

Keeping the Peace During a Home Renovation



A renovation can drive everyone crazy, including yourself. This article might just keep your marriage healthy, your neighbors happy and your contractors on schedule.

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The reasons for [renovating your home](#) are obvious: more space, improved



living, higher resale value. But getting from point A to point B involves a lot of hassle, whether you're putting on an addition or switching from a radiator to forced hot air heat. Here are a few ways to maintain healthy, happy relationships with everyone involved in a [construction](#) project, whether they're in your house or living next door.

The Contractors

Before the first hammer's swung, set boundaries with your work crew. "Just because they want to start work at 6 a.m. doesn't mean you want them to. You need to set not their hours, but your hours," says Marni Jameson, author of *The House Always Wins* and a syndicated home columnist.

Think ahead about their needs, too - even basic ones. "Get toilets to ensure workers are not peeing in the foundation," says Monica D. Higgins, founder of [Renovation](#) Planners, a Los-Angeles based certified construction management firm. "Make sure the contractor's bid includes providing a porta-potty on site and that it is drained, cleaned, disinfected and deodorized on a regular basis." Other tactics that create a happy crew: an occasional bagel buffet, endless cold water supply, and learning crew

members names. “Everyone likes to be valued and treated well,” says Higgins.

Throughout the process, “communication is key,” says Tracy Morris, of Tracy Morris Design, a DC-based interior design firm. “You should have meetings with the contractor to make sure things are on track with the project’s timeline.” For short projects, daily meetings are appropriate; for longer projects, weekly meetings.

She also suggests always being available to the contractor so you can make a call on last minute decisions, which keeps you in the loop and eliminates additional hold ups. “Your stress level will stay low if you know exactly what’s going on,” she adds.

Don’t let a contractor walk all over you, though -- if he or she is doing shoddy work, doesn’t listen to you or doesn’t show up on time, you can fire the contractor. Check a review site like Angieslist or Servicemagic for contractors who are consumer reviewed -- some offer discounts to users of the site, too.

The Neighbors

Your [home project](#) doesn’t just affect you -- it affects your entire block, so be courteous to your neighbors.

“Let them know what’s going on from the get go,” says Morris. “Tell them what type of project will be happening, and that they can expect extra cars and trucks to be parked on the street while the project is going on.”

She also suggests giving your neighbors affected by the project the contractor’s phone number. “That way, if there is a van blocking a driveway or creating another problem, the neighbor can fix the problem.” Who should know? The houses on either side of you, the house behind you and your neighbor across the street .If it’s a major renovation, or a from-the-ground- up project, alert the block since they will be dealing with dirt and noise and work crews, too.

Be clear with your contractor, too, what those parking restrictions are.

Letting neighbors see the plans can help -- even writing out a timeline of the construction process for them so they know what should be happening on what days. “In the event that your renovation project must go through a variance or design review process requiring the support of your neighbors, invite them to an open house where they will have the opportunity to preview your project in context and ask questions prior to the confirmed hearing date,” says Higgins.

Tell your neighbors about those work hours you’ve set with the contractor - that way, if the contractor breaks those rules, especially if you’re not living in the home during renovation, your neighbors can tell you.

If the crew upsets a neighbor, take action immediately. “You should always determine what the issue is and do your best to accommodate the neighbor,” says Higgins. “If the complaint is of concern to the city, the city will tell you what needs to be done to rectify the situation.” Groveling helps, too.

“Apologize profusely. Send cookies, lemonade, flowers or a bottle of wine,” says Jameson. “Be as courteous as you possibly can.”

Family Members

“My husband’s favorite expression is keep your eye on the ball’,” says Jameson. Focusing on the end goal can help your family stay sane while living in a land of dust, noise and drop cloths. Keeping a rendering of your soon-to-be-new home in a highly visible place adds a visual representation that can also help.

Keeping that team mentality in mind is even more important if both partners aren’t equally excited about the process. “If one person is more into the remodel, the less interested person should try to weigh in on creative touches or budget decisions,” says Jameson. And the less frustrated person should keep refocusing the partner on that end result.

Be creative when it comes to living in a chaotic space, too, especially if it’s a kitchen. You don’t want to be ordering out all the time - it’s not good for your waistline or your budget. “You don’t need a kitchen. What you need is a sink, a counter, a cooking appliance and a refrigerator,” says Jameson, even if that means the bathtub is the sink, the refrigerator is in the garage, the microwave is in the living room, and the coffee maker’s in the bathroom.

If you have young kids, make this an adventure. “When we built one of our homes and the kids were little, we said we’re going to get a dog and a swimming pool when our house is done,” said Jameson. You don’t necessarily have to bring in a Fido after the project is doing, but seeing what would make a kid excited as a goal can help them keep their eyes on the ball, too. “The best qualities couples who want to survive a renovation intact are a spirit of adventure and a sense of humor,” she adds.

Text by Jen A. Miller