

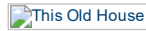
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'Renovation therapists' analyze disasters

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Delays are common, so don't start renovations before a big event, therapist says
- Don't tolerate rude workers or those without proper tools
- Standard warranty on contractor labor is a year, contact them early
- Experts: Check on project regularly to catch mistakes -- always be polite

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(This Old House) -- Renovation therapists Rory McCreesh, Reva Kussmaul, Ignacio Arribas and Nitsa Lallas take on these three homeowners' disasters.

Reader therapists listen to remodel sob stories and offer strategies to avoid that next home-improvement trauma.

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CASE #1: Wedding bell blues

Tracey Ann D., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"We had a deadline for our kitchen remodel: our wedding, on October 20. Work began on September 7. The first problem was that our wall cabinets were hung upside down. Next, we asked for oak butcher block, but we got maple, and the subway tiles in the backsplash were cracked and sticking out in places like buckteeth.

Two weeks before the wedding -- still with no running water, sink, or counters, and with only one naked bulb hanging from the ceiling -- we had to fire the contractor. There was a silver lining, though. The wedding was lovely!"

Rory's diagnosis: These people hired a bum. The only way to protect yourself is to get

recommendations. You wouldn't pull into just any garage and say, "Hey, do my brakes." No, you'd ask a friend "Do you know a mechanic?" Same goes for finding a contractor.

But don't just get a name and number; get an address, and check it out. Then look at the contractor's portfolio and ask questions about the photographs to be sure he's showing you projects that he did, not somebody else. That's one trick. The last thing is to go see the work in person. We take people to past clients' homes all the time so they can see, feel, and touch our work.

Nitsa and Ignacio's diagnosis: As with any renovation project, there are always delays. You don't know exactly what they'll be, but you can predict that they'll happen: Cabinets won't arrive on time, the contractor will get sick, there'll be bad weather. So starting something seven weeks before your wedding really is a disaster waiting to happen. It's better to wait, and take it one life-changing event at a time.

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CASE #2: No tools, no manners, no way

Gary O., Reston, Virginia

"Even the simplest things that shouldn't go wrong, will go wrong. I had bathroom mirrors installed. The crew didn't have a level (I provided mine); they didn't have a stud finder (I provided mine); they didn't have drop cloths (I provided mine).

It got worse once the work began. A drill slipped, just missing the new granite vanity top and making a dent in the drywall (not repaired); they put glue on mirrors while they were lying on our carpet with no

protection against drips; they started to install one of the mirrors in the wrong bathroom. As they left, they ran over my garden." [This Old House: Hand-holders for homeowners](#)

Reva's diagnosis: The first red flag was no level. The second was no stud finder. The third was no drop cloth. Shame on you, Gary.

You knew exactly what was going on but had the fatalistic attitude that you just can't win. If they're so unprepared, you have to say, "I'm uncomfortable with you not having the tools to do this job. I'm going to regroup and talk to your boss. Maybe you can come back another time." You could have controlled this.

Rory: Oh, geez, yeah, I would have tossed them out of the [house](#). Now this is a small project, so you're not going to get references, but the contractor should treat your home with respect.

Next time a crew walks into your house for the first time, check their manners. Are they courteous enough to ask to take off their boots or shoes? Remember, you're bringing strangers into your home. [This Old House: How to hire a contractor](#)

CASE #3: Treacherous tub

Nancy R., Carmichael, California

"We are completing a remodel and discovered that the plumber installed the on/off and hot/cold handle way up on the wall (46½ inches from the tub floor), close to the showerhead. He placed the diverter valve just above the tub filler.

My young daughters will now have to stand up to adjust the temperature. The contractor says it's 'fine' and refuses to correct it even though these were not the specs we agreed to."

Reva's diagnosis: If you had plans and the contractor didn't follow them, then he should make it right. The standard warranty on a contractor's labor is a year.

But if the shower plumbing wasn't specified, the best way to get the contractor to fix the work is to say, "Okay, what can we do to make this right? What do we need to talk about as far as money goes?" Don't go to him in an accusatory fashion because he'll say, "Forget you."

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Nitsa and Ignacio: Nancy also has some accountability. We were having our kitchen redone and the electrician put some outlets in the wall. We looked, and looked, and looked at them some more because they seemed too low.

We told the contractor, but he insisted that they were the right height. So we asked, "Could you please come out and measure them to be sure?" Turned out they were too low. The countertops would have been right where the outlets were. You must check on your project on an ongoing basis so if something goes wrong you can tell the contractor early enough that he can fix it. [E-mail to a friend](#) | [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

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