

Renovating? Building? Consider Your Health

By Chris vanderZwan

These are exciting times! You've made the decision to renovate or build new. You've lain awake at night picturing the finished product and you're eager to get started. Before you hit that "go" button, take a moment to stop and think about something often overlooked: your health. There are multiple avenues to explore here, but *personal* and *financial* health tend to sit atop the list.

Knowing *exactly* what you want and how much you have to spend will go a long way to avoiding surprises and keeping your stress level down. Getting to that stage is a result of careful planning over an extended period of time. Rushing into decisions of this magnitude will commonly yield a less-desirable result. Making changes during the construction phase of your renovation or build will add costs, cause delays and contribute to higher stress levels for all involved.

A mortgage agent or financial advisor can help with a budget. Aim below your budget to ensure any extras won't break the bank. A real estate agent can help you determine if your plans make sense from an investment point of view. For renovations in particular, think about how long you plan to stay in your home. Your renovation plans may not make economic sense if you're planning to sell in the short term. Consult with the city building and planning departments to ensure property zoning and bylaws won't be an obstacle. It's also a good idea to engage a contractor as early as possible. You're not committing to anything at this time; a contractor can help you determine what's realistic, given your unique property and set of circumstances. Does your project require the services of an architect or engineer? Do you have to worry about existing contaminants such as asbestos or mould? The more you know the better.

Having a family member with an illness or allergy may help identify a list of materials and finishes to avoid, but *everyone's* health should be considered. Any contractor should have a proactive plan for mitigating unwanted moisture, dust, debris and *radon*. A critical factor is "indoor air quality" (IAQ). Any time we introduce something "new" to the home environment, look at it in terms of what *can't* be seen:

- Paints, flooring and new cabinets can "off-gas" and are common sources of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's) such as formaldehyde.
- Consider installing wire in place of "wireless" for your telephone and computer networking equipment to reduce radio frequency emissions.
- A fresh air supply is *essential*. A Heat Recovery Ventilator (HRV) will introduce fresh air to your home while extracting the heat-energy from the stale outgoing air. An HRV not only increases oxygen levels, but also controls humidity and removes pollutants. For today's more air-tight construction practices, an HRV is not optional equipment. Fresh, clean air is the most important element of a healthy living environment.

Slow down, do your homework, ask lots of questions and you'll be well on your way to enjoying a healthier new or renovated living space.