



READY TO RENOVATE? THINK AGAIN!



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FOUR POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE RENOVATING

The word "shiputzim" quickly enters the vocabulary of the English speaker who buys an apartment in Eretz Yisrael. While the word literally means "renovations," it's not as simple as it seems. Laying tiles may seem like a simple job, but before you embark on any renovations or construction in Israel, first read up on these four important points:

TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE

An incompetent architect can make an expensive renovation practically worthless. While it may seem like a waste of money, it is a well worthwhile investment to hire two separate architects to give you their idea of what the space should look like when complete. Since each one is limited by his or her own mind and styles, getting two totally separate viewpoints will give you a myriad of new ideas and insights that will help you make the apartment as close as possible to the dreams you had of the perfect apartment. (From my own experiences with clients, I can tell you that without very thoughtful planning, the renovated apartment will not be quite the dream apartment you envisioned.)

IS THE OTHER QUOTE REALLY CHEAPER?

Most cheap quotes are expensive by the time you are done. When you price a construction job, the estimates vary widely. It's not uncommon for unscrupulous contractors to try to get their foot in the door by offering a lowball estimate knowing full well that they will find excuses to charge more than they originally proposed. (And don't think that you'll just turn to a Beis Din if *shtik* is pulled. It's not worth going into something with that thought process.) Furthermore, there are some "honestly honest" contractors who keep to their low end quotes—and who can afford to be so low precisely because they skimp on quality. You want the job done right the first time around, I assure you. Being forced into new renovations six months later is unpleasant, to say the least.

STICK TO THE PLAN

Once you've followed the above steps, make sure to stick to your original plan and don't be persuaded by "special" bells and whistles that the contractor recommends. Budgets always rise during construction if you aren't careful. Don't start the work until you are absolutely certain

what you DO and DO NOT want done. This is the reason why we spend so much time planning down to the fine details.

TIME IS MONEY

It's essential to make up a timetable so that you know what to expect and when to expect it. If you hire a construction supervisor to oversee the entire project, he will make sure everything happens in a timely manner, but if not, you have to make sure that the carpenter works within the same time frame as the contractor, electrician, and plumber. Along with their tool boxes, contractors have a "wonderful bag of excuses" that allow them to constantly get away with delaying work for one reason or another. Some common excuses include: "The cement needs a week to dry," or "Today's a Muslim holiday," or "We're waiting for a certain part to arrive."

Make sure to stay in control. The final 5% of the contractor's fee should ONLY be paid two full weeks after you move into the apartment and see for yourself that everything was built correctly and up to the right standards. At our firm, we keep the contractors on schedule by inserting a penalty clause into the contract by which the contractor must pay a set amount for each month of delay (usually the value of one month's rent).

STICK TO THE CONTRACT

Sometimes, if a *kablan* is tight for cash, he will suddenly start working at a frantic pace, to try to convince you that the entire job will be done sooner than expected. "We'll be finished in no time. Please pay the final installments now." Stick to your agreement and do not release any additional funds until the agreed upon stages of construction are complete. If you pay up, you can be guaranteed that the project won't be finished until the last possible date.

The inverse is also true. When the *kablan* finishes a work stage, have the funds ready. Do NOT start putting them together only when the stage is finished. It's not fair to the contractor who has workers to pay and other obligations to meet. When you see the point coming closer, prepare the money so it's ready on time. ■

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Incidentally, I am going to the New York area in about two weeks, so if you are planning a renovation in Israel, I'd be glad to give you some time. Simply email my assistant at sarah@shiagetter.com to schedule an appointment. I look forward to meeting you.