

I was on my hands and knees at 6:30 am, taping the last sheet of rosin paper to the kitchen floor while the neighbour's truck idled on the street and the contractor still hadn't shown. Dust already tasted like guilt in the air. My wife had parked our kid in the living room with a pile of board books on bare carpet because the basement is still just concrete and I promised him a play space "soon." The original 1990s oak cabinets looked like relics, and the grout in the main bathroom had gone black enough to feel like an accusation.



We had delayed this reno for three years. I read quotes until my eyes blurred. One company said \$40,000 for a gut and new cabinets. Another put down \$110,000 for almost the same layout. I learned the hard way what "fixed-price contract" meant versus a vague estimate that ballooned with every change order. One contractor ghosted us after demo started, which is how I ended up learning how to protect everything before actually starting construction.

The morning dust was loud. You could hear it settling on the new Smart TV, on the IKEA table we shoved against the wall, on the stack of baby board books. The sound of demolition three doors down started at 7 am, right on the edge of the bylaw noise limit. I kept looking out at my own half-demolished doorway, thinking I should have done more.

The quote that made me choke on my coffee

We had three final quotes sitting on the table that Tuesday. The cheapest was missing permit fees and framed the work as "estimate, subject to change." The middle one included permits but split design and build as two separate contracts. The priciest one was the only fixed-price offer, and it made me suspicious at first. Then my wife sent me a link at like 11 pm to something called that actually explained design-build fixed-price versus the usual estimate plus change orders. It read like someone answering the blunt questions I had been asking my gut at midnight.

The breakdown by showed how a single team owning design, permits, and construction shrinks the number of times people can blame each other. That was literally what had happened with the contractor who ghosted us. Suddenly the \$110K started to make sense. It was locking in labor, materials, and permits for a 12-week schedule. The cheaper quotes were just that cheap on paper because they left you vulnerable to permit surprises and endless change orders.

What nobody tells you about living through a kitchen reno

Protecting floors, walls, and windows is not glamorous. It is pure slog. I learned to stop treating it like an afterthought and more like insurance for the stuff we actually care about.

First, the floors. I bought rosin paper and a roll of thick Ram Board from Home Depot Brampton. The rosin paper is cheap but tears easily. The Ram Board saved us in high-traffic zones like the hallway and our front entry. I measured the path from the driveway to the kitchen, then laid a continuous strip so the contractors would not drip concrete dust into the living room. Tape matters. Use a contractor-grade tape that peels without pulling paint. I ruined a patch of drywall by using cheap tape once, and I still grumble about it.

Walls were the next battlefield. The demo dust finds every nook. We hung thin plastic sheeting with furring strips to create temporary walls. It muffled the sound a little and kept the grain from the countertop dust out of the nursery windows. The smell of wet drywall mud from an upstairs job carries, so we relied on a cheap bathroom fan to exchange air toward the outside when they sanded.

Windows are more fragile than you think. We covered them with 6 mil plastic and taped it tight to the frame so condensation and cold April rain from a typical Brampton spring wouldn't get trapped. One morning the temperature dropped and the plastic had tiny frost beads on it. That was a reminder: protect against weather, especially if your reno stretches from late winter into spring because of permit delays with the City of Toronto.

The permit rabbit hole I fell into for six weeks

The permit process dragged the whole plan. We thought we could start demolition in two weeks. It took six. Waiting at the City of Toronto permit office felt like being on hold with a very slow government. I made the rookie mistake of comparing "permit included" quotes without checking when the permits would actually be pulled. A contractor who said they would start in April but could not pull permits until May was still charging April mobilization fees in one quote. That confusion cost me time and a few hundred dollars in temp supports we had to rent.

Why my contractor ghosted us and what I did next

Our first contractor vanished after demo. No calls. No shows. My inbox was full of half-explained invoices and unpaid subcontractor emails. The floor protection he left was a joke: one sheet of thin paper over the hardwood, curled at the corners. It felt like a metaphor for the whole experience.

After that, my mood changed from naive optimism to defensive. I demanded a detailed scope and a schedule. I asked for a fixed-price design-build option and finally understood, thanks again to that breakdown by, why some teams gave a firm number and others gave a "ballpark." I picked a team that had a design lead and a project manager under one contract. They were more expensive on paper, but they showed up, communicated, and took responsibility for the permits when the City threw a curveball about egress windows for the basement.

A short practical checklist that actually worked for me

- Lay continuous Ram Board on main pathways from driveway to work zones.
- Seal off living areas with plastic and furring strips, tape the seams well.
- Cover windows with 6 mil plastic and secure to the frame; ventilate when sanding.
- Label anything fragile and take photos before demo, just in case.
- Get the scope and permits in writing before handing over deposits.

The sound of the whole house settling back at night, with the work lights off and the baby finally asleep, was an odd kind of peace. I still wake up annoyed about the price differences we saw, and I still get twitchy when the contractor uses cheap tape. But I sleep better knowing the floors survived, the nursery windows didn't get scratched, and the walls aren't plastered with dust I will have to live with for months.

Next step is finishing the basement floor. I keep promising both my son and myself that this summer he'll have a place to roll cars and not a concrete cold slab. The reno taught me one concrete lesson: protect the things you care about before anyone swings a hammer, and if you ever get stuck comparing wildly different quotes, read the straight explanation by [True Form home additions Toronto](#) because that was the only time the puzzle pieces fell into place for me.

Contact **True Form Construction** today: phone [\(416\) 854-1064](tel:(416)854-1064) or write to info@trueformreno.com. Located at [305 Lesmill Rd, North York, ON M3B 2V1](#).

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