

# WALKER BUILD



## Before You Build

The sacredness of home is something that is very close to me. When I was a young boy, all the houses I grew up in were eventually demolished by developers and replaced with McMansions or subdivisions. I've never had a family home to return to and I think that's made my approach and appreciation for the concept of 'home' all the greater. Now, after a career in the performing arts, I've found myself transferring those soft skills and aesthetics to building and renovating beautiful homes for young families.

## Concept

There are a few things to consider before embarking on a major home renovation. The obvious is budget, but factors such as time, energy and emotion are just as important in my view so it's important to set yourself up for success. We've all heard horror stories of when renovations go bad. These make for great TV but I promise you, you don't want to be the star of that show. My simple advice is this: get it done right, the first time. The key is thorough *planning*.

Start early and spend time daydreaming about your new home. Collect inspiration photos that match your vision so you can share these with your designer and builder. Think about your 'whys' of the build, which will ultimately inform the 'hows.' This will clarify your 'must haves' for the project. If you entertain a lot, how might the kitchen flow to accommodate guests, or is it more of a chef's kitchen, or both? Where is the kids' space and how do they use it? How might this change as they grow older? Often overlooked, but critically important, where is the parent's refuge in the home and how might it function?

## Design

When ready, reach out to a builder. Preferably, that introduction comes through a trusted reference. A good builder will be able to guide you to the right architect or designer. Often times, when a client engages a designer first, little attention is paid to the budget because construction costing is not something they do. A builder will be able to keep these costs in check and plan accordingly throughout the design process.

Share your goals for the project and inspiration photos. The clearer the ideas, the easier it is for an architect to hit the bullseye. The less time spent in revisions means less costs and quicker to permitting and construction. In other words, know what you want. If you don't know, then be honest about it and discuss what's not working for you in the current space. This at least

begins the creative process for the architect and builder to solve those problems in design. Moving lines on a piece of paper is much less expensive than moving walls in the midst of construction.

When selecting who you wish to work with, remember that this will be a long term intimate relationship for the next year of your life, at a minimum. A great builder is a people person, serving others, who understands that relationships are the life blood in home building. They are highly organized, responsive, efficient with their time and yours, responsible, accountable and impeccable with their word.

## Build

Once permits are in hand and construction is ready to commence, best practice is to have the home's furnishings in storage. This means your items will not be subject to the dust and potential damage that goes along with an active construction site. Make sure everyone is clear on the expectations, including payment schedules and timelines.

I recommend walking the construction site biweekly to keep an eye on progress. It's best to inform your builder of this in case there are planned trades or dangers on site. Ultimately, the builder and yourself ought to have the same goals: on time and on budget built to agreed specifications and materials. There are tens of thousands of details required to execute a major renovation and if one little aspect is missed, it can have significant consequences down the road. Do your best to help catch those details as no one is infallible and great builders are busy for a reason.

Planning is critical to a smooth project. A well planned build is half built. A great builder has a plan but is adaptable. The plan will change and flexibility is key. A builder with strong relationships can have a problem solved within hours keeping the project moving. The old saying is 'you get what you pay for.' This is true. An upfront investment with a builder or trade who will do the job with expertise and efficiency is always more cost effective than doing it twice, or worse, missing a critical detail in structural or waterproofing resulting in a catastrophic event. Do it once, right.

Happy Building!

Kevin Walker  
Walker Build Ltd