

Renovation Roadmap



Renovating your home is an exciting journey—but without a roadmap, it can quickly become overwhelming. This guide walks Louisville homeowners through a step-by-step plan for interior renovations (kitchens, bathrooms, basements, and structural changes **inside** the home). We'll cover the order of key decisions you should make, the ideal sequence of construction trades, and common DIY pitfalls to avoid. With a little planning and the right help, you can transform your home while steering clear of costly mistakes. **Let's dive in!**

Plan First: Key Decisions Before You Swing a Hammer

1. Define Your Goals and Budget: Start by clarifying **what** you want to renovate and **why**. Are you updating an outdated kitchen, finishing a basement for more living space, or removing a wall for an open concept? Outline your must-haves and nice-to-haves. Then, set a realistic budget **with a contingency** for surprises (a common rule is to pad initial estimates by at least 100% for time and cost overruns. This financial cushion ensures that if you discover, say, hidden water damage or decide on a last-minute upgrade, your project can stay on track.

2. Do a "House Health" Check: Before any design work, assess the condition of your home. Consider a professional **home inspection** or at least a thorough DIY check of critical areas. Look for signs of leaks, old wiring, or structural issues that might need fixing **before** or during the remodel. For example, you wouldn't want to install new drywall only to later tear it open for a plumbing leak. Identifying these issues early means you can incorporate the fixes into your plan (and budget). Also, if your Louisville home was built before 1978, be mindful of potential **lead paint or asbestos** in old materials; these hazards require special handling by professionals during demolition.



"Proceeding without a plan, is like planning to fail!"

3. Know the Codes and Permit Requirements: In Louisville and Jefferson County, most remodeling work (even finishing a basement or moving a wall) **requires permits** to ensure the work meets building codes. Skipping permits isn't just illegal – it can lead to fines, forced do-overs, or problems when you sell the house. Early in your planning, check what permits you need (e.g. building permits for structural changes, electrical/plumbing permits for those trades). **Louisville Metro's Construction Review** office issues building and electrical permits, while Kentucky's state plumbing office handles plumbing permits. Thankfully, as a homeowner you *can* pull an owner's permit for work on your primary residence, but you'll still need to get inspections and meet code. It's often wise to consult Louisville's guidelines or a professional expeditor to navigate this process. Remember, permits and

inspections are about safety and protecting your investment – they ensure your new bathroom wiring won't cause a fire and that your basement bedroom has a proper egress window for emergencies (Louisville follows the Kentucky Residential Code, which requires any basement **bedroom** to have an emergency escape window or door).

4. Decide What to DIY and Where to Get Help: Be honest about your skills and the project's complexity. Cosmetic updates like painting or installing trim might be DIY-friendly. However, critical systems – **structure, electrical, plumbing, HVAC** – are best left to licensed professionals unless you have significant expertise. As one builder put it, mistakes in these trades **"CAN KILL PEOPLE IF INSTALLED IMPROPERLY,"** so don't cut corners on anything that affects safety. In Kentucky, homeowners are allowed to do their own electrical or plumbing work on a primary residence with permits, but **"allowed" doesn't always mean "should."** Improper wiring or plumbing can lead to shocks, leaks, or worse. Know your limits and plan to bring in pros for tasks like running new circuits, moving gas lines, installing HVAC, or knocking down **load-bearing walls** (which may also require an engineer's design). A good rule of thumb: DIY what you confidently can, and hire experts for the rest – you'll save money **and** sleep better at night.

5. Design and Plan the Details: With the preliminary homework done, move into the design phase. This is where you translate your ideas into a workable plan. Consider consulting a designer or architect for layout changes (many Louisville homeowners do this especially for kitchens and bathrooms to optimize space). Create a **floor plan** and specify materials early. Why now? Because choices like cabinetry, fixtures, and appliances will affect both your budget and your schedule. For instance, custom cabinets or special-order tiles can have long lead times – you'll need to order them well in advance. During this phase, also think about how the renovation will impact your daily life so you can plan around it. If you're renovating your only bathroom, where will you shower during construction? If you're gutting the kitchen, set up a temporary cooking station (microwave, coffee maker, etc.) in another room. Map out a sequence if multiple spaces are involved: for example, **don't renovate all bathrooms at once** if you need one to remain functional, and renovate bedrooms in rotation so you always have a dust-free place to sleep.

6. Set a Timeline and Line Up Help: Once you have a plan and permits in process, create a rough timeline. Decide if you'll tackle the work in phases (room by room) or all at once. Coordinate with any contractors or tradespeople you'll need. Good contractors can be booked months out, so start those conversations early. Aim to schedule messy and loud work (like demo and framing) at times that least disrupt your family or neighbors (weekday working hours, for instance). Also consider Louisville's **seasonal climate**: humidity and cold can affect certain tasks. Many pros prefer major interior construction in spring or summer when materials like drywall mud cure faster and you can ventilate the space easily. If you have any exterior components (say, replacing windows as part of your remodel), plan those for milder weather to avoid a giant hole during a cold snap. In fact, Louisville's **dry summer months** are ideal for any needed waterproofing or structural work, whereas painting and finishing can be done in the fall when temperatures are comfortable. By scheduling smartly, you'll reduce delays – for example, you won't be waiting on an inspection with walls torn open around Thanksgiving, or trying to tile a floor in a humid August garage. Lastly, arrange your living logistics: Will you need to stay with relatives for a week when the HVAC is off? Do you need a storage pod for furniture during construction? Making these decisions **before** work starts will save headaches later.

7. Obtain Permits and Prepare the Site: With your design finalized and timeline set, submit your permit applications (if you haven't already). Don't swing that sledgehammer until the permits are approved – unpermitted work can void your homeowner's insurance if something goes wrong. While waiting for permits, prep your house:

clear out work areas, set up dust barriers and floor protection, and plan safety measures. Professionals often seal off areas with plastic zip-walls and even put the house under negative pressure with fans to keep dust from spreading. You can't eliminate all inconveniences, but a little prep (like covering furniture in adjacent rooms and closing HVAC vents to those areas) can keep your home livable throughout the process. Now you're ready for the real fun to begin!

Construction Sequencing - Follow the Proper Construction Sequence



You can save days, weeks - even months - with proper construction sequencing. Without it - you will experience overruns, mistakes, and reworks. Make sure to proceed in the correct order!!



Once planning is done, it's time to execute. Renovations have a **logical order** that efficient contractors and builders always follow. Sticking to the right sequence prevents rework and damage to your finished surfaces. Here's the typical order of operations for an interior renovation...

1. Set Up and Demolition: First, the workspace is prepped for tear-out. This means protecting floors and other areas of the home, and setting up alternate utilities if needed (for example, a temporary kitchen sink or a portable toilet if the only bathroom is gutted). Then comes the **demolition** phase – out with the old to make way for the new. Everything that needs removing is removed now: old cabinets, fixtures, drywall, flooring, even entire walls or ceilings if it's a full gut job. Demolition can reveal hidden issues (like rot or old wiring), and it's normal to pause and address those surprises as they surface. It's an exciting step, but also messy – expect noise, dust, and debris. Professional remodelers often bring in a dumpster and even a specialized demo crew. (Many swear that money spent on a demo crew is well worth it, as it's **hard, dirty work** best done efficiently.) Once the demo is done, the team will haul away debris and clean up so you're left with a blank slate of open walls and floors.

2. Structural Changes and Framing: With the space opened up, any structural carpentry comes next. If you're removing or adding walls, widening doorways, or installing new beams/headers, this is the time to do it. In a basement finish, this is when you'd frame out new rooms. For a kitchen, you might be moving a window or creating a new wall opening for a breakfast bar, etc. Framing sets the bones for your new design. **Structural integrity is top priority** here – which may involve a structural engineer's input for major alterations. Make sure all new framing is solid, level, and per code. In Louisville's older homes, walls may not be plumb and floors not perfectly level; a skilled carpenter will address these so that cabinets and tile will install correctly later. If you're replacing windows or exterior doors as part of the remodel, they are usually installed during framing as well, since they often require adjusting the wall framing. By the end of this phase, the new layout is physically in place, and you can literally "see" your rooms taking shape.

3. Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing ("Rough-In"): After framing, the next step is to get all the **behind-the-walls systems** roughed in. This includes running new electrical wires, setting up plumbing lines or moving drains, and any HVAC ductwork or vent installations. Essentially, all the guts that go inside walls, ceilings, or under floors are done now, while everything is still exposed. In renovation lingo, this is the "rough-in" stage. For example:

Plumbers will install or move water supply lines, drain lines, and vent pipes for sinks, toilets, showers, etc. If you're adding a bathroom in the basement, they'll rough in the new drains (which may involve jackhammering the slab for new lines) now. In Louisville's climate, they'll also ensure pipes are placed to avoid freezing (e.g. not in uninsulated exterior walls, or adding pipe insulation) – a critical detail in winter.

Electricians will rough in wiring for outlets, switches, light fixtures, and dedicated circuits for appliances. They might upgrade your electrical panel if needed to handle additional load. Any new exhaust fans (bath fans or range hood ducts) are also installed at this time.

HVAC techs will add or reroute ducts if you're changing room layouts, and handle any new ventilation needs (like a vent for that basement bathroom or range hood venting to the outside). If you're adding heat/AC to a formerly unconditioned space (like a basement), they might extend your system or add a new zone now.

It's crucial to have **licensed tradespeople** do this phase unless you're extremely confident, because mistakes can be hidden in the walls until they cause a disaster. In fact, many pros advise that homeowners *always* hire out the "MEP" work (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing) – these are complex and must meet code. After rough-ins, **inspections** are typically required. In Louisville, a city inspector will check the framing and general building work, an electrical inspector will approve the wiring, and a state plumbing inspector will check the pipes. This rough inspection stage (sometimes called "4-way inspection" when framing, electrical, plumbing, HVAC are all looked at) ensures everything is safe and up to code. It's far easier to fix any issues now than after the walls are closed up. Once you get the green light, you can move on.

4. Insulation and Drywall: With rough mechanicals approved, you'll insulate any opened walls or new construction as needed. Proper insulation is key not just for efficiency but also for moisture control – especially important in Louisville's humid climate. Basements, for instance, should have insulation with vapor considerations to avoid trapping moisture (many experts recommend foam board or spray foam against foundation walls to prevent condensation in our climate). After insulation, it's time to close up the walls. Drywall (also known as sheetrock or plasterboard) is hung on the framed walls and ceilings, covering up those pipes and wires and bringing your rooms closer to their finished shape. Drywall installers will then tape the seams and apply **joint compound** ("mud") in several coats, sanding in between, to create smooth, paint-ready surfaces. This stage can be dusty (all that sanding), but once it's done, you'll really see the transformation – rooms feel like rooms again instead of construction zones. Some contractors will apply a coat of **primer paint** at this stage, or even the first coat of color on the walls, since it's easier to do before trim and flooring are in (no worries about paint drips on a brand-new floor). Others prefer to wait – either approach is fine, as long as the walls eventually get primed prior to final painting.

5. Flooring and Cabinetry: Now the focus shifts to finishes. Generally, you'll install **flooring** before things like cabinets or trim, but the exact timing can vary by material. The goal is to avoid damaging your new floors during remaining construction. One common approach is:

Install hard flooring (tiles, hardwood, laminate, etc.) at this stage, then immediately **cover it for protection**. For example, after laying hardwood or tile, contractors often cover it with rosin paper or ram board (heavy cardboard sheets) taped at the seams to shield it from paint splatters or tool drops. If you'll be installing carpet in some areas, many builders actually wait until the very end for carpet (since it's soft and easy to damage or get dirty). Each project is a little different – if your hardwood runs under your kitchen cabinets, you might do it *before* cabinet

install; if you're doing a floating floor that butts against cabinets, you'll do it after. Professionals weigh these choices to get the best result. The key is that by the time flooring is done (or at least all **messy** work on ceilings and walls above it is done), you're ready to bring in cabinetry and fixtures.

Next, install **cabinets, built-ins, and trim**. Now your kitchen cabinets, bathroom vanities, shelving, and other built-ins go into place, anchored to the walls and floors. Along with this, finish carpentry like interior **doors**, baseboards, window and door casings, and crown molding (if used) are installed. It's like the room is getting dressed up: suddenly those finishing touches give a polished shape to your space. You can literally walk into your new kitchen (cabinets in place) or use your new closets, though they might still be empty shells at this point. One note: if you had any **wall tile** to do (say a tiled shower or a kitchen backsplash), it can be done now or after cabinets; for example, kitchen backsplash tile is typically set after the countertops are installed (since it sits on the counter). At this stage, your renovation looks nearly complete, aside from appliances and final fixture hookups.

6. Paint, Fixtures, and Finishing Touches: We're in the home stretch! Now comes the detail work that makes the renovation *shine*. If painters didn't do a final coat before, they will paint walls and trim now (or at least do necessary **touch-ups** to any primer/paint done earlier). Electricians return to install light fixtures, outlet/switch cover plates, and hook up appliances. Plumbers come back to install sinks, faucets, toilets, and connect the water to appliances like dishwashers or water heaters. These last installations are sometimes called the "trim-out" or "finish-out" for the trades – it's when all the pieces they roughed in earlier get the final fixtures attached and working. If you're getting new appliances, they'll be brought in and connected. Flooring folks might return to finish any transitions or, if carpet is in the plan, **carpet is usually the last floor covering to be laid** (after painting is fully done, so the carpet doesn't become a drop cloth!). Finally, any remaining details like backsplashes, mirrors, hardware (drawer pulls, towel bars), and accessories get installed. The space gets a thorough cleaning to remove construction dust. At this point, you should have a fully transformed area ready for use. A good contractor will do a **final walkthrough** with you to ensure everything is done to your satisfaction and address any punch-list items (tiny fixes or adjustments). And don't forget any final inspections required by the city for your permit sign-off – they may need to check that all electrical and plumbing fixtures are working and up to code before closing out the permit. Once that's done, congratulations – it's time to enjoy your renovated space!



*(Notice that this sequence keeps messy work like demo, framing, and drywall **ahead** of installing finishes like flooring and cabinets. Following this order avoids scenarios like scratching a new hardwood floor by dragging out demolition debris, or cutting holes in a freshly painted wall to add an outlet you forgot. Each step builds on the previous one in a logical flow.)*

Beware of Common DIY Pitfalls (and How to Avoid Them)



Even well-planned projects can run into trouble. Here are some common renovation pitfalls, especially for DIY enthusiasts, and tips to sidestep them:

Skipping Permits or Inspections: It might be tempting to avoid the paperwork, but doing work without proper permits is a big gamble. Unpermitted renovations in Louisville can result in **hefty fines and even orders to tear out work** if discovered. More importantly, permits exist to ensure safety. For example, an inspection might catch that your new bathroom outlet isn't GFCI-protected (a shock hazard), or that your water heater vent is back-drafting carbon monoxide. These aren't "red tape" – they're lifesavers. Always obtain the required permits and welcome the inspectors' expertise. It's far easier to do it right the first time than to fix it later. *(Tip: Louisville Metro's online portal and "Homeowner's Toolbox" guides can walk you through the permit process; don't hesitate to call the office if you have questions.)*

Underestimating Costs and Timeline: A tale as old as time – a homeowner thinks a project will take **two months and \$10k**, but six months and \$25k later, it's still not done. Renovations often have surprises (inside walls, nothing is ever as straightforward as it seems). That's why it's crucial to build **contingency** into your budget and schedule. One seasoned DIYer's advice is to **double your initial time and cost estimate** – this way you're more likely to come out pleasantly surprised or at least on budget. If you plan for the worst, anything less feels like a win. Keep some funds (around 10-20% of the project cost) reserved for the unexpected: mold behind the shower tiles, termite damage in a wall, or an upgraded light fixture you splurge on. Similarly, be prepared for tasks to take longer, especially if you're learning as you go. Avoid scheduling something immovable (like hosting a big family event) for right when your project is supposed to finish; give yourself a buffer.

Taking on Too Much Solo: DIY shows make everything look doable, but complex renovations are an orchestration of multiple skilled trades. We've said it before but it bears repeating: know when to call in the pros. If you tackle work that's beyond your knowledge, you risk **serious issues** – from electrical fires caused by improper wiring to burst pipes flooding your new basement floor. In fact, Kentucky law requires certain work to be done by licensed pros or the homeowner occupant only; you can't have an unlicensed friend do your electrical, for instance. As a DIYer, focus on what you can do safely: demolition, painting, maybe installing laminate flooring or assembling cabinets. Leave tasks like **structural engineering, major plumbing, HVAC, and electrical installations** to licensed contractors. Hiring professionals for these critical steps can save you money in the long run by preventing damage or code violations. It also provides peace of mind that the work was done right. Remember, it's **not** an all-or-nothing choice – many successful renovators DIY some parts and bring in experts for others. Your home is your biggest investment; it's worth protecting.

Ignoring Moisture and Climate Concerns: Louisville's climate demands attention to moisture control in renovations. Our humid summers and chilly winters can wreak havoc if you don't build accordingly. Common DIY oversights include **insufficient waterproofing** in wet areas, lack of ventilation, or using the wrong materials in the wrong place. For example, finishing a basement without addressing water leaks or humidity is a recipe for mold – always fix drainage issues and consider a vapor barrier and dehumidifier for below-grade spaces. Use cement backer board (not drywall) behind tile in showers, and ensure bathrooms have a vent fan ducted to the outside. In basements, you'll likely need to incorporate **insulation plus a vapor retarder** appropriate for our climate zone to avoid condensation in walls. And don't forget the **freeze/thaw cycle**: water pipes in exterior walls or unheated areas must be insulated or heat-traced to prevent freezing in winter, and masonry or tile work near exterior walls should allow for slight expansion and contraction. Choose materials with Louisville's weather in mind – for instance, hardwood flooring needs to acclimate to our local humidity before installation, and you might opt for more dimensionally stable products (like engineered wood or LVP) in moisture-prone areas. Bottom line: building

science matters. If you're unsure, consult with a local expert or resources like Matt Risinger's Build Show for best practices on moisture management and energy efficiency.

Poor Sequencing and Planning of Work: Doing things in the wrong order is a classic pitfall that can **double your work**. A few examples: painting walls or installing new carpet *before* you demo that old ceiling (result: you ruin your new finishes with debris), or forgetting to rough-in a new light fixture until after drywall is up (result: you cut holes in your nicely finished wall). Avoid this by following the **renovation order of operations** we outlined above. Seasoned builders emphasize an "inside-out, top-down" approach: fix the hidden structural stuff first, then the systems, then close walls, then do ceilings and paint, then floors last. If you ever feel unsure about what comes next, don't hesitate to ask a contractor or inspector for guidance – many are happy to point DIYers in the right direction. Another planning pitfall is not considering how one project affects another. For instance, if you're remodeling multiple rooms, think about how working in one area might block access or mess up another. If you refinish hardwood floors in the hallway **before** renovating the adjacent bathroom, that new floor could get scratched when hauling in a cast-iron tub later. Plan sequencing not just within a room, but across your home: sometimes it makes sense to postpone finishing touches in one area until a messy job nearby is done. Good planning is like a chess game – anticipate your next moves.

Underestimating the Disruption: A final pitfall is overlooking how much a renovation can disrupt your daily life. Even a one-room project can send ripples through your routine (noise, dust, workers in your home, utilities being shut off). If you're DIYing while living in the house, it can be stressful to cook in a makeshift kitchen for months or to have kids doing homework amid construction dust. Mitigate this by setting up alternate spaces (a temporary kitchen, a mini living room away from the work zone) and by containing dust and mess as much as possible. Use plastic barriers and keep the work area isolated. Communicate with your family about the schedule – for example, "Water will be off on Tuesday morning while I tie in the new plumbing; plan showers accordingly." And be mentally prepared: there will be days when the house is a mess and your patience wears thin. It helps to focus on the end goal and celebrate progress along the way (yes, even that first coat of drywall mud is progress!). By expecting the chaos and having a plan to live with it, you'll handle the journey much better.

You've Got This – And We're Here to Help!



Renovating a home in Louisville can be one of the most rewarding projects you ever tackle. With the right roadmap, you'll not only end up with a more beautiful and functional space, but you'll also enjoy the process knowing you've avoided the common traps. Remember to **plan thoroughly, take it step by step, and don't hesitate to ask for help from professionals when you need it**. Even the most seasoned builders lean on a team – you're never truly doing it *all* alone.

At **HH**, we're passionate about helping homeowners create their dream spaces with confidence. Whether you just need a bit of coaching, or you'd like us to handle the heavy lifting, we're here as your friendly renovation partner. **You deserve a home that works for you**, and we'd love to help you get there. Feel free to reach out to us for expert guidance or a free consultation – together, let's turn your renovation dreams into a reality, one well-planned step at a time. *Happy renovating!*

