

For those who have never remodeled before, learning where to start can be a daunting task. You may have chatted with some friends about their experience and learned who they recommend (or who they definitely wouldn't recommend) based on their experience. This information will prove helpful when you are ready to select a contractor or builder but the very first step is actually the longest phase of your remodel and ideally happens before you even pick up the phone to get in touch with a builder/contractor. This is the all important Planning Phase! This article will take you through some vital steps to consider during the planning phase and well before you "start" your remodel.

Step 1: Identify your objectives & Scope of work. You can do so by answering some simple questions like: What do I want to accomplish with this remodel? How do I use the space? What could I add or take away from this space that would make it work better for my family? Is my goal to increase space, functionality, style, resale value or a combination of these things? Make a list of your answers so you don't lose sight of why you decided to remodel in the first place. From there you can determine specific aspects of your remodel. Be specific and make another list of all areas that need attention.

Step 2: Determine your Budget: If you are like many, you have no idea what a project like yours would go for so you may be tempted to skip this step and go straight to getting a quote from a remodeler, but that's not the best idea. A lot goes into providing an estimate for a project, on your part and on the part of the builder/remodeler and if you don't have some of these preliminary steps complete it can be a waste of both their and your time. We recommend starting with Remodeling magazine's Cost vs. Value report which will give you the average cost of a number of projects both nationally and by a specific region. It will also give a "higher end" cost of the same project in some cases so you understand the range of cost dependent upon your choices for products & finishes. Once you determine a general cost you'll need to determine where you will be getting the funds. Is it readily available, or will you need to borrow from a bank or from some of your current investments?

Step 3: Start Dreaming: Now that your objectives and a realistic budget are set you can begin determining the types of products and finishes you would like to incorporate in your remodel (this is the fun part!). You can start the search for some inspirational images that will help your design professionals and remodeler better understand your style preferences. This will also allow them to better advise you on how those choices will affect your budget. You can create a custom ideabook on Houzz so all of your ideas are in one place. This will make it easier to share your vision with your design & building professionals once the time comes.

Step 4: Choose your Design & Building Professionals. Dependent upon the size and scope of your remodel you may need to contact both an architect & remodeler. If your project includes building a new structure, an addition, or major structural changes to your home, an architect should be your first decision. Here is where your friends advice may come in handy, ask around about who they have used or know has a good reputation in the community. You can also look to a local trade association like NAHB.org or NARI.org to find reputable companies that will have all of the proper licenses and credentials necessary. Remodelers and Architects often times have good working relationships with other professionals in their industry that do the same caliber of work and could make a valuable recommendation as well. If your friend loved working with a specific remodeling contractor, they may be a good resource for an architect referral, and if they already have a good working relationship with your architect, your remodeling project will have a better chance of being a success.

Step 5: Leave the Rest to the Professionals. Now that you've done your part to ensure that you've planned all of the details of your remodel, including selecting the right professionals for the job, you can leave the rest to them. They'll walk you through the design and final planning phases, permitting and the other specifics that you will need to know before the project begins. Make sure you keep really good communication through the rest of the design & planning phase so you are well informed about how their specific process works and what your role in that process will be. A well planned project makes for a much smoother and faster remodeling process and will help you make your dreams of a newly improved home a reality, without the headaches!