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paint, cabinets, light fixtures, flooring and much more.

During the planning and building of her family room, Greenberg hired three independent professionals: an architect, an interior designer and a contractor.

She has done so again for her fourth renovation, a second floor addition built over the garage. Just completed, it involved enlarging the washroom just off the master bedroom to include a large wardrobe, make-up area and computerized jacuzzi.

Greenberg sees both advantages and disadvantages to using full-service companies.

"I guess you could save money if you went to an all-inclusive design/contract/architectural firm," she concedes. "The only thing is, if you do it my way, you're being protected from all ends.

"If you hire all three separately, the architect will watch the contractor for you, and the designer will watch both the contractor and the architect. Each one will know someone independent is watching and that they can't fall asleep on the job." She cautions that if the architect and/or designer come from the same firm as the contractor, shortcuts may be taken of which the client is not aware.

Greenberg also points out that hiring three independent professionals will lead to fresh ideas and solutions from many different angles. This may suit you and your project better in the long run than hiring a full-service renovator.

If Greenberg's method seems too complicated, but you still wish to retain the services of more than one professional team, a combination of the two approaches may be the answer.

Most large contractors, even those who offer full service, will accept building projects already blueprinted by an outside architect. If you want your renovator to do everything but the electrical work—which you promised to your brother-in-law, Bernie—Sawatsky says that would be fine as well.

Tracking down a renovator

The choice of a renovator/contractor is one that must be taken only after careful deliberation and a great amount of research—or you could end up like our friends Gladys and George, with a bathtub full of broken tile.

We all know the classic renovation horror story. A couple contracts a firm to build an addition onto their house. The building firm begins by tearing down the back wall and ripping off part of the roof. The very next day they go out of business, and the couple is left with a very large—and expensive—hole where the kitchen window used to be.

"People should always call the Better Business Bureau *before* signing with a contractor," Tuz cautions. The Bureau receives about 100 complaints a year about home renovators. Tuz says of the many cases piled on his desk (of which "a bathtub full of tiles" is one) that they can keep you "in stitches in one sense and tears in another."

By calling the Bureau first, you will be able to ascertain a number of important facts. Chief among these are: how long the company has been in business, if there have ever been any complaints launched against the outfit and, if so, how these complaints were dealt with and resolved.

If the Bureau has no information available on a certain company, they will ask you to call back in 10 working days. By that time, their crack team of investigators will have gathered the information needed to judge the calibre and reputation of the company in question.

Because a firm has not been around very long does not mean you should not deal with it. The problem is that it may not have many assets as yet. Therefore, if the unthinkable happens and you *do* end up in court, there would be no assets from which you could collect compensation. If you still choose to use such a young firm, Tuz suggests you sign the contract with an individual rather than a company; a company may not have any assets, but a person certainly will.

If you don't know of any contractors personally, this is a good time to talk to your neighbors. Chances are they have had some renovations done to their own homes, or know someone who has. If they'll let you, go see their homes and the work done to them. If you like what you see, ask them to recommend someone. (Greenberg found all her people through word-of-mouth and personal referrals.)

If you are the first on your block to renovate and cannot take advantage of neighborly advice, call the Toronto Home Builders' Association (THBA) and ask for their membership list.

Founded in 1921, the association offers professional and technical workshops to its members. It is dedicated to upholding and improving the standards of both new residential construction and home renovation throughout the Toronto area. THBA members are investigated and screened thoroughly before being accepted into the organization, and include not only renovators but builders/developers, architects, interior designers, suppliers and service people, as well as subcontractors.

The THBA will, upon request, provide you with brochures (such as *How*

A custom-made wall unit from Candooodwo

to find a Renovator) specifically designed to help the public navigate successfully through the maze of contracting firms.

Once you have someone in mind, ask to see his license. All renovators must be licensed by the Metro Toronto Licensing Commission.

Ask for financial references, and check on them to see if the company is stable.

Finally, and most important, before you sign with a building firm you must be satisfied with the quality of workmanship. Most reputable contractors will supply you with a list of former clients. Speak to three or four of them and ask to see their houses. Most will be more than happy to share their experience and advice on the trials, tribulations—and rewards—of home renovation.

When you find two or three contractors you like, show them your plans and ask for price quotations.

Greenberg made it a policy to seek bids from three different contractors. She always accepted the middle bid; the lowest estimate is not always the best. As Greenberg says, "There has to be a reason *why* the lowest bid is the lowest bid."

Once you have settled on a builder, insist upon a written contract which clearly outlines all aspects involved in the project and the system of payment. Most renovators in Ontario use some sort of contractual form, but if you wish, changes in the contract can be negotiated.

Ask about a warranty. Many reputable firms offer a one-year warranty on labor and materials.

Remember that only good, solid research on your part will insure you and your leaking roof do not end up on Mr. Tuz's desk.

"Just as people take care when buying other products," Sawatsky states, "so must good consumer practice be placed upon the purchase of a

'ando 'oodworking Ltd. graces the cozy family room addition designed by Toronto architect Harold Smith.