

Saving Face

Is your log home in need of a makeover?

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Have you lived in your log home for years and feel that it's time for a change?
Are there things about your log home that don't quite fit your lifestyle anymore?

Maybe it's time to renovate your home. Take that galley kitchen and expand it into the gourmet kitchen you've always dreamed of. Or, if the children have left the nest, knock out a wall for the master bedroom to include a sitting area. Thoughtful time spent planning can make renovating your home a much more enjoyable experience.

Gather all the information you will need to make informed decisions about your renovation. I break this down into four areas: program, regulatory, technical, and financial.

Start by determining your wish list. What additional space would you really like. What do you need and what items might be considered luxurious? Find photographs of spaces similar to what you are envisioning and start clipping files. Focus on spaces that complement the existing, not only in style, but in sense of scale. If you are considering renovating part of your home's interior review you entire home? For example, now may be the time to re-carpet the house, or replacing the old kitchen cabinets or bathroom countertops.

Regulatory review might include investigating whether the renovation is allowed under the current zoning of your property. For example, if you are contemplating adding

a rental suite, find out if it is even permitted. If you are planning on adding an addition to the side or rear of your home, how close can you build to the property line? If you are currently on an existing septic or leach field system, will your renovation subject you to a new set of regulations. Will permits may be required?

Technical review may include the current state of your existing home. You may wish to retain a certified property inspector or construction professional to review the state of your roof, exterior woodwork, plumbing, and so on. Or a log home professional to review the state of your logs. Catch up on important maintenance items during your renovation while you have tradespeople on site and construction disturbance.

Review the technical aspects of your renovation plans. Will a new addition block sunlight into rooms of your existing home? If wiring and mechanical services are exposed in the basement, what will be the effect of closing them in? Adding another floor or dormer will have structural implications. If you are removing any bearing walls or structural members, or adding new loads, consult a Structural Engineer.

Financial research includes a review of the potential cost of your renovation and your financing options. How much you can afford to go over budget should unforeseen circumstances arise? What will upgrades to your existing house cost and can you afford to have them done at the same time as the main renovation?

After you have gathered all the information related to your renovation, the next process is **Evaluation**. Determine as accurately as possible the cost of your wish list. Estimating for renovations is considerably more complicated than for new housing, especially if it is difficult to expose the existing building systems to determine the extent of work required. Using traditional dollar per square foot numbers is irrelevant because

there is always considerably cost that does not actually add floor area such as dismantling existing structures or rerouting wires. In addition, handling building materials may be more difficult. In order to minimize disruption to your family, the construction workday may have to be shorter and there may be more time spent in protecting existing spaces and in ongoing cleanup.

Clarify the quality of materials and construction you intend to use. Does it make sense to use high quality new materials and fixtures if your existing house is older and well worn? It is important to build in generous contingencies into your budget? This will cover you if there are unforeseen delays or expenses or if you decide on further upgrades once you see the new addition taking shape.

Step back and look at the big picture? Ask the important questions. What are our long-term goals? If we are adding substantially to the value of our home does it fit with our long-term housing requirements? Are we over-investing for our neighborhood? Would it make sense to look for a new house? Are there homes for sale in our neighborhood that would give us what we want for less than the cost of renovating?

If you are adding a substantial addition, does it make sense to do a face-lift of your entire house? Will an addition complement or enhance the existing design? These are all difficult questions, but ones that should be asked before entering any substantial and expensive renovation project.

I can't over-emphasize the importance of making sure your requirements meet your budget before you get too far into the design process. For many people, after a design is well-developed, it is emotionally grueling to have to start cutting back from

their wish list. It is better to know exactly what you can afford before you commence the actual drawing and detailing.

The **design process** itself is the final part of renovation planning. Much of the best design happens not with pencil and paper in hand, but while lying on the couch or walking in the park. Many people rush into drawing two-dimensional shapes on paper, without taking the time to visualize the renovation. And by visualize I don't just mean what it will physically look like, but what it will be like to live in. Close your eyes and picture yourself living in your newly renovated home. What does it feel like to sit or stand in different rooms? How does it relate to adjacent spaces?

Make sure the renovation complements your existing home, not only in its physical appearance and scale, but also in terms of flow and privacy. How will you handle changes in material at the floor, walls and ceiling? You will unlikely be unable to match the materials closely enough so build a transition into the design. It may be a band of different flooring or a different paint color. If an existing exterior wall is to be extended, I usually recommend shifting the new wall to create an easier material transition. If a structural post is required, place it adjacent an existing wall instead of within it. Similarly, it usually doesn't make sense to try to continue an existing roofline. Use the same style and pitch of roof but bring the new one under or over the existing. If they must meet on the same plane, then you may need to re-roof the existing house.

One of the biggest challenges when adding onto an existing log home is dealing with differential settling. It may be that your existing home has settled considerably and you are planning to add an addition that will be subject to settling. This means that in every location where the new structure interfaces with the existing structure some

allowance will have to be made for differential settling. In this case, it is extremely important to note that at no point can the two structures be rigidly joined. Because log posts shrink almost imperceptibly in their length, I usually recommend inserting a log post at the intersection, keyed so that the new structure can settle without interference. If the new roof intersects a wall, a simple step flashing can be used. If it is intersecting an existing roof in a perpendicular direction, I recommend cantilevering the new structure over the existing and dealing with the differential settling through flashing and counterflashing.

If possible, try to completely seal off the renovation area from your existing home, or arrange to have the work done while you are on holidays. Avoid trying to live in an area while it is being renovated.

I have been involved with dozens of renovation projects of varying sizes and complexities. If well thought out, they can be done with minimal disruption to your life and can add substantial value and enjoyment to your home.

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