

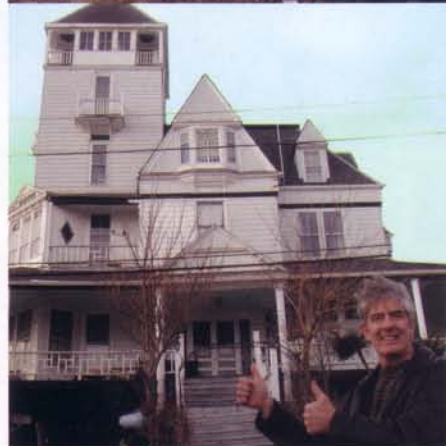
Ask Mike



the 411 on your design 911 with Michael McCloskey

Tear Down? Worth Remodeling?

"My husband and I have been looking for a new home for our growing family for what seems like forever. We think we've found something in a great old neighborhood but it needs everything. Some people tell us it's not worth it and we're out of our minds to attempt to resurrect the building but others say it's perfect for a renovation. How can we decide what to do and where can we get reliable, unbiased help?"



The short answer is, if it looks like a tossup, tear it down. But there are other things to consider when making this very tough decision.

Generally speaking, if you're buying an old summer cottage and want to convert it to a full time residence, consider it a labor of love. When your heart says yes, your wallet often says no.

Unless it has irreplaceable details and sentimental value you're going to want to tear it down. Summer homes are generally built with marginal construction.

Maybe you've heard the expression 'good bones'. This usually refers to buildings that have high ceilings; good construction and interesting details and in general are the ones you want to work with. Victorians, Federals, Queen Ann's and Shingle Style homes are often built like this. However even beautiful, professionally designed buildings like these must sadly be taken down if they haven't been maintained over the years.

The worst thing you can do is begin a major renovation only to find the hidden disasters like rotted frames, extensive termite damage and crumbling foundations. Avoiding this can be done by hiring a licensed architect or contractor to do a thorough investigation of the building and it's structure before you begin. IT may cost a few more bucks but it's worth it.

Another trap is thinking you can pull up the old toilets; faucets and that great old soapstone sink and reuse them. Given enough blood, sweat and tears, usually yours, you can. However 99% of the time it's better to get new stuff and leave it to the pros to do a proper install. If you just can't part with that Victorian stained glass window, find a special place for it in the house and make it a feature, but don't expect it to keep out the cold weather.

Finally, talk with your local building inspector. He's usually an incredible source of information not only for the permit process but other things as well like where to find a good local contractor or architect. Many towns won't let you tear down a building without a permit. Many wonderful old buildings are protected by Historic Districts or other specially designated districts.

Bottom line; get lots and lots of information from a variety of sources before you buy your dream house. A good place to start is with your local building inspector, real estate agent, qualified home inspector or licensed residential architect. For most people, a well run renovation is a dream come true. Don't let your dream turn into a nightmare.

And that's the 411 on your design 911.