



**BEFORE:** This kitchen was dark and dreary.



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PHOTOS TIM MCGHIE

## Renovation nightmares

### Don't skip the 'no-brainer' pre-planning

**R**enovations can be many people's worst nightmare.

They can temporarily pull couples apart during moments of insanity, and completely take over their lives. But they don't have to — it's all in your approach. As a designer who's out on construction sites all the time, I always get excited every time I walk into a new demolition site, or when I see walls coming down, home layouts evolving and improving. I just focus on my vision and the end result ... The rest is just a means to an end.

When I first met my clients for a recent kitchen renovation, their main mandate was to have a more open concept for their kitchen and family room. They wanted more light coming in the kitchen, more counter space to cook and entertain, more storage, more seating if possible, and even a bar area. They wanted something neutral, elegant but cosy, warm and with a very subtle country chic flare. My team and I gave them that and more!

We broke down the main wall separating the family room and kitchen and reconfigured the location of the fridge and stove. We more than doubled the island size and put the sink in the middle, which makes the area more functional to cook and clean while facing people in the family room. Extra storage was created under the island, and by extending the cabinets a little longer on

the back wall we were able to add a bar fridge that was high on the wish list.

More illumination by way of pot lights, pendants and a wrought iron and smoky crystal hanging chandelier really added a touch of class and a little bit of rustic at the same time.

One of my favourite elements in the space was the custom banquette window seating area we had designed. I love doing bench seating in eating areas, as it allows to push the table closer to the wall, thereby giving more space around. They're a great statement in the room, not to mention the fun kids have squeezing themselves in the back.

In general, there are certain guidelines you should try to follow to help you keep your sanity during a renovation. Here are my top five tips:

**1. Create a plan:** Start by designing a scheme, a budget, a vision of what you would like on your wish list and write it all down.

**2. Establish a budget:** It may seem like an obvious thing to do, but you'd continuously be surprised at how many people skip this step. It's important to sit with your spouse and discuss what your spending comfort level will be. Whatever it is, add a 10% minimum

contingency overage. One of the biggest stresses during a reno is incurred additional costs. You want to be prepared and ready.

**3. Source out your trades:** There are many trades and resources out there — it's easy to get overwhelmed. This is the part that you really want to do your research on — not only on what they say they can do, but what they have done, their credentials, testimonials, reputation, etc. Cost is important, but never go for the cheapest option, as there is a reason they say "you get what you pay for." I've run into many instances where contractors just walked off the job site!

**4. Follow a time table:** Try to get dates and timelines from your contractor that you can write down and follow up with. Inquire about what is scheduled to be done weekly, and ensure tasks are kept on track. This will also help alleviate some unnecessary stress down the road.

**5. Follow your design scheme:** Ideally when I work on renovations, I like to try to hammer in as many elements as possible in the same day. I do this not only to be efficient, but also because it's fresh in your mind and makes it easier to make a decision.

For example, I would take my clients to a countertop manufacturer to get inspired by a beautiful slab of granite or quartz or marble. From there, I would take them to a tile showroom to select a backsplash. Since we have the main elements selected, choosing wall colours from the different shades of the selected finishes is now a breeze.

In the case of this kitchen project, the overall design was actually inspired by the fabric used as window valences, with a creamy yellow base and different shades of teals, blues and soft green that was picked up in the accessories throughout.

The fresh yellow colour in the background and whimsical fun and fresh pillows make for a very bright, airy, and happy kitchen the family truly enjoys everyday.

*Designer Catherine-Lucie Horber is the principal of Royal Interior Design Ltd., providing decorating, staging and renovating services for both small and full scale residential projects throughout the GTA, and known for creating elegant and affordable design solutions tailored to suit different lifestyles. [royalinteriordesign.ca](http://royalinteriordesign.ca)*