



# TOP 20 REMODELING MISTAKES TO AVOID



Main Street  
— DESIGN BUILD —



Remodeling projects can be extremely rewarding when done correctly. But they can also be a nightmare when done poorly.



It's easy to get SO excited about a project that you forget to pay attention to the details, resulting in mistakes like hiring the wrong contractor, choosing a contractor based on cost alone, or trying to do it yourself to save a few bucks. It's also easy to get overwhelmed by the enormity of the project itself. You might fear all of the details that go into managing a remodeling project, along with the risk of the investment required, and let that keep you from moving forward.

At MainStreet Design Build, we want you to love the home that you're in and achieve your remodeling dreams. So we've compiled a list of expert tips to ease your concerns by making you aware of the most common remodeling mistakes—and how to avoid them.





# AVOID THESE 12 MISTAKES GETTING STARTED

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## 1 Not Knowing Your DIY Limits

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This one's a common mistake for both rookies and veteran remodelers. Sure, doing it yourself can be a good way to save money AND give you bragging rights around the neighborhood. But you should first consider the amount of time and energy you can reasonably afford to put into your project, especially if you have children. Then review your expectations regarding quality, and determine whether your work will live up to your own expectations (and those of others in your home). And don't forget the added cost of having to hire a professional to finish the project, or fix your mistakes. Keep in mind that a poor remodel can actually devalue your home, and remodeling decisions can directly impact resale value.

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## 2 Avoiding Permits

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Building codes vary by area, so there isn't a one-size-fits-all list to follow. Some routine maintenance items do not require permits. But remodeling projects such as window replacements, plumbing modifications, and bedroom additions do. Failure to acquire the right permits could result in fines, delays, and even difficulty selling your house. And worse, if something serious happens while you've been working without a permit, your homeowners' insurance will not cover it. To get the necessary permits, you'll need to meet your city's design and construction requirements. But keep in mind that most contractors do not draft plans. So if you're not working with a design + build firm, you'll need to hire a designer to devise a functional layout of the room and an architect to create those drawings.



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## 3 Setting an Unrealistic Budget

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Remodeling projects often end up costing more than you initially expect, especially if you're not a pro.

If you're planning to tear down walls or rip up floors, there's a good chance you'll find something you weren't expecting, especially in an older home. A design + build firm will develop an accurate scope of work for your project that results in a cost-effective budget and a smooth construction process. Through careful planning, you can expect to minimize your exposure to cost overruns while also allowing for contingencies and unexpected items. Make sure you start every project with a written contract that outlines your budgetary items in detail, from the start date to the approximate completion date. Any changes that are made during the remodel should be added to your contract in explicit detail.

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## 4 Expecting Remodel to Pay for Itself

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A word to the wise—your home's value will not increase by the amount you spend on a remodel. Like children, remodeling projects don't pay for themselves. However, you can expect to recoup some costs if you keep your project in line with neighborhood standards. Some projects do offer higher return— so be sure to explain your project goals to your contractor ahead of time. By working with a design + build firm, you'll have the support of a team of professionals who will guide you through a decision-making process that results in a functional living space that is just right for you.



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## 5 Expecting to Manage the Project On Your Own

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Maybe you just like the way you look in a tool belt and hard hat. Or maybe you really are looking forward to serving as your own construction manager, and selecting individual contractors. While this may reduce the project cost up front, you'll run the risk of having the work poorly coordinated, taking longer than expected and running over budget. Again, you need to consider the cost of your own time and energy. Hiring a reputable design + build firm offers many benefits. They will oversee the entire project, from concept to completion, and assume all responsibility for getting your project completed on time and on budget. They also have a keen eye for details and will run interference for you through the construction process spotting mistakes that many homeowners would otherwise miss.

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## 6 Not Using a Designer

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To get a professional-grade project, you need to hire a professional. This includes a designer as well as an architect and general contractor. A design + build firm offers the benefits of all, without the potential challenge of working with multiple independent contractors who approach your project individually rather than collaboratively. A design + build firm offers a perfect blend of form and function all under one roof—from technical know-how to advice on color and material selections that complement your home's architectural style. They can also foresee potential design issues and offer better solutions.



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## 7 Incomplete Research on a Contractor

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It's imperative that you do your research ahead of time. Focus on questions that require the company to explain and provide clear evidence of expertise. How much experience do they have in your type of project? Do they offer both design and construction capabilities? Or will you need to hire a second company to manage part of the project? Do they have industry accreditations, certifications or belong to professional organizations? Do they have insurance coverage? You're looking for a clear pattern of proficiency, proper credentials and satisfied customers. You can also check Houzz.com, Google+, Angie's List, and the Better Business Bureau for customer reviews and complaints.

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## 8 Hiring the Wrong Contractor

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Not everyone in your office is capable of performing the same work as you, right? So don't expect all contractors to be able to perform all types of projects. While there are projects that any reliable contractor can take on, there are many types of specialized projects that require a licensed professional. Do your research and make sure you choose someone who has a proven record of excellence in your type of project. Plumbing, electrical work, HVAC, and anything to do with gas or the structure of your home (i.e., kitchen or bathroom remodeling) should always be completed by a professional licensed in that specific trade.



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## 9 Choosing Contractors Based on Price

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When choosing a contractor, don't just go with the cheapest. In an ideal world, the cheapest contractor would also be the one to provide the highest-quality work. But it doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes the phrase, "you get what you pay for" does ring true—you will get cheap materials and sloppy installation. In addition to different pricing, every company has different levels of quality and service, which includes longer or shorter completion times and completely different specifications. When comparing companies, make sure you receive a detailed set of project specifications, not just a rough "bid".

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## 10 Going Into a Project Without a Contract or Set Plan

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A detailed plan will help you stay on budget and on schedule. Typical remodeling projects are broken out into several phases, some of which can be longer or shorter and often overlapping. A good design + build firm will walk you through each phase and have a clear plan for completing each phase, from project feasibility meetings through the final walk through. Discuss work hours, parking, dumpster placement and access to your home. Ensure that proper protection will be in place for the floors and entryways. Discuss how the job site will be left each day. Discuss everything—leaving no stone, brick, or tile unturned.



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## 11 Not Setting a Payment Schedule

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You probably already guessed it, but this one's a big one. Make sure the payment schedule is detailed in the contract, beginning with the amount to be paid upfront. (Can't agree on an amount? Check with your state's contractors' licensing board for rules about the maximum deposit a contractor can ask for.) Installment payments that start after the project begins should correspond to completed phases of the project. To ensure work is completed to your satisfaction, leave 10% to be paid once your final punch list items are complete.

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## 12 Cutting Corners on Materials

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There are many lower cost alternatives that offer a look of luxury without breaking the bank. But there are some things you just can't scrimp on—like fixtures, and drawer hardware. Before you choose a material, consider the items that will get the most use—and then think of the nuisance level when they fail. Leaky faucets, and faucet handles that don't regulate water temperature correctly are not worth the money you saved in buying them. Add to that the higher water bills associated with leaks, and you might decide that some high-quality materials are worth the investment.



## AVOID THESE 8 MISTAKES IN THE DESIGN

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### 13 Ignoring Current Square Footage in Quest for a New Addition

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In today's world, more of anything is often perceived as better. Unless of course you're talking about debt, gray hair, and the almost unavoidable pounds we tend to pack on between Thanksgiving and the Super Bowl. But when it comes to adding space to your home, you can often get more without having to build a new addition. A good design + build firm can help you find ways to create space by redistributing the space you already have. Almost every kitchen design has wasted space, but this can be minimized with adequate planning and forethought. Rooms like attics, basements, and even porches can be remodeled to create additional living areas, while removal of an interior wall can create the illusion of more space.

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### 14 Hiring a Designer Unfamiliar with Your Home's Architecture

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Here's your goal: perform a successful remodel that doesn't look like a remodel. You're looking for harmony, not an opportunity to appear on the newest remodeling nightmares reality show. The styles and materials used in the remodel should match those of the original house design, otherwise the project can end up looking inappropriate or out of place. A design + build firm will consider the existing home and your remodeling goals and make a recommendation that works with both.



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## 15 Poor Lighting

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Sure, everything looks better with a little mood lighting. But that same lighting will do you no favors while you're chopping veggies in the kitchen, or getting dressed for work. And then who's to blame when you leave the house without noticing that large spot of toothpaste on your shirt? Lighting in your home can completely change the ambience, the colors and your mood. Be sure to install bathroom-rated lights over your sink and near your tub or shower. Evaluate work areas in your kitchen to determine spot-specific lighting needs and ensure you'll have sufficient lighting for common kitchen tasks. After all, when a room is well lit, your guests will be able to see and appreciate the hard work that went into creating it!

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## 16 Uncomfortable Spacing

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The discomfort and inconvenience of trying to use or share a tiny bathroom is comparable to trying to squeeze four linebackers into a Ford Fiesta. Sure, you can make it work. But wouldn't everyone be more comfortable in a SUV? While building codes mandate minimal spacing guidelines, these requirements don't take into account the embarrassment of trying to explain to a houseguest the best way to climb over the vanity in order to get into the shower. In areas such as the kitchen and bathroom, when it comes to space, more is better. To start your project off right, create an agreed upon list of 'must-haves' and "like-to-haves". Consult a designer for ideas on how to maximize every corner, while minimizing any discomfort.



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## 17 Undervaluing the Importance of Balancing Style with Trends

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Ultimately, your home should be a haven for you and your family. Limiting improvements to what might interest a future buyer is no way to enjoy your home. However, just because Pantone declared Radiant Orchid 'the color' of the year, you should probably think twice before dedicating an entire room to it. Of course you should decorate your home in a style that makes you feel comfortable. But don't make the mistake of decorating your home in only the latest trends because you think it will increase the value or make it more appealing to future buyers.

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## 18 Thinking Short Term

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The fastest way to run into trouble is to think about your remodeling project in the short-term. If you go through all the work of remodeling a room, you're not going to want to do it again before you sell your house. And, anticipating future needs can save you money in the long run. Before picking up a hammer, a design + build firm can walk you through all aspects of your remodel, helping you evaluate your needs, set goals, find inspiration and choose the right materials that will satisfy your needs now and in the future.



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## 19 Ignoring the Environment

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Even if you're not a tree hugger, don't make the mistake of starting a renovation project without some thought to sustainability. While green appliances and renovations may be more expensive, green upgrades can save you money over time, especially your utility bills. And, they'll increase the value of your home, with added features like solar heating. Other examples of energy efficient products include low-flow showerheads, auto-shut off faucets and high-efficiency toilets. You may also consider a grey water system or incorporate trash/recycling sorting bins into your kitchen design.

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## 20 Avoiding Professionals

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Ok, mistake #20 is very similar to mistake #1. But it's important enough to mention twice. Whether you're thinking about doing it yourself, or hiring your friend's cousin's kid's friend who just got a B+ in shop class, stop and consider the benefits of hiring a professional, especially when quality work and safety is of utmost importance. Professional designers stay on top of the latest trends, design ideas and manufacturer's details, and can help you identify your specific needs. They will also transform your needs into an efficient plan that is carefully managed to a specific schedule and budgetary constraints. When all is said and done, they simply make your life easier; and the value of their expertise and connections more than pays for itself.



Although this is a rather comprehensive list, these are just a few very important items to consider during a remodeling project. Know that you don't have to do it alone. Choosing the right remodeling contractor is likely the biggest factor in determining the success or stress of your remodeling project. Find comfort in working with a design + build firm that combines the design and construction experience into *one team with one goal—to design and build a home that you'll love.*

*Find your inspiration at  
MainStreet Design Build.*





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