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Atomic Ranch Project House Austin

How to Manage Your Project Budgets

Experts share their real-world renovation and redesign advice.



IT'S OFTEN THE FIRST STEP, if not the precluding step, to starting your next home project. But there's more to creating a budget than just your bank account. In order to set a realistic budget—and stick to it—you need to have the proper expectations and know the potential pitfalls. We consulted some leading Mid Century Modern-minded interior design experts for their top tips on how to make and keep the right budget for your renovation.

Sally Julien

**Modernus
Seattle, Washington**

Have a complete plan.

There is a saying that you can pick two of the following: fast, cheap, good. Having a full plan before starting can take a bit of time, which is hard for the impatient among us, but it can improve the result and save a lot of money by letting you really balance the various components and figure out the best places to save and best places to splurge.

Get the look for less.

A good designer can help you create a high-end look for less by focusing first on the design (the sky is the limit!) and then figuring out a way to get that look with less expensive materials.



Elin Walters

Exactly Designs
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Design your space completely before beginning any work. This is my best advice, because time spent planning saves money in the long run. Being thorough and taking time to consider the entire scope of the project ensures that you've thought of all the details. Those surprises can be costly!

Think long-term and invest accordingly. I talk to many clients who are frustrated that they didn't "do it right" the first time and now have to spend more money to make it right. If you spread out the cost over time, you'll find that the "better choices" are worth it. Cutting corners or settling for the less-expensive options at the time often backfires.

Christine Ho

Breathe Design Studio
Austin, Texas

Obtain realistic allowances. You often rely on your general contractor for a labor and materials budget, but the materials allocated for the area may be underquoted, leaving you with an unexpectedly changed order. For example, you may be given too low of a price for a square foot of tile for a backsplash. Ask your builder to give you mid-level allowances from the beginning; if you don't receive one, you can request a "take off" for the area so you can figure out the cost yourself based on the tile or material you are considering.

Balance "statement" design elements with neutral ones. If you are looking to splurge on or incorporate a statement design element for your renovation, opt for neutral finishes in the remainder of the space when in doubt. For example, if you've fallen in love with blue cabinets, balance them with neutral countertops, backsplash and lighting to keep the focus on your pop of color.

Michael Norpell

Michael Norpell Wall To Wall
Palm Springs, California

Don't start your renovations too soon. If possible, live in your house for a while before making any plans to overhaul. Learn the home's flow... its soul. Pay attention to how you use the spaces. What works and what could be better?

Review lessons learned from similar projects. Ask your friends, family or that neighbor who recently completed a project similar to yours. Their projects will be a gold mine of information because they're a real-life record of where budgets stayed on (or off) track. They can help you see costs you might have overlooked or how unexpected circumstances might influence a bigger budget.