



5 Things to Do Before You Remodel

By Barbara Charlton, Great American Remodeling Co.

Congratulations, you're going ahead with that remodeling project you've been dreaming about! To help the dream become a reality, be well prepared. The following steps can help to make your project a huge success!

#1 Have a Vision

Clip pictures from magazines and make notes about what you like or don't like. Visit design centers, appliance stores, home improvement stores, and specialty retailers.

Not only will you get more ideas, you'll also get a feel for material costs such as countertops, flooring, paint, tile, textures, fixtures, appliances, etc.

The sky's the limit (governed by your budget, of course). But sometimes we don't start a project because there are *too many choices*. If this describes you, consider working with a designer or interior decorator.

By investing in a few hours of a professional's time, you could avoid costly mistakes later.

A designer can stick just to colors, or go all the way to providing you with a full-blown design with materials, textures, layout, etc.

Many design professionals charge by the hour, and some general contractors include a designer's time in their bids. Be sure to agree on the deliverables: a sketch, a materials list, etc.

#2 Sketch It Out

If you're designing on your own, make a sketch with room layout, materials, structural changes, etc. If drawing isn't your strong suit, write up your wish list.

Your list might look like this: "Remove wall between kitchen and dining room. New ceramic kitchen floor, new hardwood in dining room (birch or maple). Base trim and living room carpet to remain as-is."

Having specifications to give contractors will go a long way toward getting what you want.



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#3 Build a Playhouse

How can you tell if your changes will improve or impede traffic flow? One way is to use props.

Say you want a kitchen island. You should have at 36" of clearance on all sides for workability. Stack and tape boxes to working height. Now for a day or two, just work and walk around it. Open nearby cupboards and appliances to see if there is enough room.

Does the island draw the kids like a magnet? You might want to add an overhang and some stools to see how that feels, too.

A playhouse setup can save you a pile of money if you can fix a size or location issue before building the real thing.

After the test run, give the boxes to your little ones so they can build a playhouse, too!

#4 Get Bids

Once you have defined the project, get at least three bids from reputable contractors. Be sure you are getting a bid **for your specific job**. Many contractors will quote a "per square foot" price, which means they bid based on their experience with a particular room type. This may or may not accurately represent the cost of **your** job.

Since you have a list of the job tasks with materials, sizes, etc. (this is the "scope"), ask the contractor for a bid based on the scope. If they can't do that, they may not be a good fit for your project.

Remember to check references. You may also wish to check with the Better Business Bureau, as well as with the Minnesota Department of Commerce who issues and administers builder's licenses in Minnesota.

#5 Finance the Project

Bids in hand, it's time to see to finances. You may not hire the highest bid, but it's a good idea to use that number plus an extra 10% for unexpected

changes and mid-course corrections. This should assure that you will have adequate resources to complete the project.

Is the money in the bank, or will you need to get a loan?

If you have to get financing, get a firm closing date **before** scheduling work to begin.

Note: Some folks prefer to nail down the financial piece before getting bids, etc. Think of this as getting pre-approved for a mortgage. Knowing exactly what you can afford keeps costs in line, and prevents you from wasting valuable time

Ready, Set, Go!

As with most things in life, doing your homework can save money and prevent headaches when work starts. A little planning goes a long way to ensuring a smooth and successful remodeling project.

Good luck!

