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Common Issues, Often Forgotten, When Planning your Home Renovation

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As a Building Designer, with over 35 years experience in the building & home renovation design field, I see a lot of renovations. People bring me their wish list or a sketch of what they are trying to achieve in a home renovation. Sometimes all the main points are addressed and it's just a matter of drawing up your sketch. You are then ready for your council/building certification approvals and getting your builder to put a final quote on your project and you are ready to start. From my experience here are some of the most common issues that are over looked when planning a home renovation. It is by no means a complete list. See if you have addressed the most common home renovation issues. It's a balancing act.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues in terms of how they would apply to your renovation give me a call or email. A Building designer can help you achieve your renovation goals.

1. The first conceptual decisions you make are the most important as to how successful your renovation will be.

Any other decisions made after the concept is established will have less of an impact on your renovations success. You are looking at the big picture. What is your vision? What spaces are you adding or altering? How big a space and for what use? How will the new and existing spaces relate to each other? Are you utilizing any natural features on your site? How are you connecting your outside spaces with the inside spaces. How will the roof fit? The decision to go up and add a 2 storey or add an addition on the ground floor. Do you do more extensive internal alterations to reduce the size of an addition? These decisions also set the major building costs that you will be working to for the remainder of the project. They will also affect on how much money you have left to spend on fixtures and fittings. It's a balancing act addressing all of the issues. Make a list of what is important to you, your vision, before you try to sketch any pictures.

2. Getting your budget right.

Deciding on and setting your maximum budget to spend is easy. Getting your budget to fit your vision is a little harder. Sometimes your budget needs to be done in conjunction with the preliminary concept to reach a balance between what you want in your renovation and what you want to spend. A preliminary concept can be costed out and allowances then made for PC amounts such as cabinets, finishes and fixtures. You can then determine if your preliminary concept plan meets your budget. If not either the preliminary concept plan or the budget will need to change, or maybe both change. Part of this process is also establishing the level and quality of finishes and PC items like plumbing fixtures, cabinets/benchtops, flooring finishes, doors and windows. This is a bit of work to figure out, but time well spent to make sure you stay within your budget. It's a balancing act between your budget and your vision.

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3. Building brand new Dark & Dead Living Areas

Having a dark Living Area before you renovate is one thing, it can be fixed and corrected when you renovate. But to do a renovation or addition and create a new dark or a dead area in the middle of the old house is poor renovating value. Floor area is expensive. What usually happens is you use the new portion of the renovation and the existing dark portion of the home may not be as fully utilized. That is poor renovation value, building new floor space and ignoring or under utilizing the existing old floor area. The solution is to evaluate very carefully the connection of the existing spaces with the new or altered spaces in your renovation.

4. Interior Habitability

We live in a very comfortable sub tropical climate. But if no attention is paid to air movement & solar protection to door and window openings it can become very uncomfortable. Air conditioning is expensive to purchase and expensive to run. A well designed house may or may not need air conditioning but the goal should be to minimize its use. By protecting openings, allowing for good cross flow ventilation, taking into account the natural prevailing breezes and good insulation practice it is possible to make a home more comfortable. Ignoring these issues and putting on the air conditioning can reduce the habitability of your home renovation. Another solution is the old Queenslander use of extra ceiling height to promote natural air convection, even for only a small portion of your ceiling.

5. Open planning, poor internal function and the need for some social engineering

The current trend is for open floor plan homes. It is a nice feature to have an open feel to the inside of a home. But there is a trade off for this feature. Noise seems louder and travels further in open spaces. If someone is watching the TV in an 'Open' Family Living Area with an adjoining 'Open' Kitchen area, then by default everyone in the household has to listen to it. This may not be an issue for adults, or a couple, but when children/adolescents are involved it can be more challenging maintaining control and an acceptable noise level. Decisions made on whether you have 'Open' planning, where the main TV goes may have a serious impact on how successful your renovation becomes. Various alternatives that need to be evaluated are: 'Semi- open' planning, a multi-purpose space or two separate Living areas.
(Kid space & adult space)

6. Indoor-outdoor interaction

In our sub tropical climate where we have 12 months of the year when we can enjoy the Outdoors Living it is a shame when the interior living space does not connect to a usable Outdoor Living Space or spaces. The use of a pass-thru & servery benches from the kitchen and large opening doors are common solutions. The challenge is providing Outdoor Living which works in the winter as well as the summer and takes into account of the prevailing winds and driving rain.

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7. The Kitchen

The kitchen can be the most expensive single part of some renovations. It may become the central hub of the home through planning or by intent. It's sad to see a kitchen which does not fore fill the client's needs through bad planning or no planning at all. It is easy to fill a space up with lots of cabinets for storage with a big bench top but taking it a step further in how the new Kitchen interacts with your adjoining Living spaces, both inside and out. It is common to have an open kitchen and adjoining family room opening to the outside. But it is sad and common to see a kitchen sink pushed into a corner and the cook top facing a blank wall. One solution is the 'Social Kitchen' where the work stations face the adjoining living spaces. This is the social aspect in that if you have guests, kids or partner you can see and talk to them directly while you are preparing or cooking a meal. It's also easier to get people to help in the preparation of the meal when they are facing you, not your back. This is just one issue of many to address to integrate the modern kitchen in a renovation.

8. Why things don't fit?

Furniture, appliances, fixtures and other 'things' don't fit because they were usually not planned to fit. Show your furniture arrangements & TV on your proposed floor plan to make sure they do fit in the planning stage. Large rooms look like they should work, but due to door & window placement and the travel paths, size does not guarantee that 'things' will fit. Show your outdoor furniture on any outdoor Living space to make sure that space works as well. Showing the travel paths also highlights wasted hallway & poor traffic flow. In most cases it may be better to use the extra wasted corridor/travel path to make a room larger or add additional storage. Plan for enough storage space, such as; Linen, Broom/vacuum, Pantry, cleaning cupboard, adequate robe space, and space for all the other stuff that you need to store.

9. No defined entry to the house

You may not use the front entry and come through the garage or through the back but.... One way to de-value a home is to ignore the Entry. The Entry needs to tie in with the internal traffic flow of the house. You can either have a private entry or a more open Entry.

10. Lack of future proofing

We can all get tied down in our present life that thing will remain as they are for ever. But we all go through the different stages of life. Ask yourself the question, will your renovation plan grow or adjust to you as time moves on. A couple of examples;

- A retired couple planning a renovation by adding a second storey to allow for visiting family members to come & stay. Future proof your renovation plan by thinking in terms of will you be able to age in place? Will stairs become barriers? Plan your bathrooms by not the latest colours from a glossy magazine but if you or an aging parent be able to access the shower and WC.

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- A younger family renovating their home to make space for a new baby or fast growing toddler. But remember those young ones will grow up into adolescents and older very quickly. They and maybe you will want a little more distance or separation as well as compared to when they were a toddler. Future proof your renovation plan by thinking in terms of having the flexibility of your living spaces growing and altering as your children grow up. Think in terms of the flexibility of *Kid Space* and *Adult Space* if kids are involved. This issue has a direct relationship to the short falls of open planning in point 6.

11. Designing by Glossy Magazine.

It's nice to see what other people have done and what products are available, but to design your renovation by pictures in a magazine is fraught with problems. Usually glossy magazines show the more expensive solutions and products. Sometime the glossy pictures are not even from Australia, which means they may not even comply with the Australia Building code and Standards. If you want a particular expensive product or finish that is fine. But unless you have an unlimited budget you may find that something else in your vision is reduced or eliminated altogether. Such as reducing square meters or removing a whole room. You may have to decide what gets reduced—your new doors, new windows, new cabinets or a little of each. Particular products are suited to a particular application/situation and may not fit into your renovation with out some compromises. Unless your budget is of no concern, it may be a mistake to decide on particular expensive products or design features with out appreciating what compromises that need to be made to accommodate those decisions. When looking at the glossy magazine photo try to determine what it is that appeals to you and how will it fit into your project. What comprises are there for a particular feature, product or finish.

This list is by no means complete, but a list of the more common issues, often forgotten. If you would like to discuss your renovation project, give me a call for a no obligation review. Call or email for an in-home consultation.