

the SHOPPING MAGAZINE • for YOUR HOME

# domino

from the publishers of Lucky magazine

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your home!

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# DIARY OF A RENOVATION

Home improvement can be as anxiety-producing as a thriller. Just ask Haylynn Cohen, a busy model who saw her one-bedroom New York apartment go from gutted to gorgeous in six drama-filled months.

photographs by ERIC CANAN styling by TOM DELAVAN and ASHLEY SARGENT

## PHASE I HIRING A CONTRACTOR

Seven years after moving into her 900-square-foot apartment, Haylynn finally had some time to spruce it up. Her objectives: a new kitchen, bathroom and custom closets. The first step was to find a contractor. She gathered five referrals, eventually choosing Ray Romano, a contractor with a flair for the dramatic (he wooed Haylynn with a DVD featuring heroic clips of him on job sites—"I watched it and thought this guy is either a fanatic or really dedicated," Haylynn says). Visits to a few of Ray's pristinely renovated exteriors confirmed the latter.



my contractor,  
Ray Romano



### HAYLYNN'S DIARY

**MYTH** A contractor's estimate includes all the extras—refrigerator, doorknobs, faucets, etc.

**REALITY** To be honest, I was so wet behind the ears about renovation I didn't realize the estimate wouldn't include these things (that was frustrating!). My budget was \$55,000 (with change orders and other unexpected developments, this morphed into \$80,000), and the extras ended up costing another \$20,000.

### FURNITURE

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Finally pulled together  
The apartment is a collaboration  
of all sorts, but the way it comes  
together is a beautiful surprise.  
—MARTHA STEWART

# THE GOLDEN RULES FOR

The prospect of knocking down walls, ripping out wires and depleting your savings is guaranteed to daunt even the bravest of hearts. Heed these tried-and-true tips to ensure your remodeling project flows as smoothly as possible.

## 1. follow the code

Before undertaking any remodeling project (interior or exterior), find out which permits are necessary. Check with your local building department or municipality. Some towns have architectural review boards that must approve your plans. Without their okay, you could be stopped with hefty fines and even be liable for demolition.

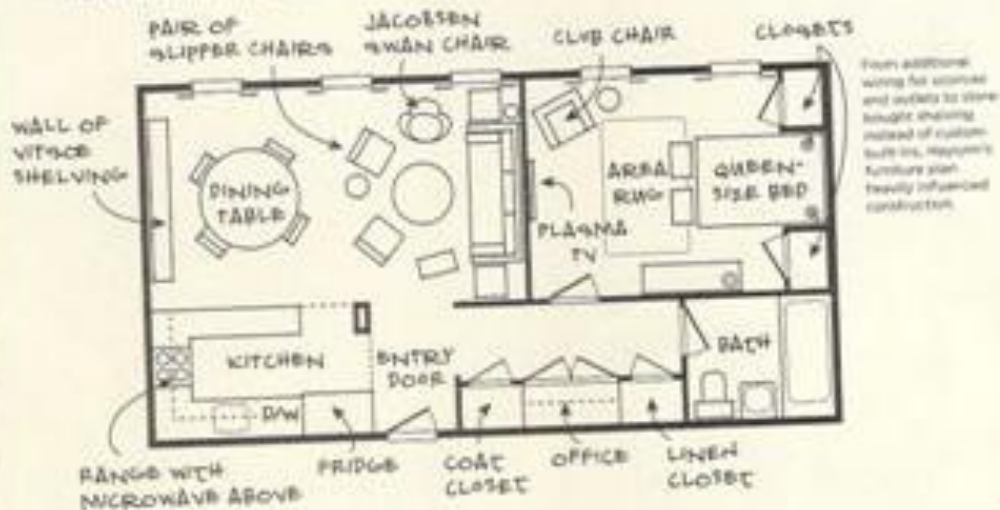
## 2. choose the right contractor

Contractors are more like a third spouse than a hired hand. Besides checking references and ensuring they are properly licensed and insured, spend some time with them to see how you get along. A successful redo is largely about communication and clear lines of responsibility.

**BTW:** If you're a renovation novice, buy a simple, dummy-type book about contracting. Learning to speak the contractor's language will help things go much more smoothly.

## 3. create a furniture plan early on

Whether or not you are planning to involve a decorator, certain decisions must be made early on. Get a feel for the space by marking the floors with blue painter's tape for sofas, fridges, bookshelves, etc. Want a floor lamp next to your armchair? Plan for an outlet nearby. Should the chandelier go in the center of the ceiling or over the dining table? Decide this now.



# RENOVATING

By Ray Romano

## 4. set a time line

Establish firm start and end dates with your contractor from the outset. Depending on the size of your project, the dust from demolition may force you out of your home for the duration.

## 5. budget realistically

Even if you employ the best contractor on earth, expect to be 10 to 15 percent over and four weeks late (thanks to change orders, unforeseen problems like termites damage in the walls, etc.) Hammer out a payment schedule with the contractor, detailing how many installments there will be.

## 6. determine who's responsible for what

Showersheds, faucets, door-lock sets—who will be in charge of all the little details and decisions? Never assume the contractor is going to handle it. If you are doing the ordering, ask your contractor for deadlines. Tile, stone, appliances, electrical and plumbing fixtures—these all have long lead times, often requiring six to ten weeks to arrive. As a general rule, everything that goes into or behind walls should be ordered first. You don't want to have to rip out sheetrock walls once they're in place!



Haylyn's bedroom alcove is illuminated by two swing-arm sconces like this. "Madame" [EIN.WENHIRE.COM](http://EIN.WENHIRE.COM)

## 7. establish a Switzerland and a Germany

For the length of the renovation, it will be helpful to divide your home into two distinct camps. "Switzerland" is a neutral area, not part of the redo—your retreat from the mess. "Germany" is a space on-site that's hyper-organized and neat, so that you can store and readily locate any tools, supplies, fixtures, plans, etc.

## 8. keep a running punch list

This is a record of the jobs that haven't been completed, or things that have gone wrong and need to be fixed (scratches in new wood floors, doors that don't close properly). Start the list early on in the project. Don't make the final payment until all of the items on your list have been dealt with.

## 9. be available

If you can't be there all the time (and your contractor certainly won't be), write your cell-phone number on a wall. Let workmen know it's okay to call you with questions, rather than leave them to guess how high you want your showershed.

## 10. test paint colors

It seems like a minor detail, but paint jobs are expensive. Picking the colors in advance is great, but the true test is putting several sample paints on a wall in each room. Live with your choices a little if you can (with sun, overcast skies) to be certain they are right for the space.



Haylyn and her designer choose a Farrow & Ball's blue for the highly refined, feminine bedroom. Royal Wattle is Bird's Egg. [BENJAMINMOORE.COM](http://BENJAMINMOORE.COM) FOR STORES