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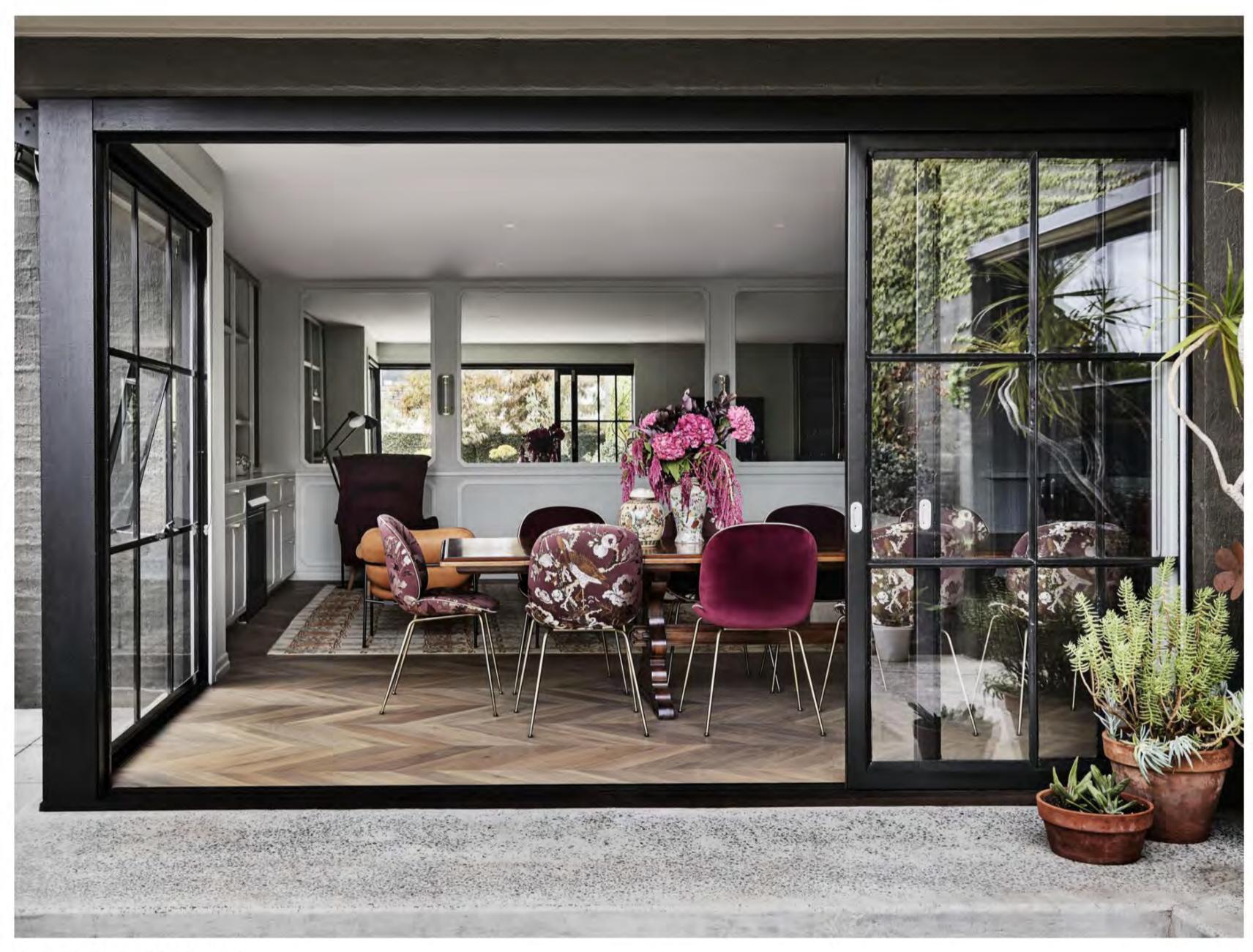
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HOME / LIFE

Renovating? Interior designers want you to know these 10 things

Have you developed the urge to update or alter your home? Before you do anything, take a hint from these experienced interior designers and architects first.

By YEONG SASSALL



Studio Tate Euston. Picture: Lillie Thompson

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s we settle into the second year of living through Covid-19 and the ensuing property boom, our homes remain in the spotlight more than ever. Whether you're planning to sell, downsize or trade up, chances are, a renovation is on the cards. No matter if you're just upgrading just the kitchen or bathroom, or doing something more substantial like an extension — ask anyone who's been through a reno and they'll warn you that it's a rollercoaster. From council headaches and building delays to material shortages and unexpected discoveries (hello, rising damp or asbestos), fact is, even the simplest-seeming renovations can blow out your budget and tamper with your sanity.

So how does one avoid unexpected or nasty surprises? While some issues like old, leaky plumbing are unavoidable, there are many issues that can easily be avoided by proper planning and due diligence from the outset. To prove it, we asked some of the industry's top interior designers and architects to outline the biggest renovation mistakes and life lessons they've learnt.

1. Avoid Staging



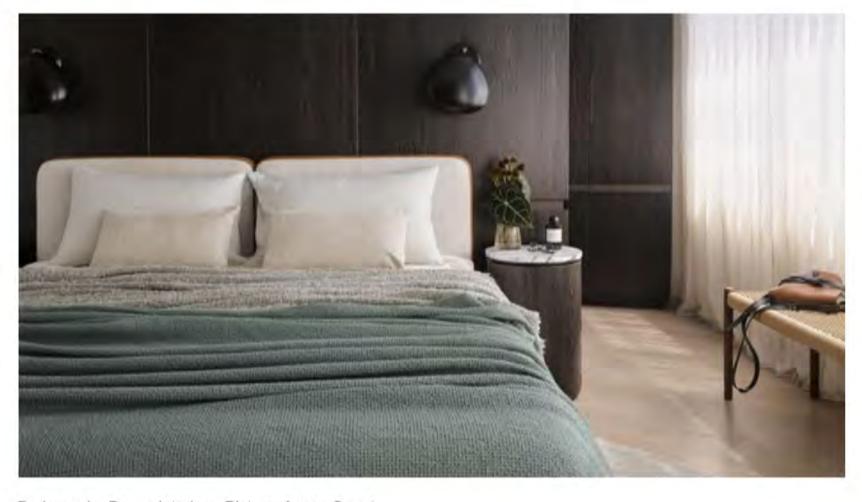
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"One of the most common mistakes we see is splitting a project into stages in the belief that it will streamline the process and create an economic benefit," says Alexandra Donohoe Church, managing director of Sydney-based studio <u>Decus</u> <u>Interiors</u>. "This is simply not true. The process itself can be daunting, challenging, and emotional; so knocking down walls, plastering, painting, and living with tradespeople is best experienced once, especially if you're living on site."

Furthermore, Donohoe Church warns against staging for reasons of design cohesion and material availability. "Building costs are also likely to shift between stages, and in the current environment we must account for trade and supply shortages too. Economies are really embedded in a streamlined process, so it pays to be as efficient



as possible," she adds. "Taking a staggered or staged approach can also result in revisiting or altering the design which in turn can create design dissonance within the home." In short, it's best to rip the Band-Aid off quickly — and all at once.

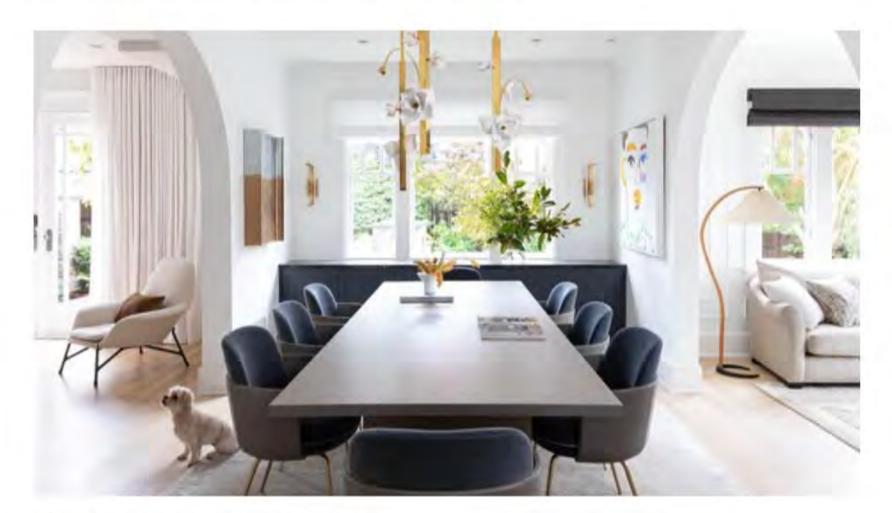


Bedroom by Decus Interiors. Picture: Anson Smart

2. Reconsider your need to live there

Planning a large renovation taking up more than one room or area of the house? You might want to move out while it's happening — so budget accordingly. "I can't tell you how many times I've had to explain to my clients that they just cannot live in a single bedroom, with three kids and a dog, with one bathroom, and no kitchen, while we take the rest of the house down to the studs," says LA-based interior designer Kate Lester of <u>Kate Lester Interiors</u>. "Take it from me and do yourself a favour and allow some room in your budget for alternate (comfortable) lodging if you are doing a large-scale remodel."

That said, if logistics permit, it pays to inhabit in a home before you renovate it too. "I think there can be tremendous merit to actually living in the space before you start tearing it apart," says Gillian Segal of Vancouver's <u>Gillian Segal Design</u>. "Some clients are very surprised by how they feel about things they thought they hated and wanted to change, and how they use the space."

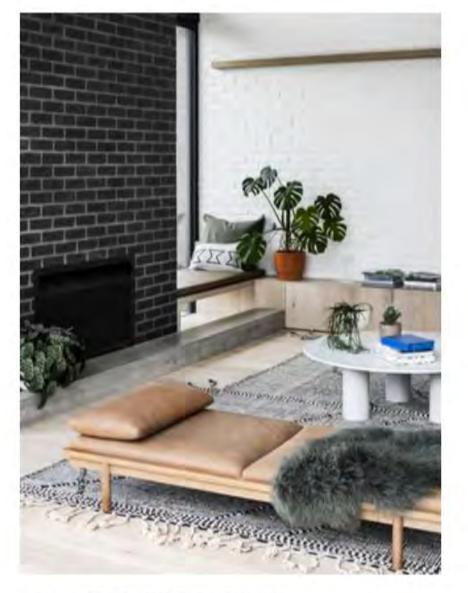


Interior design Gillian Segal. Picture: Ema Peter

3. Rely on experts

Sure, you might like to imagine you can tackle a few jobs yourself, but never underestimate the value of employing an expert. "My advice for anyone undertaking a renovation, alteration or addition is to not underestimate the value of working with professionals," says Miriam Fanning, principal of Melbourne's <u>Mim</u> <u>Design</u>. "Interior designers and architects are highly skilled professionals whose years of education and experience contribute to quality outcomes. Mistakes can be costly and are best avoided by working with trusted collaborators."

4. Don't take shortcuts



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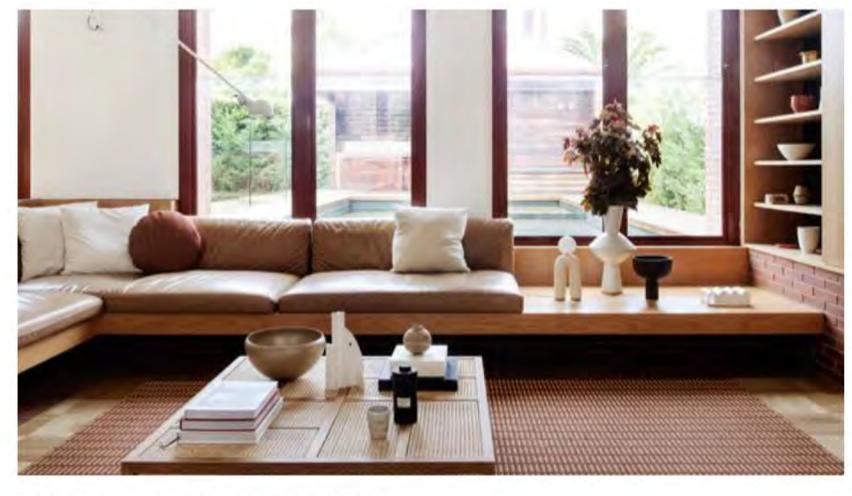
Mim Design Coastal Pavilion Interiors

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It might be tempting to cut corners, especially in the face of mounting bills and budget concerns, but trust designers when they say it can lead to long-term regret. "Choosing quick-fix solutions in a home redesign will almost always result in wishing you did it correctly the first time around," says Eva-Marie Prineas, principal of Sydney architecture firm <u>Studio Prineas</u>. "We encourage anyone embarking on a home renovation or redesign to resist getting carried away with beautiful images on Instagram and Pinterest and instead focus on getting the basics right."

Donohoe Church agrees, "Another false economy is investing in low-cost materials

or replica furniture. Investing in quality from the outset means the return is enjoyed over time. Making such compromises quickly becomes a painful regret."



Studio Prineas house in Haberfield. Picture: Chris Warnes

5. Play the long game

We live in an age of instant gratification, so don't let your desire for fast results impede your planning process. "Take your time from the beginning," advises Alex Hopkins, design director of Melbourne's <u>Studio Tate</u>. "A measured approach enables your design team to establish a considered foundation that can flex as your needs change. It's easy to get caught up in your immediate requirements and desires, however, if this is your forever home, how will it need to perform as your family grows, for example? Intelligent design considers functional requirements over time, and ensures you get the most out of your investment and a home you truly love."



Studio Tate Euston. Picture: Lillie Thompson

6. Take chances

No one is going to argue the value of a beautiful, classic interior, but don't forget your home is supposed to be a reflection of you. "Some clients get so caught up in having 'timeless' design and ultimately talk themselves out of actually doing anything interesting," says Segal. "The reality is, in 10-15 years no matter how 'timeless' things are, they will likely need an update, just due to wear and tear. Of course, we always want our clients' homes to stand the test of time but I would encourage homeowners to take a few risks! When we push clients to do this, these parts always turn out to be the favourite spot in the home and the biggest topic of conversation."

Same goes for challenging traditional ways of doing things. "Don't be afraid to get creative and disagree with your tradespeople," argues Lester. "Especially if you don't have an interior designer to advocate for unique or unusual design ideas. Pretty much 50 per cent of my job is explaining my unique idea to a tiler or cabinet-maker who replies with, "No" or "Yes, but it would be much easier to do it like this —[insert boring way]". Come prepared with inspiration images, ask questions and explain to them that these unique details are what you are most excited about. Then work together to make them happen, and don't back down."

7. Don't be too quick to cover up the past

This isn't your high school yearbook — there's much joy and character to be found in honouring the past. "Finding union between the old and the new is a common design challenge in the renovation process particularly when working on homes that are in their original state," shares Prineas. "We believe in the importance of achieving sympathetic design outcomes that are timeless, but that also celebrate the past. Rather than throwing away or rendering over old brick, for instance, consider repurposing or restoring the material



Bathroom by Decus Interiors. Picture: Anson Smart

so that it adds character to the home in a unique and exciting way that's authentic to its history."

8. Research your contractors. A lot.

"Ultimately, I recommend finding good people to do the work," says Cara Woodhouse of New York-based practice <u>Cara Woodhouse Interiors</u>. "You should also review and vet the work they have done in the past. This goes for everyone involved such as a builder/contractor, architect, and designer. It's important to take that into consideration at the beginning of the process."



And another thing — cheaper is not necessarily better. "The biggest mistake is when people hire an inexpensive architect, contractor and designer —

Studio Prineas house in Haberfield. Picture: Chris Warnes

they wind up spending double in the end. This is not something that should be skimped on."

Using an interior design firm or designer? "Do your due diligence," stresses Donohoe Church. "It's more than just reading about them in a magazine or seeing Instagram posts of their work. I would advocate for meeting with at least two studios, and really analysing their proposals to understand their process, what's allowed for, and assess if the fit is right for you."

9. Be flexible with your budget and timeline

One of the biggest complaints you hear about renovations? They always take longer and cost more than expected. "Add a 20 per cent buffer to your budget, and the same goes for your timeline," suggests Lester. "Even the pros get delays when an important material is back-ordered or delayed, or with bad weather (or a pandemic) so it's good to be prepared." Woodhouse suggests padding out your budget as much as 30 per cent, if you're really worried.



Decus Interiors. Picture: Anson Smart

Pay attention to those numbers too —

overlooking small details is the fastest way to lose track of your budget. "I recommend interviewing a few contractors and asking for line item pricing," says Sarah Stacey of <u>Sarah Stacey Interior Design</u> in Austin, Texas. "Never take the lowest price. There's always a reason that pricing may be so low. When you get your quotes make sure to review all of the numbers with each contractor. Additionally, if you are working with the designer, ask them to review the quote as well. They will bring experience and will be able to help you determine why quotes may vary so wildly in price.

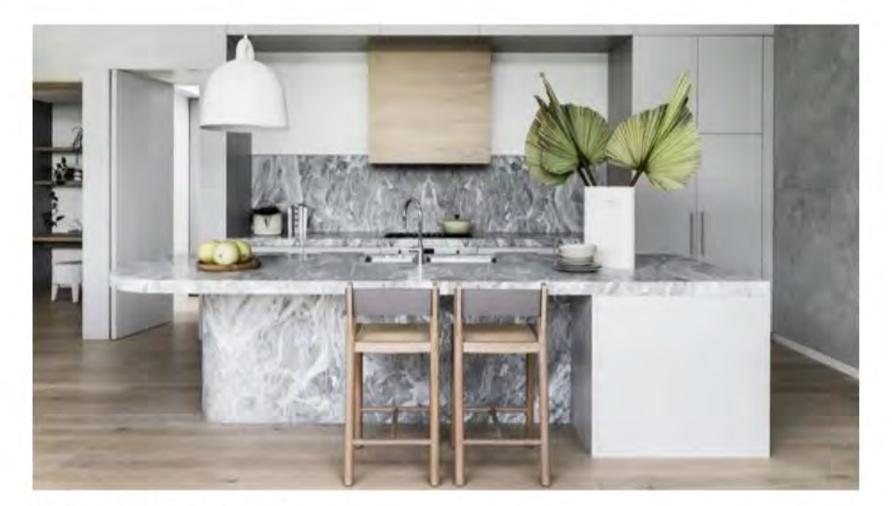


Mim Design. Picture: Tom Blachford

10. Design is everything

This might seem obvious, but taking a holistic approach to the design of your home is paramount. "Good design must be informed by contextual cues, such as the surrounding environment," says Fanning. "Think: neighbouring properties, sitespecific parameters such as heritage overlays or existing structural elements, and of course, the needs of the homeowners, which naturally differ between a growing family, a single resident, or empty-nesters."

It's easy to get tunnel vision, agrees Stacey. "A big mistake is not thinking about the full design as a whole. I see a lot of people select a material because they like it and they don't think about how everything relates to one another."



Mim Design. Picture: Tom Blachford

YEONG SASSALL, HEAD OF BRAND, VOGUE LIVING Yeong Sassall is a lifestyle journalist with over 10 years experience in the industry. Her short attention span means she's adept at writing across a number of subjects, from pop culture, music and fashion, to ... <u>Read more</u>

