

Shift happens

Don't want to move? Go for a reno

Homeowners can upgrade, expand property and stay in the neighbourhood they love

Kenzie Campbell sees the value in staying in one place — except when he's on the phone. "I do my best thinking while walking around," he says, laughing.

He has just stepped away from his company's booth at a recent home show to offer advice on home ownership and renovations — two topics he knows a lot about. Campbell is the general manager of Royal Home Improvements, an Etobicoke-based renovation company that's been operating in the GTA for 40 years. If selling your home doesn't seem to make sense, he says, think about investing in a renovation that can add comfort and value to the place.

In Canada, home renovation is a huge industry. In 2011, Canadians spent \$66 billion on renovations. In the GTA, residential renovations accounted for 101,700 jobs, generating \$5.3 billion in wages.

"If you're in an escalating marketplace, where all properties are rising equally, you sell one and buy another. You pay all of the municipal fees, the land transfer [tax and] moving fees and you probably will still want to renovate."

That's a lot of money that could go toward making improvements to the home you live in now, he points out. "What would you get? I'll tell you — a beautiful kitchen [with] top-notch wood, solid granite countertops, the best lighting, beautiful tile, nice appliances. You'd get a swank bathroom — all the modern finishes."

When making major changes to your home, Campbell says, it's important to trust the advice and workmanship of the people doing it. One of the best decisions you can make is to go with a trusted, professional renovator, he says.

In fact, Campbell is part of a group that helps you find one. In addition to his full-time job at Royal Home Improvements, he is on the board of directors for the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) and chairman of its Renovators' Council.

"We understand that the industry has some potential bad optics, but we know that by banding together, networking and using the educational component of an organization like ours, and having that code of conduct, we changed the lay of the land a little bit," he says.

To become a renovator member of BILD, they are required to abide by a renovation-specific code of conduct that includes providing written contracts, offering a two-year warranty and carrying a minimum of \$2 million in liability insurance. The association screens potential candidates and constantly reviews and monitors the performance of its member renovators. BILD recently relaunched RenoMark.ca — the



Lisa Sibbick discusses reno plans with Royal Home Improvements project manager Aric Bagshaw. "They really wanted the job — and it showed," she says.

Find a professional

The Sibbick family are set to move back into their professionally renovated home in Brampton

Hiring professional renovators can save you a lot of time and money in the long run. They have the connections to all of the people you need, such as engineers, arborists and planners. If you need a permit, for example, they know where to go and who to talk to.

For Lisa and Edward Sibbick, who decided to update their small three-bedroom home, renovations began on Sept. 4. Their property sits on just under an acre of land in northwest Brampton. Lisa hired Royal Home Improvements to build a 1,000-sq.-ft. extension and renovate the entire house. The couple and their daughter, Kassie, should be able to move back into their "new" home Dec. 19.

"We have an old ranch bungalow. It was 1,100 sq. ft., so it was a tiny little house and I wanted something bigger," says Lisa. "We did look around

to see if we could buy something in the area, but trying to find an acre in Brampton for something we could afford — no way! It was worth our while financially to renovate. We get to keep the nice-sized yard and now have a nice house on it.

We had to contact an architect first to provide all the drawings, which are needed for a permit. Then I looked around for a contractor. We chose Royal Home Improvements. The big thing for me was they made it a point to come to the house and to sit down and answer in person any questions I had — not on the phone and not by email. It made [us] feel like they cared, [that] they really wanted the job — and it showed.

My advice to others considering renovation: Make sure you are dealing with professionals. It makes a big difference. It gives you peace of mind."

website for the 11-year-old RenoMark program it founded, which connects consumers with professional renovators across the country. Campbell sees nothing but bene-

In essence, what this all translates into is a great source for consumers to find the right contractor and a RenoGuide to help them through the process. One such is BILD's ren-

hasn't stopped the firm from modernization, including keeping up with technological developments.

"There's no single component that makes for a good renovator or a happy customer, but communication is one of the biggest," says Gallop. Men At Work uses a web-based project management system that allows customers to log in and view online all the details pertaining to their project, including official documents, drawings and revisions, quotations from suppliers and subcontractors, and technical specifications for appliances and fixtures.

It's the kind of innovation that has led to the recognition of his

company as an industry leader. However, Gallop notes that the use of technology isn't the only indicator of a good renovator. He points back to RenoMark.

"Renovators who want to strive for that higher level are participating in that program," he says. "But until the adoption of that program and the more recent major promotion of it, there have been very few things that consumers can do to distinguish the pros from the not-so-pros."

That's not the case anymore, Gallop says. Now, consumers can connect with the pros through RenoMark and take full advantage of the place where they already live.

Consumer checklist for finding a good contractor

Two expert renovators tell you what to look for in a professional renovator.

✓ **Control** A good renovator likes to oversee all aspects of your renovation. "The more I'm in control, the less [outside] variables there are," notes Kenzie Campbell, general manager of Royal Home Improvements.

✓ **Longevity** Look for a company that's been around for a while, with a bricks-and-mortar operation — and office space — to make sure it won't have liquidity problems. According to Paul Gallop, who owns Men At Work General

Contractors, "70 per cent of construction companies fail within the first seven years." His advice: "Look for someone who's been around."

✓ **Communication** Royal Home Improvements ensures that each of its project managers has a BlackBerry or a smartphone. "It makes them accessible 24/7," explains Campbell.

✓ **Paper trail** Plans, promises, timelines — good renovators will provide these to you in writing throughout the project. Campbell

recommends asking for email updates and looking for contractors who happily provide.

✓ **Credentials** Credentials can be bought, sure, says Campbell, but it doesn't matter. Companies that invest in credentials and make the effort to be members of associations, and learn about what's offered in the current marketplace — those are companies that have the energy necessary to build out their business.

This is the fifth in an eight-part series sponsored by BILD. Look for the next one on Sat., Dec. 1



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