



# BUILDER-FREE ZONE

During the upgrading of her 1950s terrace occupational psychologist Patricia Murray learnt that project managing your own renovation involves everything from tough negotiation to making tea.

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Above: Patricia tackled the very serious business of re-wiring, re-plumbing and general structural overhauling before working on design and decoration. Having given her house a thorough upgrade, it wasn't hard to turn it into a home that fills her with pride, not to mention a great sense of achievement

Top left: Having been sensible about her priorities, Patricia splashed out on what she calls "the luxury items and final indulgences" such as the €8,000 landscaping and ash decking in the garden after the more immediate work had been done

Bottom right: An abundantly spacious back garden was just begging to be made more a part of the house as a whole; some beautiful hardwood patio doors were a stylish solution – at the most competitive cost possible, of course!



## INSIDER INFO

**The owner:** Patricia Murray.

**The location:** Clonskeagh, Dublin 14.

**Type of house:** 3-bed 1950s terrace.

**Purchase price:** Approx €500,000 (including stamp).

**The architect:** None used (the renovation did not involve extending, simply re-configuring existing space).

**The brief:** To upgrade the house from a student rental to comfortable home, with a sense of space and openness to the garden.

**Build route:** Self-managed with direct labour.

**Budget:** €27,000.

**Final cost:** €48,000 (due to significant expansion of initial scope of project).

**Planned time for job:** One year.

**Time it actually took:** Phase one was completed in one year, but second phase is only just complete, two years after purchase.

**Value renovation has added to the home:** The house is now worth approx €800,000.

**Planning Issues:** None.

**Biggest challenge:** Getting her money back after her original kitchen company was liquidated.

**Problems encountered:** The 'liquidated' kitchen company and a heavy leak from the new bathroom plumbing.

**Best bargain:** The new internal doors.

**Verdict:** Patricia enjoyed having full control over her project and is delighted with the simple contemporary home she has created.





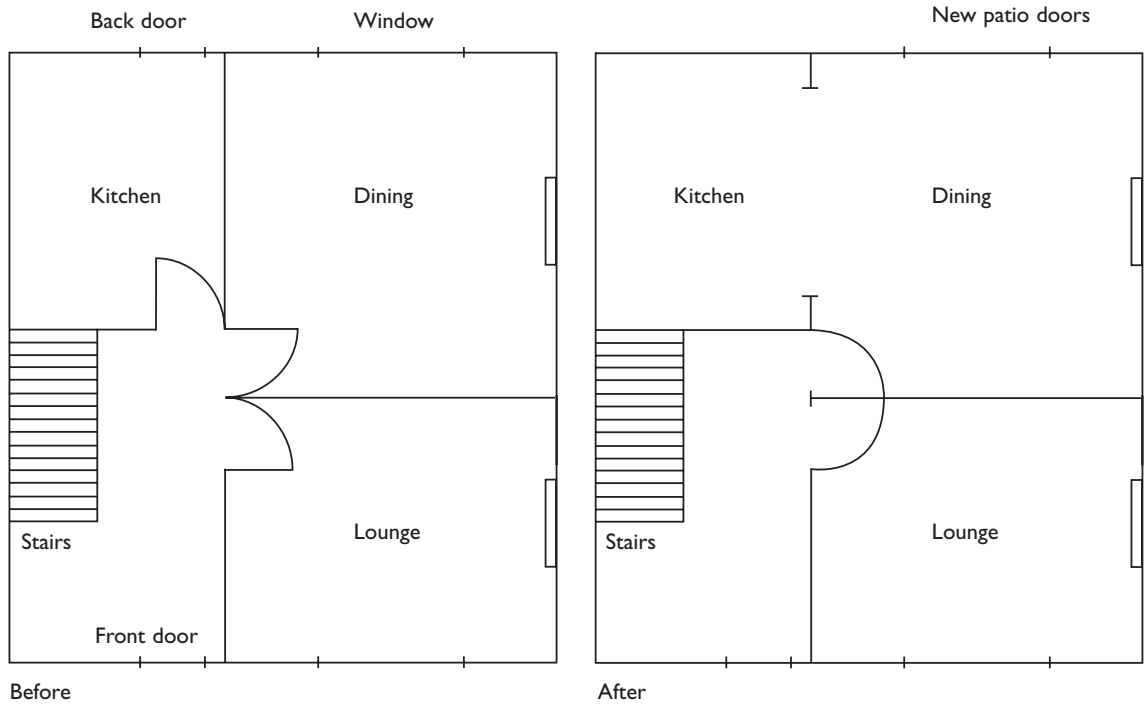
### PATRICIA ON... THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NEGOTIATION

- 1 Ask for the price for the main job you want to complete.
- 2 Always look disappointed when you hear the price! (A bit of chin rubbing and humming and hawing may be required.)
- 3 Check exactly what is included in that price.
- 4 If you feel comfortable paying cash, ask what their cash price is. If it's the same, make sure they know they will be paid by cheque.
- 5 If there are other bits and pieces you want done, get pricing for those too. If you are offering more than one job, expect a discount and say so. No reduction, no extra work.
- 6 When giving final payment, say "thanks, I love it"... smile!!
- 7 Motivate yourself through the negotiation process by thinking of what you will be able to do with your savings. Think bottle of Moët ... pair of shoes... weekend away... whatever works for you!

Above: A structural overhaul saw the separate kitchen and dining room combined to create one airy, open plan space with patio doors that introduce the back garden into the living area to enhance the light and add a roomy feel



## GROUND FLOOR PLANS



### the project

When Patricia Murray found her new home in 2004, she was looking for a three-bed house with garden in a safe area close to the city. "Initially, I thought Clonskeagh was too suburban, but it's only five minutes from Ranelagh and 15 from the city centre. The house didn't have the kerbside appeal of a redbrick, but it was spacious and had a proper garden." After 15 years of being rented to students, the house was in need of a complete overhaul, including re-wiring, re-plumbing, a new kitchen and a new bathroom.

### going it alone

Patricia decided to manage the project herself. "This was my second renovation and I had been badly burnt at stages in the renovation of my previous house. This time, I was determined to always get a second opinion and consider the motivation of the person advising me.

### phased approach

A logical, phased approach is essential to any renovation, says Patricia. "Recently, I found the brochure from when I bought the house. I had scribbled plans across it, including painting the exterior and installing hanging baskets. I had to laugh as two years later I'm still waiting to do these things! Forget the pretty bits," she advises, "first you have to get the basics right." Patricia rented while she had the electrics and plumbing upgraded, the structural work and plastering done, and the new bathroom and fireplace installed. Once the priority jobs were complete, she started working on a room-by-room plan for phase two, concentrating on getting key rooms done so she could move in."

### sourcing the labour

The entire renovation was managed using direct labour. "This house is a builder-free zone," laughs Patricia. "Everyone I've used came recommended by a friend. And if they did the job right, I've repaid them by referring them on." As project manager, Patricia had complete responsibility for scheduling jobs, sourcing products and arranging deliveries.

### bang for your buck

When it comes to prices, Patricia's mantra is "Negotiate! There's always some fat to be creamed off!" She believes a project manager needs to be able to find the cheapest way of getting a job done. When it came to the installation of her hardwood patio doors, a builder quoted €5,500 plus 21% VAT to supply the doors, knock the opening and fit them. Unhappy with this price, Patricia went back to her reliable handyman. After a bit of investigation, he discovered the RSJ over the existing window was big enough to take the new door opening, so he provided the labour and Munster Joinery supplied the exact same doors (this time, VAT was at 13.5% as it was a supply and fit situation). The total price came in at €3,200, inclusive of VAT.

### the hardships

Patricia encountered a similar situation when it came to installing a new bathroom. Rather than getting a big plumbing company, she chose to source her own products and use a tiler and plumber on a daily rate. With a bit of DIY scraping and patching of the plaster, she managed to save €3,000.

The downside of managing a job through direct labour is the difficulty in co-ordinating unconnected



Having saved a substantial amount of money thanks to her thorough research and hard work, Patricia treated herself by paying a professional decorator to do the hall and stairs

## USEFUL CONTACTS

- > Fireplace: Royale Fireplaces, Dundrum Road, Windy Arbour, Dublin 14. Tel: 01 298 7632.
- > Internal Doors: Doors and Floors.  
For nearest store, see web:  
[www.doorsandfloors.ie](http://www.doorsandfloors.ie)
- > Kitchen: Churchtown Design Limited, 117a Braemor Road, Churchtown, Dublin 14.  
Tel: 087 618 2733.
- > Landscaping and decking: Brian O'Hara, Project Garden, 10 York Court, York Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin. Tel: 087 689 1679.  
[www.projectgarden.ie](http://www.projectgarden.ie)
- > Patio Door: Munster Joinery, Ballydesmond, Cork. Tel: 064 51151.
- > Walnut flooring: Mulvey's Homevalue Hardware, 113-115 Ranelagh Road, Dublin 6, Ireland. Tel: 01 496 4000.  
Web: [www.mulveys.com](http://www.mulveys.com)

tradesmen. "The plumber and tiler didn't talk to each other about the best way to finish a few details, resulting in a few imperfections in the tiling. Also, you don't have the influence a builder has to get people on site when you need them."

### justice

The toughest part of the renovation process came just three days before her kitchen was due to be installed, when the kitchen company went into liquidation, taking Patricia's €2,000 deposit with them. Fortunately, Churchtown Design, who took over some of the business did their best to help unfortunate customers like Patricia get what they wanted at a reasonable price. Still, Patricia was determined to get her money back. Despite having paid her deposit in cash, she took the owner of the old company to the small claims court and got the maximum of €1,200 back a year later.

### self-motivation

With all the stresses and hard work, Patricia admits it can be hard to keep yourself motivated. She relied on a system of "punishment and then reward. After all the tough work and hard bargaining, give yourself the occasional treat. For example, I gave myself the luxury of paying a professional decorator to do the hall and stairs."

Another tip is to avoid the really dirty jobs. Early in the renovation, Patricia made the mistake of trying to save money in the wrong places, like loading and dumping rubble. "I now accept that I don't have brawn and my advice is to know your strengths, and the value of your time and health."

### sitting on it

Patricia believes there is no substitute for a hands-on presence on site. She spent many lunchtimes racing back to the site to check on the work.

Patricia points out that project management is not just about supervision. "You've got to be willing to prepare coffee and biscuits for the tradesman while negotiating with his boss to get €20 off the job. Even when someone makes a mess of something you

can't afford to lose the head. You want each relationship to end well so that the job is done properly and you can call them back if there is a problem six months down the line. If you're female, they will probably assume you know nothing and patronise you. My advice is 'let them'; it's like taxi drivers, you don't care what rubbish they talk, as long as they get you there."

### simplicity

Patricia points out that relatively small changes can have huge impact on a property. In her case, reconfiguring the downstairs layout, without extending, made a big difference to how the house felt.

### express yourself

Patricia found that managing her own renovations had personal rewards. "The whole process gave me a great sense of achievement and control of my own life. Creating a home can be a wonderful expression of individuality. I feel good when somebody walks in here and says, 'Wow, that's not what I expected. I love your house'. I think 'yeah, that's me'."

## PATRICIA'S RULES

- > Get cute with money. Never take the first opinion or price. When you make a saving, reward yourself.
- > Be political. However you feel, you're there to get the job done.
- > Give written briefs to each tradesman specifying every detail, including materials and fittings.
- > Make sure you can live with chaos but also impose order when required.
- > Use contacts to source tradesman with ethics. Be very careful about giving deposits and always keep receipts somewhere safe.