



TO SET NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD, FIRST DEFINE RENOVATION 'QUALITY'



by Mark Cooper

I've never met a builder who didn't swear their work was all about quality. But if they all delivered quality, Mike wouldn't have his huge Holmes On Homes show all about renovation disasters.

The Q-word is never far from the lips of most people who are looking at doing a major home renovation on the North Shore. But only a very lucky homeowner gets a truly high quality renovation without both defining that quality and recruiting the skill and experience that's needed to produce it.

CLARITY OF GOALS

I'll happily work with clients whose goal is "to do a renovation." But I'm much happier when homeowners are clear about what they want to achieve with a renovation. And so are they.

It may be all about home value, short-term. Or it may involve planning accommodation for the next generation. It could be about making a house wheelchair-friendly. The goal may be to enlarge for a growing family, or to create a home focused on entertaining friends.

Defining your renovation goals clearly takes some time and effort, but only by being able to compare results with your aims will you be able to feel satisfied years later that your efforts yielded real quality.

My happiest clients have goals that include setting a standard for their neighbourhood. Some haven't cared much about a showy exterior. Some have. Maybe it's the kitchen or bath, maybe the new deck, perhaps the rearrangement of rooms. Sometimes it's the

complete remodeling of the entire house.

Whatever the focus, homeowners who have a commitment to doing something really well usually get just that. And they get to have the pride that comes with being the best. (And so does their builder.)

DESIGN EXPERTISE

You're the homeowner and the boss of your renovation. Your tastes rule. If you're smart, though, you'll find a designer or architect who can help you educate your taste.

For example, rockwork can make an exterior beautiful, and "peel-and-stick" facing material can be a good option. But done wrong – using rock types and colours like pastels that are not seen in nature on the North Shore – it can be hideous. When there's a great designer involved, you'll just notice how a home looks like it belongs here.

Look for a designer who can show you a big portfolio of renovated homes that you'd be proud to own. Try to find one who's worked a lot on the North Shore, with a broad understanding of our viewscapes, noise sources, neighbourhood characteristics, slopes, soils, zoning, by-laws... etc.

There are many ways to seek that expertise. One of the best is to find a builder who works consistently with at least one or two top North Shore designers.

EXPERIENCE

Even the finest materials and the most refined choice of colours and details won't give you real

quality if the people who put it all together don't have solid experience. That includes the general contractor and all the trades who'll need to be involved.

The growth of construction activity in recent years has a downside. With demand exceeding supply, there's more room for people with limited skill and experience to present themselves as general contractors. At the same time, even experienced contractors are harder pressed to get the best trades and crafts to work their jobs.

The only real way to ensure the people who build for you are going to create lasting quality is to demand proof they've done it before... a lot. A good general contractor will be able to show you fine renovations and refer you to satisfied clients... from more than just last year.

And the person you want to oversee the job will be able to tell you – probably brag to you – about the skill and experience of the craftspeople and trades who regularly work on those jobs. It makes sense: the skilled people who can do quality work tend to enjoy the chance to do it, and they'll make themselves available for a contractor who's known for quality-driven renovation projects.

Re-creating your home should be immensely satisfying. If you define and demand quality throughout a major renovation, it will be. You'll be the example others use when they think about the best.

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