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At Our House Restoration, we have a slogan that reads “Home is not a PLACE... it’s a feeling.” With the ever-increasing popularity of the DIY and HGTV shows, homeowners can see that slogan in action and crave that feeling in their own lives. But what takes 30 to 60 minutes on TV is hardly an accurate picture of what a home renovation looks like.

Let’s start with the fact that the contractors that are featured are tried-and-true professionals. If we’re being honest, this might be the most important step in your entire renovation and something the reality show homeowners do not have to worry about.

With home renovations in high demand, combined with skilled labor at its lowest availability in history, finding someone to do the work, let alone good work, is often difficult. I recommend you hire a good general contractor (or GC) rather than a handyman or try to be your own GC. If you hire the right GC, they should be able to bring all the moving pieces together and coordinate everything behind the scenes so that you don’t have to as well as warranty all work completed by their subs.

Here are some tips for finding a good GC.

Do your research. Go to the BBB and make sure they are a registered business. Look at their rating, it does make a difference. Are they a licensed contractor with Louisville Metro? Do they have liability insurance? Are they a part of the professional organizations like the Louisville Building Industry Association and the NHBA? Are

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SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOME RENOVATION

they highly referred by their past clients?

When looking for contractors, be sure to hire one based on the qualifications that you are looking for, NOT because they have the lowest bid. All bids, including the materials used, the design and quality of work are not created equal!

Once you’ve hired a good contractor, make sure there is a clear contract between you and them that states the scope of work to be done, the quality of materials to be used and the payment terms. Start with your budget and secure financing before the project begins. The cost of labor and materials is higher than it’s ever been. Trying to penny pinch a renovation is like trying to squeeze the last little bit out of the toothpaste tube.

Construction of any kind, whether it is exterior or interior, is inconvenient, not just for you but also for your contractor. Things go wrong, weather interferes and holidays delay. Make sure you factor in these things when looking at your expected completion date and, keep in mind, communication is paramount on both parties.

There is a reason the reality shows require their homeowners to move out of their house during the renovation. It gives the crew unlimited access and unlimited hours to your home. Make sure you are giving your workers unencumbered access to the space being renovated.

Have high but realistic expectations. If you are renovating, there’s nothing wrong with expecting a job well done, however, do not be a “hover” homeowner. No one likes to be micromanaged and the goal is to get the work done well.

Expect something will go wrong, you’ll be pleasantly surprised if it doesn’t. While the goal for any contractor is to have a perfect

renovation with no delays or unforeseen problems, understand that more times than not there will be some sort of snag. The true test of a good contractor is not measured by whether something goes wrong on the job but what they do to make it right. I recommend that you remain flexible and have a contingency fund set aside. It is much cheaper to deal with the issues when they are found rather than cover them up.

One of the biggest points of conflict in a renovation is making changes after the renovation begins. Refrain from asking the workers to add a little here and change a little there. While you are the homeowner and you should get what you want, understand there is a premium cost for making changes mid-renovation and you should only make them with your GC to avoid conflict. As a general contractor, by the time we begin a renovation, I will have 60 percent of my job done, planning and orchestrating crews, researching materials, getting quotes and finding vendors. If we must stop production to re-quote, re-think materials, or re-design, that affects each trade and all the dominos topple.

So, after all this, is renovating really worth it? Have you seen the joy, elation and tears in the great reveals on HGTV?

You really can have the home of your dreams, one that when you pull up into your driveway you are not only proud of your home’s curb appeal, but when you walk in it functions and flows for your family, and one you will love to fill with friends. Best of all, now you can have the place you live in... really feel like home.

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