

# Lessons Learned from a Remodel

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*An abundance of natural light now fills the kitchen.*

But our lot, with its pie-slice shape and a hill behind, was not an easy fix. We finally asked Allan Sayles, a local architect, for his input – he came up with a great vision that pleased us all.

Having attended Design Review Board and Planning Commission meetings, I knew that following the Town's guidelines and getting the neighbors on board would save us time and money. I checked the Town's municipal code: it is accessible online at [moraga.ca.us](http://moraga.ca.us) (use the quick links on the left), and paid attention to the setbacks in my zoning area.

The architect also checked and we asked for the meeting with the Town's Planning Department before we finalized the drawings. Planners took the time to look at the plan, offered their comments and confirmed that we should be able to get administrative approval. I visited all my neighbors before submitting the drawing as well, offering to show them the plans.

The rule is that neighbors receive a notification from the Town when the plans are submitted and can appeal if they feel that the remodel would compromise their privacy or would be out of character with the neighborhood. We got the Town and County permits easily. Do

not underestimate the price of the permits; everybody wants a share, including the School District when someone is adding more than 500 square feet.

That brings me to the "soft costs" associated with the project – architect, Title 24 compliance, structural engineer, permits, moving costs, renting another place; all of these added 20 percent to the cost of the construction itself.

When large municipal projects are budgeted, 10 percent is included for incidentals – the things that come up during the construction process. Among the major surprises of our project were the need for a new furnace and accompanying duct work, a new roof and hardwood floor, and a serious draining problem. Then there were a few add-ons like a new pathway to the entrance, a terrace on the hill, two additional skylights, and more recessed LED lights.

We had decided on a fixed-price bid and had four contractors submit proposals. The lower bidder, Daniel Leleu's Lamorinda Construction and Remodel, was also the one who promised to finish everything within four months. We signed the contract on August 15, moved out within a few days and the contractor started digging the new foundation right away.



*Daniel Leleu builds a new foundation at the front of the home.*