

DIY renos - tips and tricks to avoid disaster

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Renovations can add significantly to the value of your property, but they can also be fraught with danger: we've all heard the horror stories, and we know that just one wrong move could cost us thousands of dollars in rectification work.

It's a fact that Alexandra and her boyfriend Richard know only too well. They bought their first home in Bronte, Sydney in August 2007, and upon moving in they immediately began planning their extensive renovation.

"When we moved in, the property was totally unrenovated – it was very dark and depressing, with a damp bathroom and an enclosed, cramped kitchen," Alexandra explains.

They began ringing contractors immediately and set to work renovating the entire two-bedroom, one bathroom apartment from top to toe, and the end result was stunning – but Alexandra is the first to admit that they ran into plenty of stumbling blocks. Here, she shares their hiccups so you can learn from their mistakes when embarking on your own renovation.

Get it in writing

Always get the job quoted in writing, and include as much detail as possible. "One of our contractors said there was a variation to our plans, which would have cost us around \$2,000," Alexandra explains. "But because we had drawings and an agreed scope of works, and a written quotation from the contractor, we were able to prove that these variations were unfounded."

Be creative

When their new shower was installed, the couple were informed that they needed to replace the waste drainage pipes. Not only did this mean they would need access to the unit below, but the project was also estimated to cost around \$3-5,000 – money that Alexandra and Richard hadn't accounted for in their renovation budget.

"The plumbers said there were no other options, but unfortunately, the lady living below us was very uncooperative, so we knew there was no way she would let us into her flat," Alexandra says. "We also didn't have the spare money to fix the problem. So, we had to come up with an alternative solution."

Richard did some homework and designed a different draining solution, which cost a fraction of the amount quoted by the plumber. Today, "the shower works perfectly – *and* we didn't need access to the unit below".

Know what you're working with

The couple painted all of the door jams and frames with white enamel. "It's an entirely different to paint to acrylic, which you would use on the wall and ceiling, as it slides down the wall if you apply too much," Alexandra explains. "After a while as it's drying it goes sticky, so you absolutely must not reapply – which is something you can do with ordinary paint. I made this mistake and the frames went streaky and bumpy and the more I painted, the worse it looked." In the end, she had to strip down two frames and do the job again. "It was a lesson learned, but frustrating to find out the hard way!"

Assume nothing

Near the end of the renovation project, the couple had Caesar stone kitchen bench tops installed. "The man who installed them cut the stone to fit in our flat, which created huge amounts of dust," Alexandra explains. "We assumed that he would cut it in his workshop, and we should have insisted that he do there rather than allowing him to cut in our apartment." Instead, they had to wash the newly-painted walls and other furniture, because everything was covered in a fine film of Caesar stone dust.