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Kitchen Renovation Prep: 10 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Your Remodel

Before you tear down any walls, look at this list

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You need to be fully prepared—both financially and emotionally—to take on a renovation project. Sometimes, they can go haywire, as you never know what you’re going to find when you start poking around behind the walls and ceilings. Even if there are no major mistakes made along the way, renovations are prone to going over budget or taking longer than you ever anticipated.

Though kitchen upgrades are sure to increase your home’s property value and improve your quality of life over the long term, they also come with plenty of challenges. So when heading into a kitchen renovation, it’s best to come prepared by asking yourself these key questions, which were previously shared by contracting professional Mike Daddio in an event hosted by *AD*. “If you have these questions answered before you call the contractor, then we’ll be able to have a much more productive, streamlined conversation,” he says.

1. What is your objective?

Being clear about your ultimate goal will help you and your contractor focus on what matters—whether lasting solutions that will turn your kitchen into an efficient workhorse, or less costly design enhancements that will help you land a good price when it’s time to sell.

Daddio advises asking yourself: “Are you planning to sell your apartment in three years? Are you intending to spruce up for that sale? Or are you looking to have all the bells and whistles?”

2. How long do you plan to live in the home?

“If you’re going to be living there for one or two years, you probably want to consider a different type of renovation, something that’s maybe not as costly or something that’s more timeless and traditional in the aesthetic that’s chosen by your design team,” says Daddio. “If you’re going to be living there a little bit longer, then naturally you’ll be spending a bit more and designing something that you really love.”

3. Do you have children?

“If so, where are you going to store everything? Are you going to have a kitchen with a magnetic board? Do you hang your children’s artworks?” Resilient, easy-to-clean materials, whether wood or stone, are also ideal for kid-friendly kitchens, so it’s helpful to keep your children’s needs in mind from the beginning.

4. Do you have allergies and health issues to consider?

If someone in your family suffers from asthma or other breathing issues, let your contractor know. “Things that are important to stay away from if you do have any of those concerns are high-gloss lacquers and urea and phenol formaldehydes, which are used in the adhesives of most plywoods,” Daddio says.

5. Will you be living in your home during the renovation?

“It adds to the lead time and the construction duration, so that’s something that’s very important to know,” he continues. “It also adds to the level of protection and cleanliness that needs to be maintained in the renovation.”

6. What is your budget?

“This question has to be something that’s first answered for yourself, so you understand what amount of money you want to spend, but it’s important to be honest with the people on your design team, and your contractors, about what that number is.” Once you have a budget in mind, add a 10 to 20% contingency, because things often don’t go quite as planned.

7. What have people in similar homes accomplished, and what have been their limitations?

“What I always encourage on first meetings, in New York City especially, is that you invite your building’s superintendent,” says Daddio. “Getting to the answer of ‘Can we do it?’ sooner rather than later is very, very helpful in the process.” Research local zoning laws, landmark preservation rules, and yard setbacks.

8. Can you remove that wall to open up the kitchen?

“It’s very easy to ask the building’s superintendent or other people within the apartment that may have completed renovations. It’s also great to schedule walkthroughs with those people to see what they’ve done.”

9. What’s behind those walls?

Be sure to ask: “Are there utility risers that limit the amount of wall that can be removed safely?”

10. When can we get started?

“I always say that a well-planned project is a well-executed project,” says Daddio. “Take the time to properly plan everything that you’re doing. Source your long-lead materials and purchase them in advance.”

If you feel ready to move forward with your kitchen renovation, you’ll need to secure a trustworthy design and build team to help you get the job done. Ask your contractor to share details about their communication style, license and insurance, go-to subcontractors, and more so you can make an informed decision about who you are entrusting with this important project. Once you both have established that you’re on the same page, it’s time to get to work!