



## RENOVATION

Sometimes, You  
Need to Fight with  
Your Home  
Contractor

## Here's how to do it without breaking up

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There's no such thing as a perfect renovation. With a myriad of specialized tasks to get done and the frenzy of a tight timeline, problems big and small are bound to come up. The project should have been done weeks ago! You hate the grout work on the kitchen floor! The paint job is a mess! Without warning, your contractor starts to feel like your worst enemy. Take a deep breath, then talk it out. "Compromise, even if the owner is right, may end up causing less aggravation and costing less money in the end," says Michael Kavin, CEO of Kavin Construction in Los Angeles. Resist the urge to fire your contractor until you've exhausted all other solutions—switching to someone new will likely result in you paying 20 to 40 percent more, he notes. Instead, here's what you should do. . . .

### When there are time delays

Your contractor said the project would take two months; now it's been three. Frustrating, yes, but it's

important to keep in mind that no construction timeline is set in stone. "In reality, the completion date should only be used as a reference, and allowed to be modified by the contractor, with notification to the owner, as the project progresses. The true test to construction timeline efficiency is having workers on site every day without significant downtime." If you are noticing a lot of down days, notify your contractor so that he or she can quickly correct the issue. In the meantime, "document all delays and correspondence regarding complaints and replies during the delay," says Kevin. If there ends up being a legal dispute later, this information will be incredibly valuable.

## When there are project management issues

Consult your contract at the start to clarify who your point person should be throughout the process. (The project manager could be the owner of the construction company, an employee, or multiple people.) If trouble is brewing with the appointed project manager—think scheduling mishaps, slow correspondence, or poor communication—document the problems in writing and request a substitution. "Not all project managers are equally talented or equally personable," notes Kevin.

## When the quality of the work is sub-par

Unhappy with the tiling in your master bath? "Address quality-of-work issues immediately upon discovery," says Kavin. "Additional costs can be circumvented if work is stopped prior to its completion." Discuss the issue with your contractor and see what he or she has to say. "If, after discussion, the work requires remedy or repair, this should be done at the contractor's expense," he says. But if the poor-quality work still continues, ask your contractor if it's possible to switch subcontractors—at the risk he or she will not accept. There is always the possibility your contractor will disagree with your complaint right off the bat. If that's the case, "there are certified industry experts in almost all trades, and for a few hundred dollars' fee, an inspection and report can be obtained to document poor or improper workmanship," explains Kavin. And then there's your last resort: filing a complaint with the state license board. According to Kavin, it will likely lead to an end to your contractor relationship, but it's a powerful way to ensure physical or financial compensation.

## But before it gets to this point, *choose the right contractor*

It's your best bet for avoiding problems later on. Kavin recommends obtaining three bids and making sure each contractor is properly qualified. "Check references and their status with the state license board, and verify they have property insurance, workers' compensation, and general liability insurance," he says. Make your decision based on reputation, not price. Personality is equally important; think of selecting your contractor as entering into a short-term relationship. "The owner and contractor must have a relationship that will survive the course of construction," says Kavin.