If you have lived through a remodel, you know the work on the house is only half of it. The other half is everything you do before a wall moves: scoping the job, documenting the design, making selections, getting permits, coordinating deliveries, sequencing trades, and keeping inspectors and neighbors happy. A capable remodeling company sits in the middle of all that, translating your goals into buildable drawings and shepherding the project through code compliance. When it runs well, you feel the calm of a clear plan and predictable steps. When it runs poorly, you get delays, stop-work notices, change orders, and a pit in your stomach every time the phone rings.

I have managed small bathroom renovations in 1920s bungalows and six-figure kitchen remodeling projects in newer homes that still surprised us. The pattern is consistent: the more disciplined the planning and permitting, the more comfortable the build. What follows is the practical playbook I wish every homeowner had before the first demo day. It is not theory, and it is not one-size-fits-all. Local rules vary. But the principles hold in most cities and suburbs.

Why permits matter more than they seem

Permits are not just paperwork. They are the formal structure that aligns your remodeling company, design team, and inspectors around a shared definition of safe work. For kitchen renovation and bathroom renovation, https://hr-di.com/contact-us/ that means the right wire sizes and breakers for new appliances, proper water proofing in wet areas, correct venting, safe gas piping, strong framing around new openings, and acceptable energy performance. Inspectors do not care about cabinet color, but they will stop a job if a new range hood dumps grease-laden vapors into an attic.

Permits also protect resale. Unpermitted work can void insurance claims, depress valuations, and scare off buyers. I have seen a buyer ask for a 15 percent price reduction when an inspector flagged an unpermitted bathroom remodeling that hid plumbing in an exterior wall without insulation. A $300 permit would have avoided that conversation.

Finally, permits establish an inspection schedule that can help pace a project. Rough inspections catch problems when fixes are cheap. Small adjustments on paper during design can save weeks in the field.

What a permit usually covers

Each jurisdiction writes its own code and process, but you will see the same categories.

Structural permits control anything that affects the building’s frame: removing a load-bearing wall for an open kitchen, cutting joists for a shower drain, adding a skylight. Expect engineered drawings for beams, posts, or shear walls. A simple 12-foot opening in a one-story ranch often needs a LVL beam sized by a structural engineer, with point loads to new footings. That drawing is not optional in most cities.

Electrical permits cover new circuits, panel changes, lighting layouts, GFCI and AFCI protection, and appliance hookups. Kitchen remodeling almost always includes multiple 20-amp small-appliance circuits, a dedicated circuit for the microwave, proper breaker size for the range, and a 240-volt line if you switch from gas to induction. Bathrooms need GFCI receptacles and often dedicated circuits for heat lamps or in-floor heat.

Plumbing permits handle supply, waste, venting, and gas. Moving a sink 8 feet is simple if you have a basement or crawl space, and complicated if you are on a slab. Showers require specific drain sizes, trap placements, and venting. Gas permits may involve pressure tests, which means scheduling with the utility.

Mechanical permits cover HVAC alterations, including new ductwork, bath fan exhausts, and range hood makeup air. If you install a 900 CFM range hood, some codes demand makeup air that turns on automatically when the hood runs. It feels fussy until cold air starts sneaking in through every crack on a winter night.

Zoning and planning look at setbacks, height, lot coverage, and use. An addition that bumps out the kitchen two feet may trigger a planning review even if the work is simple. If your property sits in a historic district, design review may control window style, siding profiles, and roof forms.

Some homeowners associations require their own approvals, which run parallel to the city's permits. A good remodeling company will ask about HOA rules on working hours, dumpster placement, and exterior finishes before surprises pop up.

How a remodeling company should handle permitting

Gauge a company by how they describe this phase. Professionals talk in verbs: survey, document, design, submit, respond, revise, and schedule inspections. They assign a preconstruction manager or project developer, gather existing conditions, and produce buildable drawings and specifications. They expect two or three rounds of reviewer comments. They know which inspectors fixate on nail plates over edge-drilled studs and which want pre-slope flood tests if you build a curbless shower.

On most projects, your contractor should pull permits, not you. When the contractor pulls, they are the party of record and carry responsibility to comply. If a remodeler asks you to pull a homeowner permit to dodge licensing requirements, that is a red flag unless you live in a jurisdiction that genuinely encourages owner-builder permits and you want that exposure. Insist on seeing the permit card and approved plans on site. They should be present during work hours.

Expect timeline transparency. Some cities issue over-the-counter permits for straightforward swaps. Others take weeks. A kitchen with no structural or exterior changes might be a quick permit in a small town but need full plan review in a large city, especially if you touch gas or move plumbing. I warn clients that permitting can run from 1 week to 8 weeks in typical municipalities, and longer if you need planning approvals or engineering.

Planning first, then pricing

Many homeowners ask for an all-in price before design. The price is only as good as the information behind it. You can request a rough range early, and a seasoned remodeler will share realistic bands, like 45 to 80 thousand for a mid-range kitchen remodeling and 18 to 40 thousand for a straightforward bathroom remodeling in a moderate cost-of-living area. But a fixed price requires documents that define the job: drawings, a scope narrative, finish schedules, and allowances for fixtures and appliances.

A solid preconstruction phase sets the table:

- Capture existing conditions accurately. That means laser measurements, photos, and notes on wall thickness, joist direction, mechanical runs, and access. Surprises found now do not derail a schedule.
- Produce drawings that show floor plans, elevations, and details. Even if you think it is simple, draw it. A shifted fridge can clash with a swing door. An outlet required by code can conflict with a tile layout if nobody coordinates.
- Specify systems and selections with model numbers. Range, hood, dishwasher, sink, faucets, toilet, tub, shower valve, tile, grout, cabinets, hardware, flooring, lighting, paint. Selections affect rough-in dimensions and blocking.

- Identify lead times and back-order risks. Cabinets might take 6 to 12 weeks, specialty tile 4 to 8 weeks, custom shower glass 2 to 4 weeks after tile. Do not start without a buffer or a storage plan.
- Build a realistic schedule that sequences trades and inspections. If the electrician needs rough-in before insulation, align inspection dates accordingly.

Notice that each step prevents a different kind of headache. When clients make lighting decisions on site during rough-in, the schedule slides. When the hood spec changes after framing, you rebuild a soffit.

Kitchen remodeling, from code to comfort

Kitchens compress the highest density of code requirements into one room. Think about circuits, ventilation, clearances, and fire safety while keeping the layout comfortable.

Start with power. Most codes call for two or more 20-amp small-appliance circuits serving the countertops, GFCI protected, with receptacles spaced so no point on the counter is more than 24 inches from power. Microwaves, dishwashers, disposals, and refrigerators need their own dedicated circuits depending on the load. If you switch to induction, plan a 240-volt circuit with a breaker sized to the cooktop.

Venting matters for health and durability. A recirculating hood is better than nothing, but a ducted hood moves moisture and grease out of the house. Keep duct runs short, use smooth metal pipe, and exit to the exterior with proper clearances. High-CFM hoods can require makeup air. I once had a client with a 1200 CFM island hood whose fireplace refused to draft when the hood ran. We added makeup air tied to the hood controls and solved it, but it would have been simpler to plan for the system from the start.

Cabinetry and layout must respect clearances. Aim for at least 36 inches of aisle space, more if you have a fridge across from an island. Dishwashers often need a small filler piece to allow door swing without clashing with a handle. Pullouts near a range make daily cooking smoother. None of those choices require a permit, but they make the room work.

Inspections in a kitchen follow a familiar sequence. After demo and framing, you rough in plumbing, electrical, and HVAC, then call for rough inspections. Once approved, you insulate any exterior walls and close with drywall. Cabinets go in, then counters, then backsplashes and fixtures. Electrical and plumbing finals verify GFCI operation, correct breaker sizing, anti-tip brackets for ranges, and the like. A good remodeling company schedules inspections early in the week so a correction does not idle trades over a weekend.

Bathroom remodeling, where waterproofing earns its keep

Bathrooms seem simple until water finds a weak point. Permits give you a second set of eyes on the details that keep moisture contained.

Showers need pre-slopes, drains sized to the fixture, and waterproofing that ties together. With site-built pans, expect a 24-hour flood test. I have seen pans pass visually, then fail the flood test when a seam wicks a quarter inch below the weep holes. Fixing it before tile saves days and avoids mold.

Ventilation is not optional. A quiet, properly vented fan keeps humidity down and preserves paint and trim. Some codes require the fan to be on a timer or humidity sensor. Duct that fan to the exterior, not into an attic.

Toilets and vanities have small clearances that make big differences. A standard 30 inches of width for a toilet feels tight unless you plan the room carefully. Wall-hung toilets can free up floor space, but they require sturdy framing and careful rough-in heights. If you use a vessel sink, specify the faucet reach and spout height early, or you will end up cutting drywall twice.

Accessibility is worth thinking about even if you do not need it today. A 36-inch clear approach to a shower, blocking for grab bars behind tile, and a curb height that does not challenge bad knees add little to cost during construction and a lot to daily comfort later.

Navigating inspectors and reviews without drama

Inspectors are not adversaries. They are professionals who see hundreds of projects each year, many of which cut corners. Treat them with respect, answer questions directly, and keep the site clean. Have the permit and approved plans accessible. If the plan changes, submit a revision, even if it seems minor. I once watched a client’s schedule slip two weeks because a minor, undocumented change to a window rough opening triggered a field correction and a requirement to show the change on a revised plan.

If you receive comments or corrections, read them carefully, then huddle with your remodeling company. Many corrections are straightforward: add nail plates where wires are within 1.25 inches of the stud edge, switch a bathroom receptacle to a GFCI, or extend a hearth to meet clearance. Others need design tweaks: adjust the beam size, add a post, or thicken a wall for a vent run.

When reviews involve planning or design boards, prepare images that show context: streetscapes, material samples, and how the change fits the neighborhood. A modest dormer that keeps window proportions similar to adjacent homes moves through faster than an attention-grabbing cube.

Sequencing, inspections, and realistic durations

Remodeling feels slowest when nothing visible happens. Often that is when the most critical work gets done: rough-ins, inspections, and drying times. A remodeling company with a tight schedule will pad for these inflection points. For a typical kitchen renovation without structural changes, a 6 to 10 week build is common after permits and design, assuming material readiness. With a beam or wall removal, tack on one to three weeks for engineering, demo shoring, inspection of the new support, and patching.

Bathrooms run shorter. A simple hall bath might take 3 to 6 weeks if tile and fixtures arrive on time. A primary bath with a large custom shower can take 6 to 10 weeks. Custom glass adds lag because glass templating only happens after tile is complete, then fabrication takes 1 to 3 weeks.

Inspections break the work into gates. Rough inspections for framing, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical happen with walls open. Insulation inspection follows in many jurisdictions. Drywall, finishes, and fixtures come after. Finals close the permit. If your area requires separate energy inspections, stack them with rough or final to minimize extra visits.

Budgeting for permits and soft costs

Permits are not the big ticket, but they are not trivial. Expect permit fees to land between 0.5 and 3 percent of construction cost in many cities for interior remodels. A kitchen around 70 thousand might carry 500 to 2,000 dollars in permit and plan check fees. Add to that the cost of drawings, which vary widely. A design-build remodeling company may include drafting in a preconstruction fee of 1 to 5 percent of project cost. Structural engineering for a simple beam might run 600 to 1,800 dollars, more if you add footings or complex loads. If your jurisdiction requires special inspections or energy compliance documentation, budget a few hundred dollars more.

These numbers are not fluff. They buy clarity and speed. A clean set of drawings with correct notes can shave weeks off review and reduce field arguments.

Dealing with existing conditions and old sins

Older homes hide surprises. Galvanized plumbing can crumble when you try to reconnect. Knob-and-tube wiring lurks in attics. Framing sometimes follows a carpenter's whim rather than a layout line. A savvy remodeler will write contingency into both budget and schedule. I suggest 8 to 15 percent for interior remodels, with the higher end for houses older than 1960 or homes with prior DIY work.

Unpermitted past work can slow things. When you open a wall and find a junction box buried behind plaster, an inspector will ask for a fix and might widen the scope of corrections. Do not fight it. Make it right. The cost of arguing exceeds the cost of compliance 9 times out of 10.

Stop-work orders happen when work starts without permits or violates conditions. If you receive one, stop immediately, call your contractor, and lay out a path to legalize. Often you will need as-built drawings, fees, and an inspection of covered work. It is nerve-wracking, but solvable with cooperation.

Dust, noise, and living through it

Protect the parts of your home that are not under construction. Ask your remodeling company about temporary walls with zip doors, negative air machines with HEPA filters, floor protection, stair wraps, and daily cleanup expectations. Lead-safe practices are law when disturbing paint in pre-1978 homes. Asbestos testing is often required before demo in older houses. Budget for both. Clients who invest in site protection report far less stress.

If you plan to live at home during a kitchen remodel, set up a temp kitchen with a fridge, microwave, hot plate, and a small sink if possible. If that is not feasible, plan for more meals out and factor that cost into your budget. For bathrooms, stagger work if you only have one functional shower.

Neighbors appreciate notice. A simple letter or text with dates and a contact number keeps relationships cordial. Compliance with working hours set by the city or HOA helps avoid complaints that draw inspector attention at the worst times.

Contracts, allowances, and change orders that do not sting

Peace of mind comes from knowing where the money goes and how decisions get made. Read the contract. It should spell out scope, exclusions, allowances, payment schedule, insurance, warranty, and how change orders work.

Allowances deserve special attention. An allowance for tile at 8 dollars per square foot sounds fine until you fall in love with a 16 dollar option. The number of square feet multiplies the difference quickly. Ask your remodeling company to align allowances with your taste by visiting showrooms during design. That way the budget reflects reality.

Change orders are not evil; they are the tool for handling unknowns and owner-driven changes. Decide ahead of time whether you want time-and-materials change orders or fixed-price changes. Require written approval before extra work proceeds, except for emergencies that prevent damage.

Lien releases protect you from paying twice if a subcontractor does not get paid. Your contractor should provide conditional and then unconditional releases with each draw. It is boring paperwork that saves pain later.

A short pre-construction checklist

- Confirm who pulls each permit and that licensing matches the jurisdiction's requirements.

- Approve a complete set of drawings and specifications, with model numbers for fixtures and appliances.
- Verify lead times for cabinets, tile, windows, and custom items, and decide where materials will be stored.
- Set a realistic schedule that includes inspection gates and a plan for corrections.
- Establish site protection standards, working hours, and a primary point of contact.

Red flags when choosing a remodeling company

- They ask you to pull the homeowner permit to avoid their licensing or insurance responsibilities.
- They provide a firm price without drawings, a written scope, or allowances tied to real selections.
- They refuse to share a sample schedule or avoid discussing inspections and how they handle corrections.
- They cannot produce recent references for similar kitchen remodeling or bathroom remodeling projects.
- Their contract lacks warranty terms, lien release procedures, or clarity on change orders.

Kitchen and bathroom case notes that teach

A kitchen update in a 1955 ranch looked easy: new cabinets, counters, and lighting. The homeowner wanted to swap in a large gas range and a 900 CFM hood. The original plan omitted makeup air because nobody thought a 36 inch range could trigger it. Plan review flagged the hood CFM and required makeup air tied to the hood control. Adding it on paper took one day. Adding it in the field would have meant tearing out a new soffit and reworking electrical. The difference was two days of design attention.

In a narrow primary bath, the client wanted a curbless shower with large format tile. During rough-in, we set the drain low and checked the recess, but the pre-slope did not fall evenly because joists ran the wrong direction. The inspector requested a pre-slope correction and a 24 hour flood test. Because we had scheduled rough inspections midweek, the flood test did not stall weekend trades. The fix added one day and no extra cost. If we had tiled first, we would have lost a week and a thousand dollars.

How to handle scope creep without losing momentum

Scope creep happens when small ideas pile up: a niche here, a light there, upgraded hardware, a pullout we forgot. None of these changes are wrong. They just hit budget and schedule if unmanaged. Keep a running decision log with dates, costs, and whether each change affects permits or inspections. If a change touches permit drawings, submit a revision early. Stacking a dozen small changes into one late package invites confusion on site and delay at review.

When you must cut, cut smart. Preserve systems and rough-in quality. Reduce decorative spend if needed. A high quality waterproofing system behind the tile matters more than an accent border. Electrical capacity and safe venting matter more than the last lighting scene. If you phase, phase whole rooms rather than splitting a single bathroom into two visits.

The quiet confidence of a well-run remodel

The best compliment I hear from clients is not about the tile layout or the cabinet finish, though those matter. It is about how the project felt. The calm comes from a plan that everyone respects. The remodeling company knew the code, pulled the right permits, answered reviewer questions, and staged inspections logically. The homeowner made selections early and stuck to them. Surprises still showed up, but the team had contingency and a process to respond.

If you are about to start a home renovation, pick your partner carefully. Ask specific questions about kitchen and bathroom permits, lead times, inspection sequencing, and how they document changes. Look for a contract that reflects those conversations. Spend a little more time and money in preconstruction than seems necessary. You will get it back with interest when walls open and the schedule holds.

And keep a copy of the final approved plans and inspection sign-offs. Years from now, when you sell or decide to remodel again, that tidy packet becomes your best friend.