



Renovation Vs Restoration: How To Know What'S Right For You And Your Home

Four Steps for Determining the Best Route for your Historical Home

Sarah Mellema
09/08/2017

Oftentimes, we hear the words “restoration” and “renovation” used interchangeably, perhaps because they both fall in the same category of home improvement, but in reality, these words carry two different definitions.

“Restoring” means you’re making the house like it was before, or returning a space to its original appearance, at least in terms of the interior architecture. For example, refinishing the floor and woodwork but not changing the original color. If you’re “renovating,” on the other hand, you could be using a new color on the woodwork and the floor with the understanding that you’ll be fundamentally changing the design that was originally intended by the architect.

Confused? [Richard Taylor](#), a residential architect based in Dublin, Ohio, remembers the definitions this way:

- Renovate: Make a space new without changing its use.
- Restore: Return a space to its original use, and/or return a space to its original character.

So, you want to update your old space. How do you know which option is right for you?

As you'll quickly find out, historic homeownership brings with it a unique set of questions, decisions and goals. Your decisions will influence the home's character, the project cost, the amount of time it takes and more. With that said, consider these top things to help you determine which approach will work best for you:

Identify the individual factors that will help shape your decision. You'll need to have a rich understanding of your home's history, its architecture and the present condition of each of the materials and systems you're dealing with. You should also consider any insurance drawbacks or financial considerations that might take a big role in the project.

Take the [Oscar Mayer mansion](#) in Evanston, Illinois, for example. The fully rehabbed home was recently updated with a blend of renovation and restoration, allowing it to keep its history and some beautiful features like the original brick fireplace and the stained-glass windows, while still featuring a brand new kitchen and master suite where necessary.

Evaluate the existing quality, design, materials and craftsmanship. You should probably remove any poorly designed or executed features, but if certain materials are still of good quality, consider keeping them.

“Renovation is the best option for people who love the bones of their home, and maybe a few unique, original touches, but they want the comforts and convenience of a more modern house,” said Keith Gerety of [Gerety Building and Restoration](#).

Integrate modern touches with caution. You won't want alterations to destroy or cover historically or architecturally significant features or materials. At the same time, you'll want to actually be able to tell the difference between the additions from the original. That way, the house's history is visible and transparent.

Gerety cautions that, “blending styles, eras, form and function requires a knowledgeable, experienced renovation professional.”

Look to the experts. If you're still not sure what to do, take time to research the [Secretary of the](#)

[Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties](#). This resource is jam-packed with guidelines on preserving, rehabilitating, restoring and reconstructing historic homes and buildings.

There isn't a right or wrong answer when it comes to what's right for you and your home. Let your property, your personal preferences and capabilities, and your needs help guide your decision, and you'll most likely be happy with your solutions.