



SCALED-BACK RENOS CAN BE WARM, GREEN... AND COOL



by Mark Cooper

Everyone's gloomy about the markets and their financial futures.

But, it's more than worthwhile to note, Warren Buffet is buying. The billionaire Oracle of Omaha knows that you invest for the future, not for the present.

Everyone who undertakes a home renovation is certainly investing in the future, given the time it takes from initial planning until you celebrate the completion.

Even if you just want to enjoy next summer on a larger deck, you have to start now. And for major renovations, you should plan on at least nine months from the time you commit until you move back in.

That timeline includes a month to find yourself a good contractor, another month or two to get a designer on board and come up with plans, two or as many as three months to get permits in place, and then three to six months for demolition, building and finishing.

Right now, with so much uncertainty in the air, people are tending to scale back their renovation plans. Those who were chatting with me a few months ago about adding a floor to their house or doubling their space have been calling back lately to discuss options for just a kitchen and bath reno.

Good thing that there is a lot they can do with a mid-sized renovation. And that not only will they

control their costs, there's many ways their reno will wind up saving them money. And, as a bonus, current technology will not only help them be more comfortable, it will make their home more environmentally sustainable – something that is now becoming cool.

Plumbing can be an important part of kitchen and bath work. It's a great time to consider instant hot water. Used in Europe and Asia for some time, tankless water heaters are finally becoming a regular feature of new construction in North America.

You have to pay a fair bit more initially, but after that you're no longer shelling out fuel or electricity costs to keep a tank of water warm all day, every day – when you're at work or gone for vacation.

Heated floors can sound like a luxury. But they allow you to focus your home heat when and where you want it. All home heating, whether it's forced air or any other kind, should be on a timer. A programmable thermostat lets you decide when you need to heat your home, rather than trying to remember to turn the temperature up or down during the day.

Heated floors take that a step further. A heated floor in the bathroom, for example, can be timed to give you the warmth you want during your morning shower, without using up any other energy for that room until you're home in the evening. You don't have to heat up the rest of your home just to be toasty when you're towelng off.

In one recent reno, I noticed that the client had converted all his lights to low-energy fluorescents. As well, he avoided turning them on. So, for his home office and his bathroom, so we agreed that skylights might be an option.

Now, his work space and bathing area are flooded with natural, healthy light during the day – and he's quite happy with the reduced energy consumption. And don't worry: skylight technology has done away with concerns about leaks.

There are many other options for those who want to improve their homes without breaking their banks, while reducing their future fuel and electricity costs... and at the same time showing concern for the environment.

In the next issue, we'll talk more about these, including such things as great-looking flooring that doesn't contribute to Amazon deforestation... and more. We may have some news about the Green Building Challenge's 10 winners who will be getting free technical assistance with renovations focused on energy, water, waste and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

In the meantime, you may want to take in the Green Building workshop Thursday evening, Dec. 4 at the Sustainable Building Centre on Granville Island. www.sustainablebuildingcentre.com 604.682.5960

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