

HOMES RESALE & RENTAL

THE UPBEAT

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OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/HOMES

THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION E

DOLLAR SMART RENOS

Six wise steps to getting the job done without breaking the bank

BY PATRICK LANGSTON

Bitten by the spring home renovation bug? A quick coat of paint won't break the bank, but bigger renovations can get out of hand, leaving you with a glittering new kitchen or a to-die-for deck, but a scary pile of bills as well. Here's how the pros advise keeping renos affordable.

1 PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

"I never do a job where the client says, 'Just go ahead and fix it,'" says Paul Denys, owner of Ottawa's award-winning design-build firm Denys Builds Designs (www.denys.ca). "I want the client engaged from the start." That means you should be researching, planning and budgeting at least some of the project yourself.

Want a new bathroom? Spend a day checking out developers' model homes: builders know exactly how to get the most bang for the buck, and you'll have a more tangible sense of what could work in your own home than by just leafing through home decor magazines.

Shopping for kitchen fixtures? Visit big box stores, but also higher-end plumbing centres, and specialty kitchen and bath suppliers. You might discover that \$69.99 faucet set isn't really such a bargain when you measure price against longevity, ease of use and simple good looks.

Speaking of visiting, the Ottawa Home & Garden Show at Lans-



GORDON KING PHOTOGRAPHY

downe Park this weekend brims with exhibits and ideas for your reno project. And a trip to <http://home-design-software-review.toptenreviews.com> will help you choose from 10 home design software packages for renovation planning.

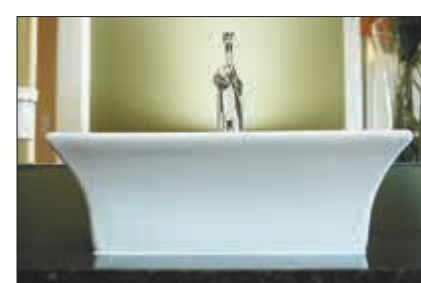
Other resources include free, on-line renovation guides from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/renoho/index.cfm) and from RenoMark (www.renomark.ca/ottawa/get_renoguide.asp). RenoMark is an industry-operated organization dedicated to raising the customer satisfaction bar in the home renovation market. Its free services include a directory of local contractors who have signed on to RenoMark's code of ethics and practices.

See SMART on PAGE E2



GORDON KING

Renovator Paul Denys, left, saved money for his client by keeping the existing flooring and cabinetry in kitchen, top, then added a wow factor with a new Corian countertop, sink and fixtures, finishing off with a glass-tiled backsplash. The butcher block island provides a cooking and neat dining area for family.



WHAT THEY GOT IN ROCKCLIFFE MEWS



LOCATION: 26 Borealis Cres.
FEATURES: Three-bedroom, three-bathroom home, bright rooms, hardwood floors, main-floor family room, eat-in kitchen and a fully fenced and landscaped yard.
ASKING PRICE: \$399,900
SELLING PRICE: \$410,000
DAYS ON MARKET: Five days
WORD FROM THE SALES REP/BROKER: "There's very little turnover in that neighbourhood in newer homes," says Gerard Windle, broker with Keller Williams Ottawa Realty, who notes that an open house attracted 40 people and then three

offers, all above \$400,000. Rockcliffe Mews is located near the Vanier Parkway. "People love this neighbourhood and they just don't move from here — it's becoming known as a pine-box neighbourhood."
WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT THE 'HOOD: Minutes from downtown, shopping and a movie theatre nearby at SilverCity, close to La Cité Collégiale and numerous elementary schools.

If you've recently sold a home contact, Jennifer Campbell at jcps@sympatico.ca

Cautionary tales

Forget the lonely image, appliance repairmen deal with scorched hair, the girlfriend's panties and far too many soggy socks

BY PEDRO ARRAIS

Forget the image of the bored Maytag appliance repairman who spends long, lonely days without a single service call. The reality is that the life of an appliance repairman is anything but boring.

While the Maytag advertisement made for a great commercial, most appliance-repair companies say their days are very busy, with thousands of house calls in a year.

A typical appliance repairman usually attends between four and a dozen service calls every day.

They get to fish missing socks, lost G.I. Joe dolls and loose change from washers, remove bra wires from dryers and even put out the occasional fire.

Doug Knowles, owner of Doug's Dependable Service in Victoria, recalls the time he went to a house to service a broken clothes washer in



Actor Gordon Jump, a.k.a. 'Ol' Lonely, the Maytag Repair Man.'

a basement early one morning. "The height of the ceiling in the basement was low," Knowles says. "While the lady of the house was explaining the problem to me she

backed up against a light bulb hanging from the ceiling. The bulb explodes with a poof and sets her hair on fire."

The woman had just used hair-spray and the exploding light bulb had ignited the fumes. Knowles quickly doused the flames and the lady was shocked, but unharmed.

While he hasn't had to put out any fires since, Knowles has found and removed numerous items from the motors of washing machines. Missing socks are the most common item he finds, but he once retrieved a rosary from the innards of a machine.

Sometimes losing and finding pieces of clothing can be inconvenient. At other times, it can be more serious.

See TALES on PAGE E2

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HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL



PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Hardwood flooring is a smart renovation because it pays off for easy, daily living and the investment is usually recouped when it's time to sell.

Smart: Easy plan to affordable renovation

Continued from PAGE E1

2 KA...CHING, KA...CHING

When it comes to costs, renos are all over the map. Some folks spend \$10,000 on a kitchen upgrade, while others fork out five times that. There is a guide to renovation costs at www.ontariocontractors.com/costs.htm, but it's rough. It says installing wood floors, for example, can run from \$5.50 to \$12 a square foot.

One way to keep renovation costs in line is to dress up a room with accessories instead of splurging on a whole new wardrobe. Flooring, plumbing and cabinetry can be very expensive, so work with what you've already got. Denys has given tired kitchens a fresh look by adding an island, new countertop and other goodies but not touching the cabinets or floor, for example.

He adds that a cost-conscious renovator knows tricks like stealing strips of hardwood from a closet to patch a damaged floor elsewhere in the room; less expensive wood can then be laid in the closet where it will never be noticed.

Homeowners overspend on renos in two main ways, says Ottawa's Ren Molnar, a former contractor and co-host of the popular national radio talk show *Renovations Cross Canada*.

Novice do-it-yourselfers typically dream too big, he says. They'll start off just finishing the basement, but soon find themselves awash in a sea of work and debt because they add a bathroom, a granite countertop for

the bar, and other frills.

When it comes to hiring a contractor, says Molnar, people often fail to put exactly what they want in a contract or change their mind mid-project. Then they're shocked at the size of the bill. "They'll say, 'Oh, while you're here ...' Well, hey folks, this truck and my equipment and my time didn't come as a Christmas present."

3 SURPRISES AND THE TAXMAN

Denys says that if you're renovating an older home, you should expect the unexpected. Not only have building codes changed — which may mean parts of your home are no longer up to snuff — but the house may already have endured sloppy renovations. Undoing others' work can be time-consuming and costly, as can discovering rot and the other depredations of age.

For these and other reasons, the experts suggest allowing for a 10 to 15 per cent cost overrun on any renovation.

And don't forget the taxman. While your municipal property tax assessment won't increase if you're simply upgrading windows or redoing a bathroom, tacking on an addition will likely spike your home's assessed value and your tax bill.

Adding insult to injury is the 13 per cent harmonized sales tax (HST) slated to become law July 1. The new tax blends the existing eight per cent provincial sales tax (PST) and the five per cent goods and services tax

(GST). But because the HST shifts part of the tax burden from contractor to client, homeowners will pay up to eight per cent more tax on renovation projects under the new scheme. That's up to \$800 more on a \$10,000 renovation.

To fend off a rush of homeowners trying to avoid the increase by ordering renovation projects on June 30, the government has introduced a May 1 clause. It basically stipulates that projects subject to HST ordered on or after May 1 must be completed by July 1 to avoid the HST.

4 FINANCING YOUR RENO

With the demise of the federal Home Renovation Tax Credit two months ago, Ontario homeowners are back to paying for the entirety of many renovations themselves. Energy efficiency projects, detailed below, are the exception.

CMHC provides a good overview of financing options, including credit lines and mortgage refinancing, at www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/moloin/moloin_020.cfm.

Banks offer a variety of financing arrangements that can include credit plans for home renovations. RBC Royal Bank (www.rbcroyalbank.com), for example, offers a Homeline Plan that blends mortgage financing, a car line of credit and a general line of credit at an overall interest rate of 5.41 per cent. Retailers like Home Depot and Home Hardware sometimes offer interest-free credit on renovation materials for six months or longer if you sign up for a company credit card. Just remember, those hefty credit card interest rates will kick in if you don't pay the balance when it's due.

5 PAYBACK TIME

Along with savings from lower energy consumption, the federal

ecoenergy program (www.ecoaction.gc.ca) and matching provincial grants can put money back in your wallet for energy efficient renovations. Installing Energy Star windows in Ontario, for example, means a total grant of \$80 per unit.

You should also recoup a portion of renovation costs if you sell your home, says Denys. He points to a Remodelling magazine report (www.remodeling.hw.net/2008/costsvvalue/national.aspx), which shows, for example, that a deck addition that costs \$10,601 has a resale value of \$8,676, meaning you'd recoup 81.8 per cent of your cost (all U.S. dollars). If you remodelled a home office, however, you'd get back only 54.6 per cent of your outlay.

Denys suggests replacing major appliances more than 10 or 15 years old as part of your renovation. For one thing, new products are more energy and cost efficient. For another, you don't want to discover when the old fridge gives out five years from now that a new one doesn't fit in your renovated kitchen.

6 FALSE ECONOMIES

Final word of advice: if you're thinking about slashing costs by hiring a black market contractor — someone who's unlicensed or charges no GST — don't. They typically carry no insurance, offer no warranties and too often don't know what they're doing.

Molnar recalls a homeowner whose under-the-table roofer claimed to have been trained in a British apprenticeship program. He laid the first course of shingles incorrectly, rot set in, and the homeowner wound up having the whole job redone.

"By that time," says Molnar, "the guy was probably back in London."

Next ACT

Theatre veteran Morris Panych is in constant motion while renovating his 90-year-old home in Toronto

BY JACK KOHANE

Though his lifelong occupation has been creating brilliant works for the stage, screen and television, writer and director Morris Panych says that what's preoccupying his mind lately is renovating his semi-detached, 1920s home in Toronto.

"Renos are a state of constant transition, especially in an old house," says the fiftysomething former actor, who has appeared in more than 50 stage plays and numerous television and film productions. "There are many things to look out for in an old house, so many that you really can't worry about them all. The key is to love your house."

Though most of his plays are black comedies, the home he shares with his life partner, Ken MacDonald, is bright and cheery thanks to "a very long two-month reno" of the main floor. Once dark and dungeon-like, the kitchen had old appliances and odd angles that made the space difficult to navigate, Panych says.

"The first thing we did was remove the wall dividing the kitchen from the dining room," says MacDonald, a set and costume designer whose playful collection of deer heads is displayed throughout the home. He has also fashioned sets for Panych, including his productions of *7 Stories*, *Parfumerie* and the upcoming Toronto production of *Art*. MacDonald also renders the architectural drawings of the designs the couple create for their home renovations.

A drab, dank and dinky mudroom that had once connected the kitchen to the rear door and outside patio was removed. It was replaced by an

enclosed addition with full-length French doors crowned by transoms. The doors lead out to the new cedar deck and barbecue area.

"Now daylight floods the kitchen and dining area. It's perfect for entertaining, which we love to do," MacDonald says. "The new open-concept living space — extending from the front living room to the rear doors — affords good flow throughout the main floor area. There's an airy feel, though the house itself is just 15 feet wide."

The open configuration also encourages conversations — and in such a pretty space: The U-shaped granite kitchen countertop is made of scratch- and stain-resistant Silverstone quartz. White Bombo barstools with chrome bases and footrests are chic perches for family and friends.

The kitchen also has a countertop gas range, an AEG Competence oven and an AEG Electrolux microwave. "Having them built-in frees up worktop space and gives the kitchen a streamlined look," Panych says.

The cabinet doors are MDF veneer, are a cinch to clean, and look smart. The cabinetry is all "cheap IKEA," Panych says. "We chose these cupboards because they come with drawers. That way, you can store and access utensils right to the back."

Panych points out that he's fine with cabinetry that isn't top-of-the-line. "A new kitchen with all the latest gadgets and accessories can cost as much as \$200,000. Our remodel is a fraction of that, and it has proven a good, functional alternative to custom-made."

But he advises hiring an expert for installation, especially for older



PHOTOS BY BRETT GUNLOCK, NATIONAL POST

Big windows bring in light, while a pair of deer heads add an impish edge to the Toronto home of theatre veteran Morris Panych and Ken MacDonald. The renovation took more than two months.



Ken MacDonald, left, and Morris Panych turned their dank, dark semi-detached home into a series of bright, sunny rooms.

houses. Over time, his 80-year-old house has shifted. Since the walls in the kitchen are not straight and the floors not level, he says aligning the cabinets and countertop would have been a nightmare without a skilled carpenter.

Asked if constant construction makes living in an old house burdensome, Panych replies: "Our philosophy is to put our money into our home. With our houses here and in Vancouver, we were advised not to buy them. But we loved them when we saw them, and to us a house has always been about living in and not investing in. The key issue for us is to create quality in our home, and quality in our lives."

The quality of his artistic output is equally undeniable. One of Canada's most prolific contemporary playwrights and two-time Governor General's Literary Award winner, Panych has written more than 25 works for the stage and has directed about 100 productions.

"In an old house almost anything can be fixed, except the location; but you can learn to love the location, too," Panych says. "A house is like a relationship; don't get in over your head, and don't sweat the quirky things. If you love it, you can change the rest, or try to. And, oh yes, buy a good screwdriver."

NATIONAL POST

Tales: It's not smart to poach fish in dishwasher

Continued from PAGE E1

"I once had a customer call after returning from a week-long business trip," says Joe Lessard, owner of Lansdowne Appliance in Victoria.

"Her washer was full of water and wouldn't wash or drain. Her husband had done laundry while she was away. I figured something was stuck in the pump.

"I removed a pair of women's underwear from the pump and left them on top of the washer and proceeded to reassemble the washer.

"When I showed her what had plugged the pump she exclaimed 'What the heck is this?' and rushed out of the laundry room. I heard her yelling and screaming on the phone in the next room.

"A few months later I was doing a call at a neighbour's house, and found out the original customers were getting divorced.

"It turns out the husband was having an affair and his girlfriend was doing her laundry while the wife was away."

Guilty spouses wishing to hide evidence and frugal homeowners looking for ways to save a few dollars sometimes take it upon themselves to fix an appliance.

The latter take on the chore when confronted with the \$70 fee for a service call and the first half-hour of a technician's time. Their confidence is buoyed by the many do-it-yourself books and videos on the market promising simple fixes. However, many overzealous homeowners neglect to take the time to study and follow the instructions given — with predictable results.

"I once arrived at a client's house and got handed a bucket with about 500 screws," says Abatis. "The gentleman had taken apart the appliance, removing 20 things instead of just the one part that was broken. Instead of a 15-minute repair, it became a 45-minute job to put everything back together."

Newer machines are more complicated. While some machines are repairable, many new machines aren't built as sturdily as appliances in our parent's time. Metals are thinner and mechanicals flimsier, says Don Copp, manager of SQ Services.

'I removed a pair of women's underwear from the pump. It turns out the husband was having an affair and the girlfriend was doing her laundry.'

One retired appliance repairman tells of people using appliances for purposes they were never intended for. Earl Mycock of Sooke says it really isn't a good idea to poach fish in the dishwasher. "And don't use it to wash underwear," he says, adding that misguided attempts to wash small items of clothing in a dishwasher can result in damage to the garment — the fabric can break down and bits of elastic can plug the drain.

Abatis, a 10-plus year veteran at appliance repair also warns of one preventable disaster that happens every holiday season.

"Don't use the self-clean function on an oven just before the holidays," he advises. The self-cleaning cycle is stressful on ovens, with temperatures often reaching up to 500 degrees Celsius. It is enough to push an old appliance on its last legs over the edge. If that happens just before the annual Christmas dinner, it may be a week or two before it can get fixed.

"People get the urge to clean up the oven ahead of guests arriving. But if the oven packs it in, the homeowner may be faced with having to cook the turkey in the barbecue or microwave instead."

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