THE PITTSBURGH RENOVATION STRATEGY GUIDE

PLAN SMARTER. SPEND STRATEGICALLY. PROTECT VALUE.

A builder-informed guide for homeowners, buyers and sellers deciding what to renovate, what to skip, and where investment can make the greatest difference.



1 **STRATEGY**
Start with the goal.

2 **VALUE**
Know the market ceiling.

3 **CONSTRUCTION**
Understand what is behind the finish.

4 **RESALE**
Renovate for the next decision.

AUBRE STACKNICK, REALTOR® | GLOBAL REAL ESTATE ADVISOR
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KNOWLEDGE STARTS WITH KNOWING®

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INTRODUCTION

RENOVATION STRATEGY

A BUILDER-INFORMED APPROACH

BEFORE YOU RENOVATE

CLARITY BEFORE CONSTRUCTION

Renovation can create tremendous value - but only when the project, property, budget and long-term goal are aligned.

> *"The best renovation decision is not always the biggest renovation."*



Before becoming a Realtor®, I spent more than two decades building custom homes, managing renovations, coordinating contractors, budgeting projects and helping homeowners turn ideas into lasting investments.

Today, I bring that builder's perspective into real estate decisions. I help clients look beyond finishes to evaluate construction quality, renovation potential, deferred maintenance, marketability and the relationship between project cost and resale value.

1 PROTECT VALUE

Avoid spending where the market will not reward you.

2 REDUCE SURPRISES

Identify hidden conditions before they become expensive.

3 CREATE A PLAN

Sequence projects around budget, timing and goals.

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SECTION I

RENOVATION STRATEGY

SECTION I

RENOVATION
STARTS WITH STRATEGY

THE PROJECT SHOULD FOLLOW THE GOAL

Before choosing tile, cabinets or fixtures, define what success looks like. The same house may require a very different plan depending on whether you are staying, selling or buying.

01 STAYING

Prioritize function, comfort and lifestyle. Personal ROI matters because you will live with the result.

02 SELLING

Remove buyer objections, improve presentation and invest where the market is most likely to respond.

03 BUYING

Evaluate what can change, what cannot, and whether purchase price + renovation still makes sense.

> *"Renovate for the property you own - not the inspiration photo you saved."*

THE FIVE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER FIRST

1. **Why am I renovating?**
2. **How long will I own the home?**
3. **What does this market support?**
4. **What problem am I solving?**
5. **Could a smaller investment do the job?**

DECISION FRAMEWORK

REPAIR. REFRESH. RENOVATE.

NOT EVERY HOME NEEDS A FULL REMODEL

REPAIR

Protect the asset first.

- Water intrusion
- Electrical / plumbing
- Roof / structure
- HVAC / safety

REFRESH

Improve perception efficiently.

- Paint / lighting
- Hardware / fixtures
- Floor refinishing
- Cleaning / landscape

RENOVATE

Change function or major finishes.

- Kitchen / baths
- Basement
- Addition / layout
- Outdoor living

AUBRE'S RULE

Deferred maintenance usually deserves attention before expensive finishes. A beautiful kitchen does not neutralize an active leak, unsafe wiring or obvious structural concern.

> *“Fix the problem. Improve the perception. Renovate only when the strategy supports it.”*

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SECTION II

WHERE TO INVEST

SECTION II

WHERE BUYERS NOTICE VALUE

HIGH-IMPACT AREAS

The strongest projects often improve both how a home functions and how it feels the moment a buyer walks in.



K KITCHEN

Consider selective updates before a full tear-out.

B BATHS

Clean, bright and cohesive beats overbuilt.

F FLOORS

Consistency and condition have a major visual impact.

P PAINT

One of the fastest ways to change perception.

L LIGHTING

Modern fixtures can instantly update a room.

C CURB APPEAL

The renovation experience begins outside.

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SECTION II

WHERE TO INVEST

FOCUS AREAS

KITCHENS & BATHROOMS

BEAUTIFUL DOES NOT HAVE TO MEAN OVERBUILT





KITCHEN: FULL REMODEL OR STRATEGIC UPDATE?

1 KEEP

Cabinet boxes are sound; layout works; selective updates can transform the room.

2 CHANGE

Function is poor, damage exists, or the market clearly supports a higher-level renovation.

3 WATCH

High-end selections that dramatically exceed the neighborhood or likely buyer expectations.

BATHROOM PRIORITIES

Lighting • Vanity condition • Tile and grout • Shower presentation • Storage • Ventilation • Plumbing fixtures

> *“ A $25,000 strategic improvement can sometimes outperform an $80,000 reinvention. ”*

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SECTION III

PITTSBURGH PROPERTY

SECTION III

PITTSBURGH HOMES REQUIRE DIFFERENT THINKING

AGE, CONSTRUCTION & LOCATION MATTER

Western Pennsylvania housing ranges from century-old city homes to mid-century properties, 1980s subdivisions, luxury custom homes, townhomes and new construction. Renovation strategy should not be identical across them.



INVESTIGATE BEFORE YOU DEMO

1. **Electrical systems**
2. **Plumbing / sewer**
3. **Foundation / moisture**
4. **Roof / chimney**
5. **Insulation / windows**
6. **HVAC / prior additions**

> *"Beautiful tile does not tell you what is behind the wall."*

Older homes can offer incredible character and opportunity. They also reward careful investigation before finishes are selected or demolition begins.

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SECTION III

PITTSBURGH PROPERTY

LOWER LEVELS

BASEMENTS, WATER & FUNCTION

FINISH WHAT IS DRY, SOUND AND USEFUL

> *"Before covering foundation walls, understand what is happening behind them."*

1 MOISTURE HISTORY

Past water, staining, efflorescence, drainage.

2 CEILING HEIGHT

Comfort, ductwork, beams and finished clearances.

3 EGRESS

Bedrooms and certain uses may require compliant exits.

4 HVAC

Comfort and air movement matter in finished space.

5 BATH ACCESS

Adds utility, but plumbing location affects cost.

6 WORKMANSHIP

Poor finishing can create more concern than value.

PITTSBURGH REALITY

Basement value is heavily influenced by dryness, ceiling height, natural light, access and finish quality. A finished lower level should feel intentional - not like problems were covered up.

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SECTION IV

PLANNING & CONSTRUCTION

SECTION IV

BEFORE THE FIRST WALL COMES DOWN

PERMITS. STRUCTURE. SYSTEMS. SCOPE.



1 PERMITS

Requirements vary by municipality. Verify before work begins.

2 STRUCTURE

Never assume a wall is non-load-bearing.

3 SYSTEMS

Walls may contain plumbing, wiring, gas or HVAC.

4 ENGINEERING

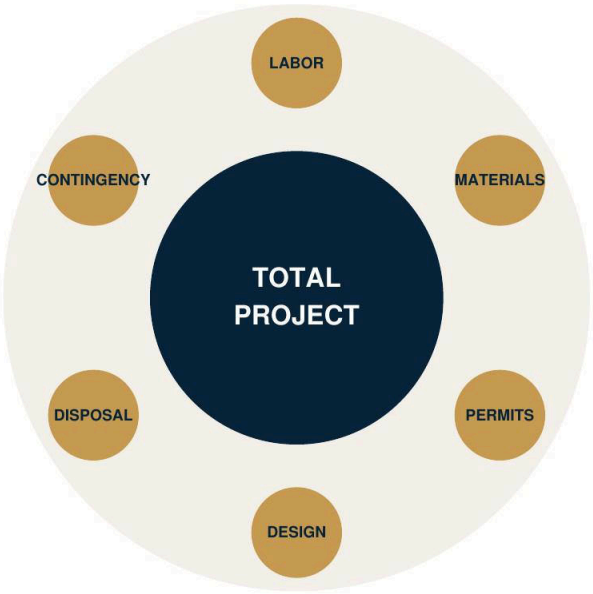
Beams, columns and openings may require professional design.

> *“What looks like simple demolition can become a major construction project.”*

BUDGETING

BUILD THE REAL PROJECT BUDGET

THE CONTRACT PRICE IS NOT THE WHOLE NUMBER



COMMONLY MISSED

- Engineering / design
- Demolition & disposal
- Delivery / storage
- Temporary housing
- Material changes
- Repairs discovered after demo
- Finish upgrades
- Schedule extensions

> *The more walls you open, the more uncertainty you introduce.*

SECTION V

COST IS NOT THE SAME AS VALUE

UNDERSTAND THE NEIGHBORHOOD CEILING



THE PROBLEM: THE MARKET DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY REIMBURSE PROJECT COST.

VALUE IS STILL INFLUENCED BY

- **L** Location
- **L** Lot
- **S** Square footage
- **L** Layout
- **S** School district
- **C** Comparable sales
- **B** Buyer demand
- **N** Neighborhood price ceiling

> *Know the difference between lifestyle ROI and resale ROI.*

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SECTION V

VALUE & RESALE

SELLER STRATEGY

RENOVATING TO SELL

REMOVE OBJECTIONS. IMPROVE PRESENTATION. CREATE DEMAND.

When the sale is near-term, the renovation should serve the market - not your personal wish list.



AND

1 REPAIR

Address issues that undermine confidence.

2 REFRESH

Use paint, lighting, floors and curb appeal to change perception.

3 POSITION

Make improvements appropriate for the likely buyer and price point.

4 STOP

Do not keep spending once the market is unlikely to reward the next dollar.

> *"Sometimes my recommendation is: don't touch it."*

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SECTION VI

BUYING A HOME THAT NEEDS WORK

VISION CAN CREATE OPPORTUNITY



1 FIXABLE

Paint, wallpaper, lighting, cabinets, flooring and many finishes.

2 EXPENSIVE

Structure, major systems, additions and significant layout changes.

3 HARD TO CHANGE

Location, lot, traffic, neighborhood and fundamental orientation.

> *“Buy the things you cannot change carefully. The rest may simply require vision.”*

SECTION VII

HIRING & MANAGING CONTRACTORS

COMPARE SCOPES - NOT JUST PRICES

1 EXPERIENCE

Relevant projects and references.

2 INSURANCE

Coverage and licensing where applicable.

3 SCOPE

Exactly what is and is not included.

4 PAYMENTS

Milestones tied to progress.

5 TIMELINE

Start, sequence and completion expectations.

6 CHANGE ORDERS

How changes are priced and approved.

7 WARRANTY

What is covered after completion.

8 COMMUNICATION

Who is responsible and how often you will hear from them.

> *“Ambiguity becomes expensive during construction.”*

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SECTION VII

PROJECT EXECUTION

THE ROADMAP

A CLEAR PROCESS. CONFIDENT PROGRESS.

FROM IDEA TO COMPLETION

1 **GOAL** Define why.

2 **ASSESS** Inspect the home.

3 **BUDGET** Build the real number.

4 **SCOPE** Define the work.

5 **SELECT** Choose materials.

6 **PERMIT** Verify approvals.

7 **BUILD** Manage execution.

8 **REVIEW** Track changes.

9 **DOCUMENT** Keep records.

10 **VALUE** Reassess outcome.

> *Strategy before selections. Scope before demolition. Documentation before closing the wall.*

CLIENT RESOURCE

PRE-RENOVATION CHECKLIST

USE THIS BEFORE YOU COMMIT TO THE PROJECT

- [ ] Define the goal: stay, sell or buy
- [ ] Establish a realistic total budget
- [ ] Add contingency funds
- [ ] Evaluate comparable homes
- [ ] Identify repairs before cosmetics
- [ ] Verify permit requirements
- [ ] Obtain detailed contractor estimates
- [ ] Compare scopes, not just totals
- [ ] Verify credentials and insurance
- [ ] Determine whether engineering is needed
- [ ] Finalize major selections
- [ ] Identify long-lead materials
- [ ] Create a realistic timeline
- [ ] Establish payment milestones
- [ ] Document change orders
- [ ] Photograph existing conditions
- [ ] Keep permits, receipts and warranties
- [ ] Revisit resale value before major upgrades

DECISION GUIDE

AUBRE'S RENOVATION RULES

THE QUESTIONS I WANT CLIENTS TO ASK

01 **SOLVE A PROBLEM**

Does the project improve condition, function or marketability?

02 **KNOW THE CEILING**

Will the neighborhood support the investment?

03 **PROTECT THE ASSET**

Repairs and water management come before pretty finishes.

04 **PRICE THE WHOLE JOB**

Include design, permits, disposal, contingency and changes.

05 **RESPECT THE TIMELINE**

Long-lead selections can derail otherwise good projects.

06 **THINK LIKE THE NEXT BUYER**

Even if you are staying, avoid choices that destroy future flexibility.

BEFORE YOU RENOVATE, ASK AUBRE

MAKE THE DECISION BEFORE THE INVESTMENT.

Whether you are preparing to sell, buying a home that needs work, or deciding whether to renovate or move, the best first step is understanding the property, the market and the likely return before construction begins.

> *"Sometimes the answer is renovation. Sometimes it is a strategic refresh. And sometimes the right answer is: don't touch it."*



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Knowledge Starts with Knowing

YOUR NEXT CHAPTER STARTS HERE.