

Renaissance South Construction Company

Media Kit: Media Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Renaissance South Construction Company?

Renaissance South Construction Company, an affiliate of Urban Proper Redevelopment, is a general contracting firm that specializes in transforming residential properties into their highest, most elegant and functional form. The firm provides thoughtful improvements to aging, often historic homes by combining timeless design and expert craftsmanship with the latest in technology, comfort and energy efficiency.

What kind of work does Renaissance South Construction Company do?

The company, which is capable of all manner of home improvement and construction, builds and manages renovations and remodeling, historic restoration, “aging-in-place” adaptations, additions, infill construction, accessory dwellings, as well as major repairs. The dwelling becomes a customized space and home that meets the needs of the homeowner.

How can a homeowner anticipate how long a renovation project will take?

The timeframe of a renovation project varies and is most accurately forecast by a contractor at the same time a price is offered to complete the work. An important factor to confirm prior to signing is that the project will be completed seamlessly without any “job hopping.”

An interesting - although often unreliable - trend is the ratio of one week per \$10,000. This “tool” should only be used for ballpark purposes and is especially unreliable with projects under \$30,000 and over \$500,000.

What disruptions can homeowners expect in their day to day lives?

Most clients decide to stay in their homes during the renovation process. Therefore it is important to hire a contractor who specializes in renovation-based construction and will make the process as easy as possible through things like dust protection, daily tidying and diligent communication.

The three biggest disruptions homeowners can expect are as follows:

- **Dust:** No matter how thoroughly an area is dust protected, expect for some of these frustrating particles to get into non-construction areas. This is especially true when drywall is part of a project.
- **Raw construction materials:** Expect to see grey and white walls, plywood floors, framing lumber, exposed wiring, insulation and the like as progress is made. Also, even on the cleanest of jobsites, there is sometimes a piece of debris that gets missed so it’s a good idea to always wear shoes around the construction site (or avoid it completely as practicality allows).
- **Dumpsters and Portalets:** Home sweet home isn’t always as inviting when there is a dumpster or portalet in the driveway. While dumpsters have to be in areas easily accessible by trucks and workers, portalets can often be set up out of sight. Also, make sure foodstuffs won’t be thrown away in open dumpsters – this will help keep rodents at bay.

Under what circumstances should a homeowner stay elsewhere?

- In any project that disturbs toxins such as lead paint, asbestos or significant amounts of fiberglass insulation, homeowners will be best served by staying elsewhere. This is also true for elements such as finishing hardwood floors. It is important for homeowners to ensure that their contractor is accustomed to renovation-based construction and that they discuss project disruptions prior to signing a contract.
- It is often recommended that homeowners stay elsewhere when having large or whole-house renovations completed. Much of the rental expense can actually be offset by the contractor being able to work more efficiently by not staging a project around the homeowner.
- The final ‘circumstance’ applies to homeowners who would simply prefer to not live in or near a construction site. Homeowners should speak with friends and family who have renovated, as well as several past clients of the company, when evaluating what is best for them.

Is there a frustrating side to renovating a house?

Client frustration is typically born out of poor expectation management, inadequate communication and/or unfulfilled promises by the contractor.

- Homeowners should never sign a contract that they are not 100% clear on. Ambiguity does not favor the homeowner, and there is too large an opportunity for them to be taken advantage of if contracts are not written in a detailed fashion.
- Homeowners should be sure that a contractor knows about and has agreed to adhere to all of *their* expectations from the beginning. And they should never hesitate to ask questions or talk about things that are bothering them – the unspoken can destroy relationships.
- Contractors should inform their clients about the realities of the construction process, timeframes and other things that homeowners aren’t typically able to anticipate. For example, most homeowners don’t know that projects sometimes seem to “drag on” towards the middle. The exciting parts - namely demolition, cabinetry, countertops, fixture installation, painting and the like - typically account for a small percentage of a project’s timeframe and usually take place in the beginning or at the very end.

What is a change order?

A change order is an addendum to the original contract. They are typically a result of hidden damage, upgrades to the existing project scope by the client, or the addition of unrelated projects by the client.

Are change orders relatively typical in a renovation project?

This largely depends on the project, the home and the contractor. It is often good financial planning to set aside 3% – 10% of the total contract price as a contingency fund. Here are a couple other things to consider as well:

- Typically, good upfront planning by the contractor (and architect) will enable them to anticipate problems and offer an educated guess as to what homeowners might expect.
- It is imperative that homeowners have a detailed project scope in their contracts. This will prevent less than honest contractors from increasing the price during mid-construction.

- The other type of change order - an upgrade to the existing project or a completely new project - is, of course, completely up to the homeowner.

What sort of liability and risk do homeowners assume?

If the hired contractor is a licensed, bonded and insured residential builder or general contractor, then very little is at risk. Any injuries or damage resulting from the construction process are covered by the contractor's general liability and worker's compensation insurance (it is good practice for contractors to have both, although they are not required to by the state of S.C.). It is worth noting that without these forms of insurance, the homeowners may be fully liable for anyone injured or killed *on* their project, anyone injured or killed *as a result of* their project and any damage that occurs to others' property as a result of their project.

What does it mean for a contractor to be licensed, bonded and insured?

The following are generally accepted standards of licensure, bonding and insurance for residential contractors:

- License: Residential Builders License or General Contractors License issued through the SC LLR (required in S.C.)
- Bonding: Surety Bond on the business owner for \$15,000 (required in S.C. for residential builders)
- General Liability Insurance: \$2,000,000 of General Aggregate Liability Insurance (not required)
- Worker's Compensation Insurance (not required)

What should a homeowner look for when considering a company for a project to avoid becoming a "horror story"?

In addition to ensuring that the company is a licensed contractor with the above credentials, homeowners need a detailed contract and plenty of client referrals. Homeowners should assume nothing and should not sign anything until they are 100% comfortable with everything that is going to take place.

Two areas of the contract that homeowners should pay particular attention to are the change order policy and payment terms.

- **Change orders:** Change orders should not be acceptable unless they are for unforeseeable circumstances (hidden damage, rot, etc.), client-chosen upgrades to the original scope, or client-chosen unrelated projects. Again, without a detailed written contract scope upfront, it can be hard to determine mid-project what constitutes a change order and what has always been part of the scope.
- **Payment terms:** Contractors typically ask for between 20% and 35% of the total project price upfront to help offset some of their mobilization costs. The key here is that homeowners do their homework to make sure they are dealing with a reputable contractor (a business, not a person) and one who cannot easily "skip" town. Homeowners should also keep at least 5% of the total contract price until the end of the project, contingent on their satisfaction and contract fulfillment. The remainder of the contract price will typically be payable in intervals agreed to in the contract. It can also be a good idea to have these payments tied to project *events* instead of *dates*.

When does a homeowner need an architect for a renovation project?

This varies on a project by project basis, and a good contractor will be able to help guide homeowners. For the most part, architects will be required for any addition, detached structure construction and/or substantial interior renovation.

Architects are typically not required for repair, restoration or straight-forward remodeling to areas such as kitchens and bathrooms. However, in certain situations it can be a good idea (or requirement) to hire an architect for these projects as they will be able to prevent many function, form and general design mistakes before it's too late (i.e. after it's built).

When does a homeowner need a structural engineer for a renovation project?

Again, a good contractor will be able to guide homeowners on this. Structural engineers are typically required when significant modifications are being made to the existing foundation and/or framing systems of a building, when adding onto an existing building, or when building new.

They are typically not required for more “superficial” elements such as adding piers to keep a floor from bouncing or adding a new doorway in a wall (although a good contractor is needed to perform these types of tasks).

Also, homeowners will most likely need a structural engineer's stamp almost anytime a set of plans is drawn. While architects are allowed to “stamp” their own structural elements, most bring in an engineer to help.

What is the per-square-foot price of an addition or renovation?

Unfortunately, there is no way to put a per-square-foot price on renovation-based construction because each project is unique (for example, a complete bathroom remodel would have a higher per-square-foot price than converting a bedroom to a nursery). Most good contractors are happy to give rough estimates (within a 10% - 20% margin of error) for a project prior to investing everyone's time or money into the planning process.

Do homeowners have to work with a design/build company to take part in the design/build process?

No. Design/build simply refers to working with a design and construction professional simultaneously throughout the planning and design process. All a homeowner needs is an architect and a contractor.

What are the advantages of the design/build process for larger projects?

Design: Although there are many ways to start the design process, it is recommended that homeowners choose an architect and a contractor prior to any design-work being completed for several reasons:

- To ensure they accomplish their design objectives and do so within budget: By working with a good contractor throughout the architectural process, homeowners can get *accurate* pricing updates throughout to make sure they don't over design.
- To ensure accountability by both parties during construction: By having the architect and contractor work together on the plans in a multi-staged process, homeowners can eliminate expensive misunderstandings and mistakes during construction.

Build: This refers to the second phase of the construction process, which primarily involves the contractor. A couple of notes worth mentioning follow:

- Some contractors will agree to work in the design capacity for a reasonable fee that is creditable towards their final contract price: In this scenario, if the homeowner decides to work with another contractor, they may forfeit that fee, but the loss will pale in comparison to over-designing (and thus paying more in redesign fees and/or construction).
- Architect presents final set of plans; contractor presents detailed proposal to perform work; project is completed in a predictable manner: This is the goal of design/build. There should be very few surprises, and it should make the renovation process as straightforward as possible.

What is an allowance?

An allowance is the budget figure on which a client will base product selections. This allotment is a portion of the total contract price and works like this:

- Costs exceeding the allowance amount are then added to the final invoice.
- If costs are less than the allowance amount, then the remaining costs get credited to the final invoice.

Allowance wording typically looks like the following example: *“An allowance of \$350 has been allotted for the kitchen faucet. Allowance figure includes all shipping and tax expenses.”*

What is “scope creep”?

“Scope creep” is a term that refers to a homeowner deciding to add more elements to a project than what is in the original contract; thus, the scope (and price) creeps up. Unchecked, it can sometimes really add up.

There are several ways to combat scope creep:

- Through thoughtful, initial planning
- Through a detailed and written contract, which will prevent a contractor from telling the client late in the game that an element of the project thought to have been agreed upon was actually not in the scope of work
- By requesting that the contractor give written change orders for any small additions and/or a list of them every other week if there are several

How can someone learn more about Renaissance South Construction Company?

For more information, please call 843-388-5550 or visit www.renaissancesouth.com.