



An experienced architect or interior designer will get your condominium or co-op renovation completed - by C. Jaye Berger

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When most people think about renovating their co-op or condominium apartment, they focus on what it is going to cost and who is going to do the design work. Obviously, those are essential issues, but there is a lot more to the process. A good architect or interior designer should be one who has experience doing other projects in co-ops and condos similar or the same as yours. They will understand the process involved with having their paperwork reviewed by the board and the building's architect. The building architect and property manager will review whatever designs are submitted and return them with comments and requests for further information. Those items must be satisfactorily resolved before the project can be approved to go forward by the building. This is an area in which many people lose a lot of time moving the project forward. They need to do a lot of back and forth with the building architect and don't necessarily keep that on track. Before anything gets started, the clients need to have the proposed contract from the architect or the designer reviewed by an attorney knowledgeable in this area to confirm whether all the necessary services have been listed. For example, some people want to save money and do not have the architect periodically visit the project. That would be something that is pennywise and pound-foolish. As clients, you are not technically equipped to evaluate the status of the project in relation to the design. That is a task that should be handled by the architect. This becomes especially important if there is a dispute with the architect later on and the client wants to change to someone else. Your current architect will need to be able to properly and fully state the status of the project in relation to the design. Only the architect can say whether the project is 80% complete or something else. The description would not be in layman terms such as "bathroom is mostly complete." Also, courts rely on the design professional's statement of opinion regarding status and quality of the work.

The design professionals will be crucial in making recommendations regarding the sub-contractors and others working on the project. He or she should ask for copies of their certificates of insurance. There will probably be an alteration package from the building in which you will have to say something about how long the project will take. There can be damages for being late between the client and the contractors as well as between the contractors and the building. These damages should be passed onto the contractor. Some buildings have their own designated amount of time for completing construction which may conflict with your idea of how long the project will take. Do not just agree to an amount of time that is unrealistic in order to get the project started. It is helpful to have people who have previously worked in your particular building. They may have experience in the process and expectations of the building, property manager, and the building's super. Your design professionals should also keep track of how much money is spent. This includes having waivers of lien from both the architect and any contractors. People forget that architects can file mechanics liens for their services, whereas interior designers cannot. The design professionals should take photographs of your empty space as well as the apartments on either side of it to document the condition. You cannot assume this will be done. It should be stated in the contract. There might be evidence of cracks or leaks that can become important in the project. The clients need to be available and prepared to review the status of the project throughout. It is not a good idea to give the keys to the design professionals, go on vacation and return when the project is done. The design professional should also be taking progress photos on your behalf.

A little extra time spent now organizing before the project begins can pay off later. In one project the client wanted to own the designs. It is not traditional to allow that and the designer of the project was advised that was not agreeable. It is better to have some of those uncomfortable conversations sooner rather than later to avoid possible litigation. The best way to finalize the project is to have signed waivers of lien from all parties. That way, you can have greater certainty that everyone agrees the project is complete.

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