RENOVATION

How to Plan a Kitchen Renovation Without Losing Control of the Budget

A clear framework for scope, selections, contingencies and contractor communication.

Plan the work first. Price the decisions second. Keep contingency separate.

A kitchen renovation can become expensive quickly when design decisions, hidden conditions and change orders are handled reactively. The strongest budget control comes from defining the scope early, pricing realistic selections and creating a process for every change before construction begins.

1. Define the Scope Before Requesting Final Pricing

Separate what is essential from what is optional. This keeps the project focused and gives you a baseline that contractors can price consistently.

- **Must-have work:** layout changes, cabinets, countertops, electrical, plumbing and flooring.
- **Nice-to-have work:** premium fixtures, specialty lighting, upgraded hardware and decorative features.
- **Future upgrades:** items that can be added later without disrupting completed work.

2. Build a Budget That Includes the Whole Project

Do not budget only for cabinets and appliances. Include labor, permits, demolition, disposal, finish materials, delivery fees, temporary kitchen arrangements and taxes where applicable.

Budget Category	Typical Planning Range
Cabinetry and millwork	25-35%
Labor and installation	20-30%
Appliances	10-20%
Countertops and surfaces	8-12%
Plumbing, electrical and lighting	8-15%
Contingency	10-20%

These ranges are planning guides only. Actual allocation depends on the home, market, material selections and complexity of the renovation.

3. Lock Major Selections Early

Late product decisions are a common source of budget growth and delays. Finalize the items that affect dimensions, rough-in locations or lead times before construction starts.

- Cabinet layout and door style
- Appliance models and dimensions
- Countertop material and edge profile
- Sink and faucet specifications
- Flooring, backsplash and lighting fixtures

4. Protect the Contingency

Set aside contingency for unknown conditions, not for planned upgrades. Older homes may reveal plumbing, electrical, framing or moisture issues once demolition begins. A separate contingency makes those discoveries easier to manage without disrupting the entire project budget.

5. Require Clear Change-Order Communication

Any change that affects price or schedule should be documented before the work proceeds. Ask for the cost impact, schedule impact and reason for the change in writing.

Before approving a change, confirm:

- What exactly is changing?
- What is the added or reduced cost?
- Will the completion date move?
- Does another trade or material selection also need to change?

6. Review the Budget at Milestones

Track the approved contract amount, selections, allowances, change orders and remaining contingency at key stages such as demolition, rough-in, cabinet installation and finish work. This creates visibility before small overruns compound.

Quick Pre-Construction Checklist

- ■ Scope and drawings are finalized.
- ■ Major finishes and appliances are selected.
- ■ Contractor pricing clearly identifies allowances and exclusions.
- ■ Permits and inspection requirements are understood.
- ■ A 10-20% contingency is reserved.
- ■ Change-order approval rules are established.
- ■ Payment milestones are tied to defined progress.

The objective is not to eliminate every surprise. It is to make sure surprises do not automatically become budget problems.