

12 essential renovation lessons you should learn before you start your reno.

Let the experience of other homeowners make your reno go more smoothly.

I never pay for clean up I can do myself. After demolition, I saved \$600 instead of paying my contractor to sort the debris, clean up, pull nails from old timber and haul it to the dump. I also did my own cleanup every day. I used that money to upgrade my door hardware.

I saved \$1,250 by limiting the super-expensive glass tiled backsplash to the area behind the stove, where the wall really needs protection. That bought me a gorgeous range hood I couldn't have afforded otherwise.

We saved \$800 by not removing the old windows in our shower. Our contractor just painted the wood with exterior latex and used waterproof PVC for the trim for about \$50.

We were about to add about 200 square feet to our kitchen, at a cost of \$55,000. Then our designer recommended a cabinet layout that gave us the extra storage we needed. We saved \$20,000– and we got a fabulous custom look.

We planned to add a new skylight to our upstairs hall for about \$1,500. Our contractor suggested light tube for about \$500. We love it!

I learned that our local Habitat for Humanity chapter would take the old cabinets, sink and tub we were planning to throw out. We ended up not adding to the landfill, and helped a good cause, besides saving the dump fees.

We should not have done our own demolition. We ended up with an electrical and plumbing nightmare. Leave interior demolition to the pros.

We didn't think we could afford an architect. Then we discovered that for about \$600 we could have a design consultation and plans that gave us a simple and elegant solution to our traffic flow problem by simply moving a door.

We wanted to turn our cottage into our dream home, but discovered the foundations weren't up to code – so that would add \$30,000 to the project. For about 3% more than we were planning to pay to renovate, we got a brand new energy efficient house and a great space that's a perfect fit for our family. We would never have discovered this without a licensed architect to help us.

We were going to move the sink and the toilet, but our contractor said our pipes were in good shape and we could save about \$1,000 on our bathroom reno if we left fixtures where they were.

We saved over \$500 by making our door openings a standard size instead of the larger size we first envisaged. We also saved a bundle by using a stock sheet of granite with no cuts for the top of the kitchen island.

Never do your own measuring! We thought we could save money by measuring and buying our counters ourselves – a small measuring error cost us a bundle. The counters were only half an inch too short but we ended up having to purchase new ones that are the right size.