

## The Best Time to Remodel

If you play poker, you know there is a time to hold them and a time to fold them. If you play the stock market, you know there is a time to buy, a time to sigh, and a time to kiss that stock goodbye. If you plan to remodel or add onto your house, is there a best time to get started with the building? For those of you in a hurry, here's my quick and snappy answer: The best time to start is after:

► *Completing a Relaxed and Well Considered Design Process*

► *Finishing Your Detailed Plans and Specifications*

► *Wrapping Up Careful and Systematic Contractor Selection*

► *Rounding Up the Money You Need to Get the Job Finished Plus Ten Percent More For Contingencies*

Once you get these big four tasks accomplished, here are some additional factors that can indicate the best time to start your remodel:

► **THE WEATHER.** We are blessed here in Sacramento with a remarkably dry summer and an equally defined wet winter. In my work on literally hundreds of home additions and remodels, I have found that most people make the assumption that the dry season is the only time for construction activity, leaving the wet season for indoor activities such as design, plan preparation, and contractor selection. It's easy to forget that in much of the United States it rains pretty much all year round, and people start projects during every month of the year.

There's no denying that it's more convenient to have your house under construction, perhaps with the roof torn off, when there's little threat of rain. On the other hand, that's when most people are starting their projects

which means costs will be generally higher, sometimes by a factor of as much as 20-30%.

In other words, there's usually a high price to pay for convenience. We've also seen rain in every month of the year. I can tell you from experience that it's just as distressing to be a homeowner standing in puddles on your hardwood floor in July as it is in November. In November, the rain is expected and tarps will be fastidiously used by the best contractors. In the summer, it is easy to become cavalier or overly confident, making the risks, although slight, much more traumatic if your luck runs out.

In some parts of Sacramento, the soil conditions make construction during the rainy season difficult or impossible. It's hard to move men and equipment around in a mucky, muddy mess, but that is not usually a critical factor as witnessed by the production building that takes place every month of the year.

► **MARKET CONDITIONS.** As I've already noted, costs can go up and down depending on the weather. This leads more or less people to be in the market place seeking construction skills and materials at any point in time. In the typical renovation or addition, about half the cost goes to materials which might fluctuate by 10-20% due to demand factors (occasionally skyrocketing much higher as we witnessed with lumber prices just a few years ago). Cost of labor, which makes up the other 50%, can vary more. If contractors or sub-contractors don't have anything to work on, they're going to value their time less dearly, passing on to you a true bargain.

We have found that in Sacramento the lowest prices are usually in the months of January, starting about 2 weeks after the holidays, and lasting until the end of February. As the first few spring days show up in March, people start thinking about remodeling and the increase in activity and greater competition leads to rising costs.

There are also bigger factors in market conditions. For the last three years, the economy in Sacramento has generally been pretty discouraging for contractors, and we have seen some great deals for homeowners. Those conditions are ending, and we are rapidly entering a period of increasing prices. Even as you read this article, we are seeing month by month costs increasing due to both labor and materials.

►FAMILY SANITY. It's easy to underestimate the mental energy and time it takes to go through a planning process. If your life is in a turmoil or you're suffering from a high degree of stress, it will take away from the fun and excitement of the remodeling process. If your family's sanity is in a delicate balance already, perhaps due to a new baby on the way or a wedding coming up, make sure you have the psychic energy and time resources necessary for a home remodeling project!

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