



# ***Ten Tips for a Successful Remodel***

*by RLB Architecture's Richard Blumenberg, AIA, LEED AP*

**We've all heard the horror stories of remodeling projects gone wrong. Cost overruns, inexperienced contractors, unexpected delays — the list goes on. With over 30 successful years as a residential architect, here are my top ten tips for your next remodeling project:**

**1. *Don't undertake a remodel project hoping to save a rocky relationship.*** You'll be making many decisions during the design and construction phases of your project. If you and your partner are having trouble agreeing on things now, rest assured it won't get any easier agreeing on things like paint colors, cabinet styles, or lighting fixtures later.

**2. *Do your homework.*** Look through plenty of design and architecture books, shelter magazines, and interior design websites to find the style and features you want to incorporate into your remodel, and share what you like with your architect and designer.

**3. *Hire professionals with experience*** who have the specific skills, abilities, and knowledge required for your project. The last thing you want

is someone learning how to do something new on your home renovation.

**4. *Make sure you know who will be working on your project.*** Often, the person you initially meet with will not be the one working day-to-day on your remodel. Before signing an agreement, confirm who will be working with you. It's essential that you not only like them but also trust them.

**5. *Create a team for your project.*** Hire an architect, designer, and contractor who are like-minded and work well together. When rounding out your team, ask those you've already hired for

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recommendations or referrals. Chances are they have a list of go-to professionals they work well with and can recommend for your project.





Photo by Anthony Perez

**6. Make decisions in a timely manner.** If you make most of your selections before construction starts, you'll not only lock in the price, but you won't find yourself making rushed, last-minute decisions later. Putting off making decisions until later can delay delivery of products and materials like cabinets, tile, or plumbing fixtures, which will only delay construction.

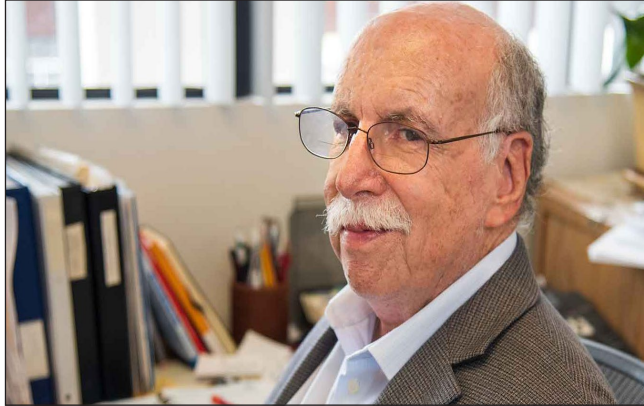
**7. Don't keep your budget a secret** — this is critical if you have a maximum amount of money you're willing to spend on your remodel. After the preliminaries and before starting on the working drawings, ask a contractor for a project estimate to see if you're within your budget. If your project needs redesigning to accommodate what you can afford, it's easier to do it now rather than later.

**8. Ask for samples and mock-ups to avoid any unpleasant surprises.** During construction, interpretations can vary about how to build a project. A mock-up will ensure that both your and your architect's vision for the project is realized.

**9. Start with a fixed bid for construction whenever possible.** If any unforeseen conditions are discovered that need addressing or changes to the work are required, make sure you approve an estimate for the cost and additional time *before* construction starts. The more you know now, the fewer surprises you'll encounter later.

**10. Finally, get lien releases** to ensure everyone who works on your remodel is paid. Believe it or not, if you've paid the contractor, but that contractor fails to pay his subcontractor or material

supplier, they can turn around and place a lien on your property to get payment from you. To obtain the right to lien, workers must send you a California 20-Day Preliminary Notice via certified mail to inform you they are on your project. To prevent this from happening to you, request lien releases for the material suppliers and subcontractors when you pay your contractor, and then ask for unconditional lien releases before the next payment is made.



*Photo by Eric Oxenberg*

Follow these ten tips, and you'll be better prepared for your next home remodel. While I can't promise you won't face some minor challenges along the way, I can assure you that by following my dos and don'ts, you'll experience a smoother process and a better result. Good luck!

#### *About the Author*

With over 30 years of experience in both the residential and commercial sectors, Richard Blumenberg, AIA, LEED AP, has primarily focused on high-end residential projects, including new home builds, remodels, additions, condo remodels, and spec houses for developers.



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