

## PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL REMODEL

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Chaos. Frustration. Out-of-control costs. Unexpected delays. Many homeowners have come to expect these as necessary evils which must be endured in order to have the home of their dreams. Our clients will tell you that it doesn't have to be that way. They will tell you that their remodel was carefully planned and executed, that they were always in control of the budget, and that they knew exactly what to expect.

Our collaborative method ensures that your design develops in close concert with your budget and that your remodel will always be driven by your priorities. Our estimates are meticulously detailed and full-disclosure, so you never have to wonder what you're buying. Since 1999, we have helped over two hundred and fifty savvy Bay Area homeowners explore their options and remodel with confidence. Here is a brief summary of how our process works:

### 1. PRIORITIZE

*(Already have plans? Skip to 2. Price below.)*

After an initial chat by phone, we meet with you (and your design professional, if applicable,) typically at the project site, so that you can tell us what you really want from your remodel. The *why* is as important as the *what*; is this to be your home-sweet-home for years to come, tailored exactly to your tastes, or is resale value first on your mind? Is it some combination of the two? The more you can tell us about your remodeling priorities, the more effectively we can help you begin to explore your options. Think big, broad strokes; we'll address the details soon enough.

## 2. PRICE

“How much is it going to cost?” That’s usually the elephant in the room. If you already have architectural plans, even a very basic set, they will help us start to answer this question more efficiently than without them. We can, and often do, compile preliminary estimates before any plans exist, but numbers will be especially rough. Regardless, we will begin to compile your preliminary estimate. Itemized by trade, your “PE” provides approximate cost opinions for every aspect of your proposed remodel and gives you your first insights into what your remodeling dollar can accomplish.

## 3. BALANCE

Once your preliminary estimate is complete, we will meet with you again to clarify the assumptions we have made in its preparation, review the numbers, and answer your questions. If, at this point, you are happy with our professionalism and attention to detail and believe we are the right fit for your project, we will engage with you in a Pre-Construction Agreement. This agreement compensates us at a reduced hourly rate as we transform your preliminary estimate into a contract-ready remodeling budget. We will then begin requesting quotes from subcontractors and vendors and fine-tuning all of the line-item costs to better suit what’s important to you. As your design takes shape, we will update the estimate to reflect these choices. This process is always guided by your priorities and is intended to help you get more of what you want and less of what you don’t. Once we have arrived at a solid pairing of the design you love and a price that works for your budget, your revised estimate will then be ready to serve as your working remodeling budget.

## 4. ORGANIZE

Your project will require you to answer a myriad of questions, both large and small. Your architect and contractor are responsible for helping you understand your options and make good decisions. We keep all the details organized for you in a shared online spreadsheet we call the Hub. Our team captures meeting notes and items from emails, calls, and texts, and stores them according to cost category so that things don’t slip through the cracks. The Hub serves as a consolidated repository of the many questions and answers not directly addressed in the plans or specifications. Examples may include the choice between matte-finish and glossy electrical cover plates, a request to move a light fixture after construction has started, changes to paint colors, etc. We update the Hub as new items arise and are resolved. It allows you ample time to ask and answer any questions and make good decisions *before* work begins, and the whole team has a library of information available to reference throughout the project.

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We hope you will allow us to help you plan and execute a successful remodeling project built around your priorities. Contact us to get started!

## TIPS WHEN HIRING A CONTRACTOR

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### DON'T:

- Give anyone promising to perform work on your home a deposit of more than 10% or \$1,000.00 (*whichever is LESS*) before construction work has started. Any contractor asking for more money up front is breaking the law and risks losing his or her license and/or going to jail.
- Hire anyone to perform more than \$500.00 worth of work on your property without verifying the validity of his or her California Contractor's License (<https://www2.cslb.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CheckLicense/NameRequest.asp>).
- Hire anyone promising to perform work under the auspices of another contractor's license. That's illegal, and can mean that the person(s) performing the work has no real contractual responsibility.
- Hire a contractor without first obtaining certificates of their workers' compensation and liability insurance policies, or you will assume all liability for any accidents or injuries.
- Insist that your contractor collect and maintain current insurance certificates for workers' compensation, liability, and commercial auto policies
- Sign a contract without an *itemized*, detailed estimate and description of the scope of work. Have your architect review and endorse these documents. A proposal comprised of only a summary, or one which simply says it will build what is shown in the plans, leaves far too many items open to interpretation and, ultimately, disagreement. This unfortunate, yet all-too-common, scenario virtually guarantees that a project will become more expensive and time-consuming than expected. Don't assume that things will turn out the way you hope they will. Get it in writing first.

### DO:

- Work together with your contractor, architect, (and designer, if applicable) to develop an efficient, practical, and pleasing design that you can afford. Be firm about sticking to your budget. Architects and designers are in the business of creating beautiful and functional spaces, but they are typically not overly concerned or informed about cost. Your contractor should be the defender of your budget as the design is developing.
- Check prospective contractors' references, license(s), and insurances.
- Ask to tour an active job. Is it organized and presentable? Are they treating the property with respect and care? Finished projects can't give you this kind of insight.
- Be candid about how much you are willing to spend on your remodel. A good contractor's goal is not to squeeze as much money as possible from a project. On the contrary – we strive to deliver more project from your money. Advocating for our clients has helped keep us in business for more than two decades now.

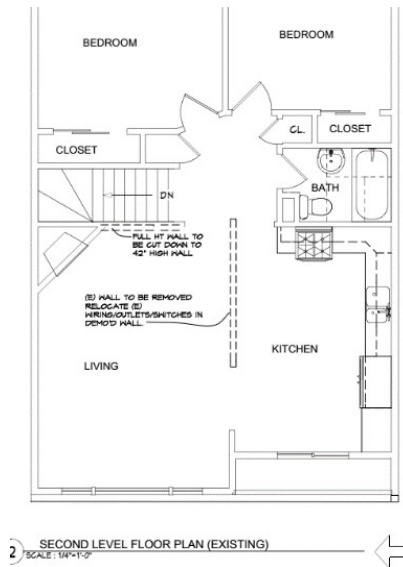
## TIPS WHEN HIRING AN ARCHITECT

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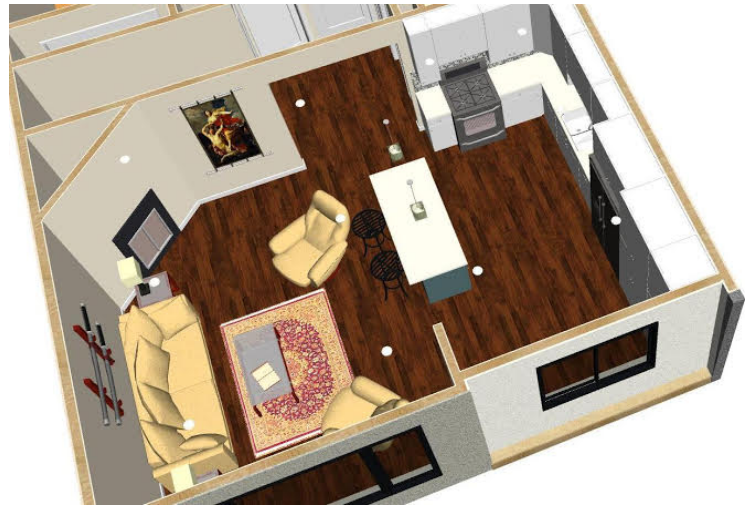
- Perhaps the most important advice we can offer on this topic is this: don't pay an architect to draft comprehensive plans for a project before you know, at least roughly, how much it will cost to build.
- While fee structures differ from one architect to the next, the most common is a percentage of construction costs. 15% is typical.
- Architects should meet with you, walk through the home with you, and then submit a proposal (at no charge) which will outline their fee structure for your project. Expect a flat fee for two or three schematic concepts and an estimated cost for the subsequent permitting-and-construction-drawings phase. The approach varies among architects.
- *Always* retain your architect for construction assistance. Even the most thorough plans and specifications cannot possibly address all of the questions that arise during the course of a remodel. For instance, one of our current jobs has accumulated over 400 discrete email threads between our staff and the architect. **Construction assistance is such a critical component of remodeling we won't take on a project without it.** There are simply far too many moving parts to entrust to anything short of comprehensive oversight.
- Should you interview more than one architect, afford them the same opportunity to submit proposals for the same project. Simply walking through the home and waving your hand towards the elements of your home you want to change will get you proposals for very different projects which cannot be effectively compared against one another. The same is true for contractors looking at your home before you have plans to share with them. We suggest composing a written description of what you want to accomplish, collecting some photos of spaces whose styles appeal to you, and sharing this with each architect with whom you engage.
- Most architects and designers can provide 3-D renderings. These allow you to visualize spaces much more effectively than line drawings can. Ask if these can be part of your design package.
- You will be working with your architect closely for some time, so choose someone with whom you feel at ease and enjoy an easy and natural rapport.

- Here is an example of how these can be helpful in visualizing a new floor plan, for instance:

**Standard architectural floor plan  
(existing space):**



**The same space as shown in 3-D renderings (proposed)**



[sid@sabaxterinc.com](mailto:sid@sabaxterinc.com)

<http://sabaxterinc.com/>

CA789351

126 W. PORTAL AVE., SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94127

415.681.7634