

# Building complete communities

## RENOVATE WITH CONFIDENCE



Bill Meek of W. C. Meek Design has seen his share of renos gone wrong. He advises homeowners to spend the time to find the right renovator.

PEYMAN SOHEILI

### If you want peace of mind the job will be done correctly – hire a pro

Bill Meek has inherited his share of renos gone wrong. “We fix a lot of them,” says the owner of W.C. Meek Design and Construction Ltd.

One of the worst in recent memory involved a fully detached house where a handyman had removed a wall to create a more open kitchen layout. The homeowner thought everything looked great.

There was just one problem.

“The guy had taken away a load-bearing wall,” Meek says, “as if it were a partition wall, and he didn’t replace it with a beam.”

Six months later, Meek and company were called in because the second floor of the home — lacking any structural support beneath the now-opened wall, had begun to sink.

“The middle of the house had dropped down about six inches,” he says. He brought in an engineer to assess the damage, then hoisted the floor back up and supported it with a footing, while also putting in a beam to undergird the opened kitchen wall.

Total cost to fix the problem: \$25,000.

“If it had been done properly initially it would have been a \$10,000 job, max,” Meek says.

Not hiring a qualified renovator to do the initial job hit this homeowner’s wallet hard. But the structurally unsound house posed an even greater threat to the safety of its residents.

“This woman trusted a person who said he could do what he couldn’t do,” Meek says, adding that she’d paid him in cash. “The guy just didn’t have the education.”

It’s an eye-opening cautionary tale that underscores the need for homeowners to choose carefully when picking a renovator.

There’s never been a busier time for the renovation industry. With the many homes across the GTA ripe for revamping, each year about four in 10 households invest in renovations, at an average cost of \$14,000, according to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. Topping the list in terms of getting the most value for your buck is a renovated kitchen, upgraded bathroom and a new roof, according to recent research conducted by RE/MAX.

With low interest rates and rising home prices — compelling homeowners to stay put and improve what they’ve got — the renovation industry is driving the local economy, generating 87,300 jobs and \$4.8 billion in wages, and creating \$13 million in investment value in the GTA alone last year, according to research commissioned by the Canadian Home Builders’ Association.

Consumers who hire fly-by-night underground contractors are exposing themselves to great potential risk. These contractors are less likely to pay taxes, have a business licence or carry insurance for their workers, all

of which can have disastrous consequences for homeowners if something goes wrong.

“Working with a professional renovator is of utmost importance because you want to be confident that you’re trusting your home to someone with the right knowledge and experience to do the job and do it right,” says Bryan Tuckey, president and CEO of the Building Industry and Land and Development Association (BILD). “If you think it’s expensive to hire a professional, keep in mind how much it will cost in the long run if you hire an amateur. You could end up paying thousands to fix sub-standard work or risk having no work done at all.”

Hundreds of professional renovators and trade contractors are available at your fingertips. A good place to look is [renomark.ca](http://renomark.ca), where there is a searchable online database of professional renovators. RenoMark renovators and trade contractors agree to a renovation-specific code of conduct, and they provide a written contract; offer a minimum \$2 million in liability insurance; provide a two-year warranty on all work; and they have all applicable licenses and permits to get the job done right.

RenoMark is a great starting point, says Joel Scopelleti, owner of Carick Home Improvements, a BILD member since 1998 and a RenoMark renovator since the program’s inception in 2001. He stresses the importance of homeowners doing due diligence and knowing exactly what to expect before hammers start swinging.

Most critical, he says, is to have a contract that spells out everything: the timetable for the project; an itemized work order of what’s included in the scope and what’s not; procedures for handling change orders; and, of course, a payment schedule.

“It’s better for everybody if it’s all there in writing,” he added. Both Scopelleti’s and Meek’s companies won big recently at the annual BILD’s Renovation and Custom Home Awards, which recognize the best of the GTA’s home renovation and custom-home building industry. Scopelleti and his crew earned accolades for transforming a tired old condo into an open and contemporary space. And W.C. Meek Design and Construction Ltd. won for its reno of an outdated and dysfunctional master bathroom.

“Bill was great, very professional from the beginning,” says homeowner Lan Power. “Just looking at his initial proposal, it was obvious the guy watches details and knows what he’s talking about. He wasn’t the cheapest quote, but considering the finished product, it was well worth it.”

Industry recognition for a job well done is gratifying, but Scopelleti says the real reward for contractors like him is when all involved are still smiling when the job is done.

“A renovation is like a marriage — there will be ups and downs,” Scopelleti says. “But until the job is done right, we’re all in this together.”

Before and after photos of these renovations and others that were Renovation Awards finalists and winners will be on display at BILD’s Destination Renovation booth at the upcoming Fall Home Show at the Better Living Centre at Exhibition Place from October 1-4. The booth will also have free copies of BILD’s RenoGuide, which has helpful tips on how to find a professional renovator and what consumers need to know.

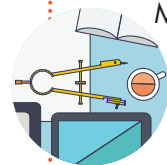
The Home Show is a good place to learn about new products and services and to get information about the latest trends and technology. RenoMark renovators and trade contractors will be volunteering their time at the Destination Renovation booth and homeowners can stop by with their questions, ideas, pictures or drawings and get some free advice.

Visit [fallhomeshow.com](http://fallhomeshow.com) and redeem the promo code **RENO101** to get \$4 off regular adult admission to the Fall Home Show.

### 5 STEPS TO A WORRY-FREE RENO

Follow this approach to avoid big headaches

#### 1. PLAN CAREFULLY



Major projects will likely require the services of an architect and other pros like engineers and heating and cooling contractors. You need their drawings to obtain building permits and other approvals; this will also provide the basis for a contractor to price the project. Be realistic about timing and consider the renovation’s full costs, adding in a 10 per cent contingency for the unexpected. And consider the impact the project will have on your neighbours — best to discuss the project with them ahead of time.

#### 2. HIRE A PROFESSIONAL RENOVATOR



Ask about the renovator’s experience with projects similar to yours. Speak to homeowners who have had equivalent work done. A RenoMark renovator must agree to abide by a local home builders’ association’s code of ethics and a renovation-specific code of conduct. A professional renovator will have liability insurance, licences and can help you get the proper permits.

#### 3. GET A WRITTEN CONTRACT



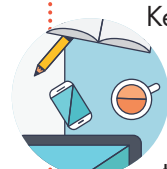
Sign a contract with a renovator to perform the work. Be sure to get everything in writing: the scope of the job; exact price, including a schedule of payments; a reasonable timetable for completing the work; and instructions for protecting parts of the house not under construction. Avoid renovators who want to make a “cash deal” or seek to avoid paying HST.

#### 4. CHECK ON PROGRESS



Schedule regular meetings with your renovator and visit the site to look in on how things are moving along. Discuss changes and make sure to get it in writing.

#### 5. COMMUNICATE



Keep the lines of communication open at all times as changes or additional work can come up and may add to the project’s cost and timing. Remember, your contractor is your partner in realizing your vision for your project.

## Renos done right

A LOOK AT A COUPLE OF PROJECTS THAT RECEIVED 2015 BILD RENOVATION AND CUSTOM HOME AWARDS

**Midtown condo renewal**  
**OWNERS:** Sandra and Rob Knowles

**RENOVATOR:** Carick Home Improvements  
**AWARD:** Best Condominium Renovation



**INITIAL ISSUE:** The view from the Knowles’ two-bedroom unit at Yonge and St Clair was what originally attracted them to the space, but the vista was only visible from the cramped kitchen. “We wanted to open up everything up,” Sandra says.

**RENO SOLUTION:** Ceilings were raised in the living room to nine feet, opening up the space considerably. Kitchen-living room wall was knocked down and the space completely redone. Plus: two upgraded bathrooms, new tile in the kitchen and bathrooms; and a new walk-in closet.

**BEST PART:** “The openness of the final space,” Sandra says.

#### Beach bathroom makeover

**OWNERS:** Lan and David Power  
**RENOVATOR:** W.C. Meek Design and Construction Ltd.  
**AWARD:** Best Renovation  
**INITIAL ISSUE:** The bathroom, same as when the Powers moved in over a decade ago, was pink,



with one sink and a giant double-soaker tub, “which sounds lovely as an idea,” Lan says, “but it used up the whole hot water tank to fill it.”

**RENO SOLUTION:** A single-person tub that tapers at the end was installed, creating extra space and using way less water. Double-sink vanity and steam shower was added, plus wood-grained porcelain tile to complement the stained-wood ceiling, giving the space a spa feel. A hidden chute

sends dirty clothes directly to the laundry room.

**BEST PART:** “We love that we have a place where at the end of the day we can take a deep breath and enjoy being at home,” Lan says.