

JUSTYN ROOK CONTRACTING

Before You Start

What to know before starting a renovation project

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Where do I start renovating an Ottawa home I just inherited?

Start with a thorough assessment before touching anything — inherited homes often have hidden issues that can completely change your renovation priorities and budget.

The very first step is a professional home inspection, even if the property was recently inspected during estate proceedings. A qualified home inspector will identify structural concerns, outdated electrical panels (knob-and-tube wiring is common in Ottawa homes built before the 1950s), aging plumbing (galvanized steel or lead pipes), and moisture issues in the basement. Expect to pay **\$400–\$600** for a thorough inspection in Ottawa. This report becomes your renovation roadmap and helps you separate urgent safety issues from cosmetic upgrades.

Once you have the inspection report, **triage your list into three categories**: safety/code issues first, functional improvements second, and cosmetic updates last. In Ottawa specifically, older homes in neighbourhoods like Centretown, Hintonburg, Glebe, or Vanier frequently have aging electrical systems that don't meet current ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) standards, or foundations that show signs of the freeze-thaw damage our climate is notorious for. These aren't optional fixes — they affect insurability and resale value.

Permits matter more than most people realize. If you're planning to change the layout, add a bathroom, finish a basement, or convert the property into a secondary suite, you'll need permits through the City of Ottawa Building Code Services (613-580-2424 or ottawa.ca/building). Unpermitted work creates serious problems when you eventually sell, and it can void your home insurance. Budget **10–20 business days** for simple permits and up to **8 weeks** for more complex projects.

On the financial side, it's worth deciding early whether you're renovating to **live in, rent out, or sell**. That decision drives everything. If the home has an unfinished basement or a separate entrance, Ottawa's demand for rental units makes a secondary suite conversion worth serious consideration — it can generate \$1,500–\$2,200/month in rental income while adding significant property value. JRC specializes in exactly this type of conversion.

A rough budgeting framework for Ottawa inherited homes:

- **Deferred maintenance catch-up** (roof, electrical, plumbing, HVAC): \$15,000–\$50,000+ depending on age and condition
- **Basement finishing or suite conversion**: \$60,000–\$120,000
- **Kitchen renovation**: \$25,000–\$75,000
- **Bathroom renovation**: \$12,000–\$30,000 per bathroom

Don't try to do everything at once. Most experienced contractors will tell you to **stabilize the envelope first** (roof, windows, foundation, insulation) before investing in interior finishes. There's no point in a beautiful new kitchen if

the basement leaks every spring thaw.

For basement-specific concerns — which are extremely common in Ottawa's older housing stock — our dedicated team at **OttawaBasements.com** offers specialized expertise worth checking out.

If you'd like to walk through the property with an experienced eye before committing to a plan, Justyn Rook Contracting offers **free consultations**. Sometimes 30 minutes with a contractor who knows Ottawa homes saves you from making a \$20,000 mistake in sequencing or scope.

Q2

What's the right downsize strategy for an Ottawa empty-nest reno?

The smartest downsizing strategy for Ottawa empty-nesters is to renovate strategically before selling — or convert unused space into income — rather than simply moving to a smaller home.

With kids out of the house, you're likely sitting on significant square footage that's either underused or actively costing you money to heat and maintain. Ottawa's housing market and the city's progressive secondary suite policies mean you have more options than most Canadian cities, and the right move depends heavily on your financial goals, your neighbourhood's zoning, and how attached you are to staying put.

The two main paths most Ottawa empty-nesters take are either "right-size and sell" (renovate to maximize resale value, then downsize to a condo or smaller home) or "stay and convert" (transform unused bedrooms or the basement into a legal secondary suite that generates rental income). The second option has become increasingly popular in Ottawa neighbourhoods like Westboro, Barrhaven, and Gloucester, where R4 zoning allows secondary suites and rental demand from students, young professionals, and newcomers is consistently strong.

If your goal is **maximizing resale value before selling**, focus your renovation dollars on the kitchen and bathrooms first — these deliver the strongest return in Ottawa's market. A mid-range kitchen refresh (new cabinet doors, countertops, hardware, updated lighting) typically runs **\$15,000–\$35,000** and can add measurably more than that to your sale price. A bathroom renovation in the \$12,000–\$22,000 range similarly signals move-in-ready condition to buyers. Avoid over-improving for your street — a \$100,000 kitchen in a \$550,000 neighbourhood won't return dollar-for-dollar.

If you're leaning toward **staying and converting**, the basement is almost always the right target. A legal basement secondary suite in Ottawa typically costs **\$60,000–\$110,000** fully finished and permitted, and can generate **\$1,400–\$1,900/month** in rental income depending on size and location. That's a meaningful offset against your mortgage or retirement expenses. Ottawa's zoning rules require a minimum of **37m² for a one-bedroom unit**, a

separate entrance, and a **45-minute fire separation** between units — all of which need a building permit through the City of Ottawa (ottawa.ca/building).

The permit piece is non-negotiable. An unpermitted suite creates serious liability when you sell, and Ottawa's insurance companies are increasingly asking the right questions. Permitted work protects your investment and keeps your home insurable.

From a **practical sequencing standpoint**, most empty-nesters benefit from a professional walkthrough before deciding. Sometimes a basement conversion is straightforward; other times the ceiling height, existing mechanicals, or lot grading make it more complex than expected. Similarly, a pre-sale renovation strategy should be scoped to your specific home's condition and your target buyer — not a generic checklist.

For specialized basement conversion expertise, our dedicated team at **OttawaBasements.com** is a great starting point if that route interests you.

If you'd like to talk through which path makes the most sense for your specific home and neighbourhood, Justyn Rook Contracting offers free consultations — we can walk through your space and give you an honest assessment of what's worth doing and what isn't.

Q3

What should I do to prepare for a home renovation?

Proper preparation is the difference between a smooth renovation and a stressful nightmare. Start by clearly defining your goals, budget, and timeline at least 2-3 months before you want work to begin.

Planning and Documentation

Begin by creating a detailed scope of work - what exactly do you want accomplished? Take photos of the current space from multiple angles and measure everything. In Ottawa's older homes (many built pre-1960), surprises like knob-and-tube wiring or cast iron plumbing are common, so budget an extra 10-20% for unexpected discoveries.

Research permits early - the City of Ottawa's Building Code Services (613-580-2424) can take 10-20 business days for simple permits, up to 8 weeks for complex projects. Kitchen and bathroom renovations typically require permits if you're moving plumbing or electrical, and any structural changes definitely need approval.

Get multiple quotes from licensed, WSIB-insured contractors. In Ottawa's competitive market, quality contractors book 6-12 weeks out, especially during peak season (April-November). Verify their credentials through WSIB's

website and ask for recent local references.

Practical Preparation Steps

Create a temporary living space if your kitchen or main bathroom is being renovated. Set up a makeshift kitchen in the basement or garage with a microwave, mini-fridge, and hot plate. For bathroom renovations, negotiate access to a functioning bathroom - this is crucial for multi-week projects.

Protect your belongings and home. Remove all items from the renovation area and seal off adjacent rooms with plastic sheeting to contain dust. Ottawa's older homes often have hardwood floors worth protecting - invest in proper floor protection, not just drop cloths.

Order materials early, especially during spring renovation season when supply chains get stretched. Custom items like kitchen cabinets or specialty tiles can take 8-16 weeks to arrive in Ottawa.

Financial and Timeline Considerations

Secure financing before starting - renovation loans, HELOCs, or cash should be confirmed and accessible. In Ottawa's current market, expect bathroom renovations to run \$15,000-\$50,000 and kitchens \$25,000-\$80,000, depending on size and finishes.

Plan for the inconvenience factor - renovations always take longer than expected. A typical bathroom renovation runs 2-3 weeks, kitchens 4-8 weeks. Factor in Ottawa's winter limitations if your project involves exterior work or concrete.

Communication is key - establish daily check-ins with your contractor and get a detailed timeline with milestones. Quality contractors will walk you through the permit process, coordinate inspections, and handle ESA electrical permits when required.

For a comprehensive evaluation of your specific project and timeline, contact Justyn Rook Contracting for a free consultation. We'll help you navigate Ottawa's permit requirements and create a realistic preparation checklist for your renovation.

Find a General Contractors Contractor

Justyn Rook Contracting connects you with experienced contractors in the directory:

- [Montgomery Construction ?](#)
- [Above All Painting Inc. ?](#)

- UpMove / 15784719 Canada Inc. ?

Browse all contractors ?

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