plaster crown moulding is probably not the best decision.

Who will buy it and what might they want? Making **separate living areas easily combinable** (or vice-versa) is usually a good spend.

## 06 | What upscale features are easy to install and give great ROI?

Certainly higher end kitchens, quartz counters, porcelain tiles in showers, glass shower doors, high end vanities, and quality light fixtures get great ROI.





## 07 | How do I maximize resale ROI, when I eventually sell?

This is a question that everyone should ask themselves. It's important to imagine the future buyer of your new home.

Are they going to be looking for extra bedrooms? Larger bathrooms? A gym? A nanny suite? A rental-income suite?

It might be useful to talk to a realtor and find out what the trends are selling well and for a premium in your neighbourhood.



## 08 | How do we get larger bathroom(s)?

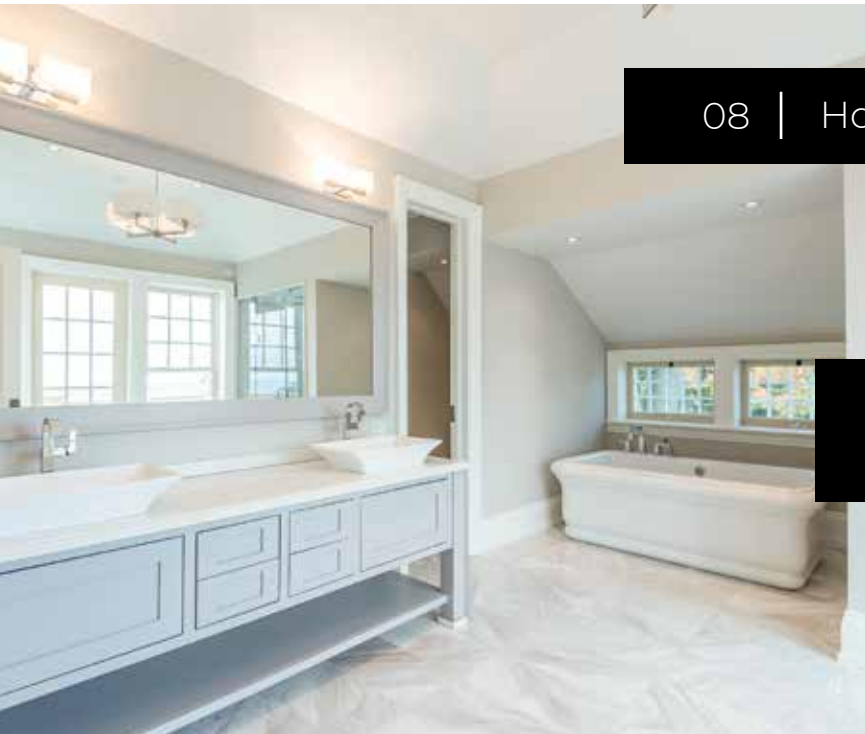
In order to create a larger bathroom you will have to remove existing walls and make another room smaller.

## 09 | What features do great bathrooms have?

Great bathrooms have good light, working surfaces, enough space to move around, a good amount of storage, proper ventilation and well-placed switches and outlets.

## 10 | Can we improve water pressure?

Yes you can and there are several ways to do it. You can purchase a larger water line from the city (going from 1/2" to 3/4" or even 1"). You can also purchase a pressure tank which holds the water in a reservoir and build up pressure.





## 11 | What is “The Triangle?”

**The triangle** is used by designers and architects when creating a kitchen layout. The belief is that no leg of the triangle should be less than 1.2m or greater than 2.7 m away. The sum of all 3 sides should be between 4 m and 7.9m. Basically it is a mathematical formula about how close the fridge, sink and stove should be in relation to each other.



## 12 | What upscale kitchen features give great ROI?

You should certainly consider quartz countertops, new (stainless steel) built-in appliances, new light fixtures and upscale faucets and sinks. They all give an upscale impression and look great as well!

## 13 | How do we make our basement taller?

In order to create a higher ceiling in the basement, you have two options: you can either dig out the basement and pour a new floor. This usually requires permits and underpinning. Or, if you have the ability, you can raise the height of the basement wall by adding a few courses of brick and raising the level of your first floor above grade.

## 14 | Can we make a self-contained apartment/nanny suite? What already needs to be in place to make this possible?

Yes it is possible in two ways. You can either do an exterior entry (a permit is required). Or, you can create a self contained apartment (permit and maybe CoA required).

In order to do either of these you will need to check your zoning status.






## 15 | What can we expect an old home to reveal?

During a renovation you will come across many unforeseeable issues that will have to be dealt with. Most common among them are: mold, asbestos, UFFI, sagging floors due to cut joists, structural walls that were removed in another renovation and require support, lead pipes, knob and tube wiring and stairs with uneven steps.



## 16 | What should we expect as the new house 'breaks in'?

It's quite common for settling to occur after a renovation. You can expect small movement and creaks, small cracks in plaster or caulking and nailheads popping out of the drywall. Allow a one year cycle for all elements to settle, then begin to remedy.

A modern living room interior. In the foreground, a black leather chair with a chrome frame sits on a white shag rug. To the right, a fireplace with a black frame is set into a white wall, with a fire burning inside. Above the fireplace, a white mantel holds a large framed mirror, a smaller framed picture, and two vases with green plants. The room has light-colored walls and a dark wood floor.

These are some of the most common questions we get about renovations. We recognize that everyone has different specific circumstances, so if you'd like to know something you don't see here, don't hesitate to give us a call. We actually do love talking about all this stuff.

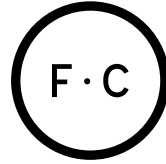
HAPPY RENOVATING!

## TOP 12 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR NEXT CONTRACTOR

- 1 Have you done this type of renovation before?
- 2 Have you done this type of renovation to a structure like mine?
- 3 Can you show me an example/do you have a reference?
- 4 Can you give me an example where something went sideways in a job and how you approached it? What was the result?
- 5 How often will you communicate with me? What will be included in these updates?
- 6 Will you contact me before fixing anything that is outside of the original scope?
- 7 Are you comfortable with me coming to visit the site to take a look at progress weekly or biweekly?
- 8 What is your payment structure like?
- 9 How frequently do you clean your site? Do you have a cleaner on staff/what is your general process to ensure your site is clean?
- 10 If our neighbours are concerned, who would they contact?
- 11 Has the city or ministry of labour investigated, charged or fined you on any of your previous jobs in the last two years? What was the context? What was the resolution?
- 12 How many of your last 5 jobs finished on schedule?



YOUR RENO NOTES WORKBOOK



FOCUS CONSTRUCTION

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Be ready for your next reno project.  
Based on our FAQ's we've put together  
a quick checklist of things you'll need to have  
thought about before your next contractor meeting.

Do you have your contractor interview questions ready to go?  
(We've provided some suggestions above!)

- What type of renovation are you considering?

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- Do you have a budget in mind?

Low: \_\_\_\_\_

High: \_\_\_\_\_

Contingency budget: \_\_\_\_\_

- What are the things you like about your current living space?

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- What don't you like?

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- Is there anything specific you want to keep about the space?

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- Do you have photos of the elements you want to include? Design styles you like?

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- Do you have photos of elements you do NOT want to see included in the designs?

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- For each room you are renovating, who will be using it most often?

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- What elements do you want to see included in each new room?  
(i.e. kitchen islands, his and hers sinks, etc)

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- Who is going to be the key point of contact for your contractor?

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- Do you want to live in the space during the renovation yes or no?

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- How active do you want to be in the process?

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- Have you acquired the official plans survey for your lot?

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- Have you modified your insurance coverage for the duration of the build?

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- Is it important to you to pursue a low carbon/LEED approach with this build?

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- If you are adding an apartment suite:  
Will you ever intend to turn it back into a single family dwelling or always be separate?

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