

A word on condo renos

Older condo units tend to hit the holy real-estate trinity, offering more space at lower prices in better neighbourhoods. But they can also be awfully worn-out and dated. Renovating a condo presents its own special challenges—here are a few things to note before diving in.

1. Other people live in this building, and there are rules to make sure everyone plays nice. “We could only work from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, so that affected our schedule a bit,” says Heather Ann Kaldeway, who fixed up a two-bedroom unit in Grange Park. The condo board might also dictate what kind of flooring you can use (and what type of sub-flooring is mandatory for noise proofing), as well as the rules for fiddling with pipes or gas lines that are connected to other units.
2. Make sure you own it before you mess with it. “Technically, your terrace or balcony is probably a common element. You have the exclusive right to use it, but you can’t alter it—put up a fence or an enclosure, for example—without the condo corporation’s approval,” says agent Brandon Ware. “It’s like renovating a hallway.” This was all outlined in the agreement you signed when purchasing, so ignorance is no defence.
3. The last owner’s renovations are now your responsibility. That glass shower is gorgeous, but does the condo board know about it? If not, they can impose financial penalties or prevent you from selling before it’s replaced. “When making an offer on a condo, include a standard clause ensuring that the current seller sought approval on all renovations they completed,” says Ware. “Otherwise, you’re forever on the hook if anything goes wrong.”
4. It might be tricky to find a contractor. “We don’t have a loading dock, and the parking garage is too short for trucks. We also don’t have a yard to put a garbage bin in for construction debris,” says Kaldeway. “Contractors have lots of business to keep them busy, so many opted to work elsewhere.” In the end, she hired a designer who helped her maximize her 850 square feet and had an in with a slew of contractors and manufacturers.

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