

Home renovation checklist

Ask why?

Deciding why you're renovating is an important first step and according to leading architects the answer can greatly influence the end result.

"Ask whether it's to maximise the property's re-sale or to love the house you will be living in," says Jade Vidal of Melbourne's Bower Architecture. "That can really affect the decisions you make."

"It doesn't necessarily mean spending more money one way or the other, but it does mean that if you're going to be living in it you will design it for the things you love, and that can be very subjective."

Getting started

Half the challenge of a home renovation is getting started, and these days the technological wizardry once available only to architects and designers can be downloaded to a mobile phone. Just Google "home renovation apps".

You will find more than 10 apps ranging in price from free to a few dollars that will automatically create a budget, draw the rooms of your house, create a floor plan, add furniture and allow you to fly through your property and view it from every angle.

Domain also has a [free guide for DIY renovators](#) that takes you through the process of planning, budgeting and checking local building legislation and requirements.

Find the right builder

Choose a builder that specialises in extensions and renovations and talk to their previous clients to see if they were satisfied. Make sure that every aspect of the work to be done, including the type of materials to be used, is included in the final contract.

Check that the builder is a registered building practitioner for the type of work they will be doing. For major renovations, it's a good idea to get a building lawyer to review the building contract before you sign.

Victorian laws

Building regulations covering renovations vary between states. In Victoria, any structural work to a building must be done by a registered builder or tradesperson regardless of the cost of the work. You will also require a building permit.

If the total cost is more than \$5000, the builder must use a major domestic building contract even if the contract is split into several smaller amounts – for example, a pre-construction contract worth \$2000 and the main contract worth \$4000.

For work costing more than \$16,000, your builder must provide you with a current certificate of domestic building insurance for the project before taking a deposit and starting work. More advice can be found at www.consumer.vic.gov.au

NSW laws

Major reforms have been made this year to home building regulations in NSW where property extensions and renovation laws are governed by NSW Fair Trading.

Before signing anything, check online at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au to ensure the contractor's licence is current and valid for the work you want done.

When you finalise your renovation plans, you need to ensure you have the necessary approvals before work starts. The Fair Trading website also has information on this, as well as an online personal advice system.