

## NYMETROPARENTS

### Make Room for the Contractors!

by Kristin Siano

A dumpster in the driveway and permits in the windows — the telltale signs of renovation — are in every town and neighborhood in Westchester County. When the desire for additional space becomes a pressing need, many families choose to renovate and expand instead of move to a new location.



Of course, with major months-long renovations come contractors, dust, mess and frustration. Added to the stress of a renovation is the question many parents with pre-school children face: how can parents keep the schedule and structure of the day with young children if their home and routine are constantly interrupted by noise, dust and disarray?

While some families opt to move out, the additional cost of a rental can be prohibitive, thus many choose to stay in their homes and take the "grin and bear it" approach.

Richard Zaccaria, president of Remodeling Consultants of Westchester in Mamaroneck, discusses the options of staying put or moving out with many of his clients.

"The most frequently asked question from people before a renovation is, 'Can we live here?'" Zaccaria says, and estimates that 95 percent of clients do stay in their homes.

"We help people who live through the renovation by breaking up the house," Zaccaria says. "With a kitchen renovation, we'd close off kitchen work area and take another room and make it into a makeshift kitchen, setting up fridge, hot plate, microwave, etc. That way, people do have a place to live with a kitchen."

Melanie Rothman of Larchmont recently completed a major renovation of her home. Her house now has a new master bedroom and bathroom upstairs and a new den on the first floor. The project, which started last September, took five months. Rothman, her husband and her three boys, ages 8, 6 and 2, lived in the house for the duration.

Rothman says it helped that her contractor shared the game plan of the renovation with her and her family. "Our contractor blocked off only the rooms that he needed to work in, so we still had living space," she says.

A cooperative builder is extremely important on this issue, Rothman continues. "When you are hiring a contractor, find one who is going to work with you if you stay in the house," she says, noting that her contractor also told her in advance what room he and his crew would be in, so there were few surprises.

Rothman had a philosophical approach to managing the noise and the dust that accompany construction projects. "The noise – well, you get used to it," she says, and notes that her youngest child was able to nap on most days despite the drills and the hammers. She fought the good fight against the dust, moping the floors nearly every night, but tried not to let a desire for dust-free house run her life. During a renovation, "You can't obsess about cleanliness," she says.

Susan Fernandez, a mother of two in Rye Brook, did a kitchen renovation in 2005. At the time, she had a one year old and was pregnant with her second child.

"The contractors that we were using were very careful in putting up plastic so the kitchen we were renovating was well sealed off from the rest of the house," Fernandez recalls.

Zaccaria agrees that the dust from a renovation is always a challenge. "Dust is a huge factor for people, for children and adults. It's actually one of the biggest stress factors," he says. "We always put up plastic to protect against dust, and in some cases we have even erected partition walls for additional protection."

For Fernandez, organization was the key to staying sane during the two and a half month renovation. "I would tell people about to do a kitchen renovation to be more organized because you won't have access to appliances and you'll have to plan your meals better," she advises. She recalls that she stacked her canned goods in milk crates and put the least used items on the bottom, and made the everyday items more accessible.

For Rothman of Larchmont, managing her children and construction also took a lot of planning and organizing before the contractor actually started work. As the contractors were working on the second floor to create the new bedroom and bath, the family lived in two of the three existing bedrooms and used the youngest child's room for storage while the fourth bedroom was built. The lack of space resulted in her needing to pack up her family's clothes and toys well before the renovation started.

As the Rothman family did their renovation during the colder months, they had some challenges that a family doing construction during the summer would not face. "If you can, do a renovation when it's warm, so the kids can go outside," she advises. During the winter, she adds, "You have to be flexible and creative, as there are just some days when you can't stay in the house."

From the perspective of her three boys, having contractors in the house was a thrill. "My middle son would follow them around and ask questions," she says. "He wanted to help them."

According to Zaccaria, having contractors in the home can be a benefit. "Most little kids are fascinated by the process," he says. "People in letters of recommendation sometimes discuss the familiarity that their children had with members of the team."

Rothman agrees. As the contractors were there every day, she says her family developed a nice rapport with them. "You see them all the time and they become like members of your family," she says.

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