

REPUBLIC OF RIPOFF

Confessions of a Home Improvement Salesman

BONUS #2

Best Materials, and Reasonable Pricing for the Most Popular Home Projects

The pricing discussed for each complete job *is based upon your contract calling for your General Contractor (GC) to supply all materials and labor* - you just sign the checks, or pay the bank loan or give your wonderful, incredible Gift-from-God contractor gold, diamonds and jewelry. If you buy your own materials and fixtures, your total costs would lessen, as the work you are now paying for is only basic construction materials and labor. Permits: they may be required by your town and can be from \$50 to \$500 based upon their requirements. If your project needs an architect, they will run from \$2000 to \$15,000, including plans and all permits, plus your Certificate of Occupancy (the town saying all is perfect and you and future owners may live there until the our sun becomes a supernova). Prices vary based upon your needs. All project pricing is exclusive of these add-ons.

Bathrooms:

Commodes (toilet bowls), sinks and bathtubs: Kohler, American Standard. Others are available, so check your plumbing supplier for designs and prices. Both make whirlpool tubs as well. Americans have come to use a brand name - JACUZZI - for this tub. Yet they are similar

to the Jacuzzi brand, and are all good units. Keep in mind that white and off-white are the standard colors. Any other hue for fixtures would come at a 20% premium.

Vanities: most plumbing stores, along with Home Depot or Lowes, carry many good units. Oak and maple are the standard wood type items. White and off-white are good also. Once you get into fancier designs and woods - mahogany, ash, etc., you are going into 50% premium territory.

Pedestal Sinks: Again, the brands as above, though others may be just as good. Many styles are available and run from the basic for \$75 to over \$1000...if you have the courage. There are many good styles in the area of \$250 to \$500.

Tiles: Many good types of porcelain ceramic tiles are available at your local floor store from between \$2.00 to \$4.00 per square foot. Designs and colors abound within this range. A floor installation, if this is all you desire, runs about \$9.00 per SF from your local tile installation man. If hiring a GC, it could run \$16 per SF or more, as they must pay their workers, run a larger business and pay much more in liability insurance.

Shower doors: Good glass shower doors, either frosted (with or without designs) or clear, are from \$300-500. You can have 1/4" up to 1/2" thick glass doors, frameless, custom made-to-measure. However, these are top-of-the-food-chain items, and are from, \$1000 for a basic door up to \$3-6000 for large glass enclosures

Medicine Cabinets: The tri-view, all glass cabinet is wildly popular these days. This has three separately hinged mirrors which swing to various positions to allow you to easily see the sides or back of your head and upper body. Yes, you may now easily gaze at that tattoo you painfully sat for last year. There are many single-door types as well. The better ones of either type can be bought for \$150-300.

The usual price paid for a full renovation, including the initial gut-out, of a 5'x8' bathroom should be between \$10-16,000 based upon both fixtures used, if tile goes up to the ceiling at all walls, you install a whirlpool, and where you live. We've also done bathrooms for \$40,000. Keep in mind that, because of cost-of-living variables and labor pay scales, a bathroom in Lincoln, Nebraska could cost 30% less than in San Francisco.

Kitchens:

Appliances won't be covered in depth, as so many variations and brands are available, and taste, along with budget, is a large factor. The basic appliance package is often stove, refrigerator (with water and ice maker), dishwasher and microwave/hood combination. The hot exterior material today is stainless steel. One can buy all four from the local appliance store, or a "big box" retailer for under \$3500. We have seen special sales for between \$2000-3000. You could also spend \$20,000 or more for SUB-ZERO products.

The main kitchen components are cabinets, countertops, floor and backsplash materials, sinks and faucets. Lighting also plays into pricing. Many homeowners today opt for the in-ceiling high-hat type fixtures - often between six to twelve units, with several switches operating separate banks of lights. For cabinets, maple and oak are most popular, with maple being the preference, as the grain is fine and not too apparent, whereas oak has very pronounced graining which some feel overpowers the look of the cabinet door design. Always opt for plywood boxes (the sides and back of your cabinets and drawers) rather than "pressboard," small wood pieces pressed into boards by mixing with glues. Years ago, wall cabinets were always 30" high with a "soffit" above. This looks like a wall installed above the top-front of the cabinet. Today, if layout permits, go for 42" high, as you will have much more storage space. Also, be sure the

cabinet over the fridge projects the full 24" forward, the same as your base cabinets. This will provide easy access. Your regular wall cabinets are always (other than special order) 12" inches deep. Other wood options could be cherry, alder, birch, ash and hickory. These woods are usually at a 25% premium.

Countertops vary greatly: laminate, granite, quartz, marble, concrete and various man-made branded materials such as Corian, Silestone and Caesarstone. Laminate is always the economy countertop. Often, the full 18" high backsplash is made as part of the laminate counter. Granite and marble have been in the ground for hundreds of millions of years, thus they are very resilient. Marble is more porous, thus sealing is required every few years. Granite is denser, thus one good sealing right after installation can last for years. The man-made tops can mar; each come with maintenance instructions, which are quite basic and simple. Quartz is similar to granite in durability. Concrete is always custom poured and costly. In the many kitchens we have done, granite and marble have been virtually the only surfaces our clients chose. If buying a countertop *on your own*, a laminate top (Formica and Wilsonart are two popular brands) with full backsplash could be had for \$800 to \$1800 installed, based on size. Granite, marble and quartz - in the \$50 SF range, installed.

Sinks are either stainless steel or cast iron. The cast iron type are coated with enamel resins, color of choice. Styles, sizes and shapes vary. An all-in-one single action faucet is recommended. One lever gives you any temperature of water along with the spray attachment as part of the unit.

Floors and backsplash, other than the above laminate description, are usually of porcelain ceramic tiles, just as in the bathroom.

The usual price paid for a 12'x15' kitchen, including all new sheetrock walls and ceiling, tile floors and backsplash, cabinets, granite countertops, sink and faucet, along with some updated lighting, is usually between \$27,000 and \$38,000 exclusive of appliances. Cabinet choices can alter these prices upwards 20%. The geographic price variables apply just as with bathrooms, and they shall for all construction descriptions to follow.

Windows:

I speak about the replacement type where the existing opening is measured, with a new unit custom built to fit into your existing old wood-framed opening. Construction windows are those installed into newly built homes or additions, or when the old window openings are either enlarged or reduced. There are four materials used - wood, vinyl, fiberglass and aluminum.

I don't recommend aluminum, as, with today's emphasis on energy conservation, they are at the bottom. Metal conducts heat and cold, thus you do not want your windows mirroring the outside temperatures. They often come with a "thermal break," a non-conducting material in-between the inner and outer parts of the mainframe - think of a ham sandwich. Still, they are not as thermally efficient as the others.

Vinyl and wood are most popular. I lean toward vinyl, as it is maintenance-free, whereas wood might need sanding/sealing work down the road. Today's thicker and sturdier vinyl, with a metal reinforcing frame in its interior (this does not affect thermal efficiency), along with welded corners, make them strong. Both wood and vinyl are insulating materials, thus the frames remain cool in summer and warm in winter. Fiberglass is the new guy on the block, it is strong, with similar thermal characteristics, though more costly than vinyl. Wood is the highest price type. These materials, in the better quality windows which will qualify as EnergyStar (R), and through

2010 will qualify for an income tax credit, are paired with energy efficient double thermal glass. Virtually all twin-glass units have Low-E coatings, to prevent heat transference, and argon gas sealed in-between (to enhance this efficiency). Some have triple-glass units, though this makes the sash heavier, requiring heavier duty springs and a higher price.

Heat Mirror (R) is another technology paired with the Low-E coating. This is a clear mylar-type film (think of a very thick piece of plastic food wrap) installed mid-way between the two glass pieces, which acts as a reflector, deflecting heat away from the window in summer and keeping the heat *in* the home in winter. It is a very effective piece of technology.

A complete installation would include removal of the old window and carting of debris, installation, caulking and capping (a cosmetic covering of the old outside wood frame).

Prices from your GC for vinyl should be about \$550 to \$650 per unit for a 3x5 window. Larger windows = more money. Bows and bays are much more - from \$3000-\$6000. Wood and fiberglass are about a 20% premium. Additional costs may occur if old original cast iron or aluminum windows (installed back in the 1920s through the 60s) must be removed. These units are surgically removed with giant earthmoving equipment utilized in iron mines.

Well...not really. Your workers do have to cut them out all the way to the original opening's structure. If your home is brick and you have these old metal windows, then they are cut out and the brick is revealed. Wood framing must now be installed around this opening, as windows should always be secured into wood. Then the usual caulking and capping finishes the job. There are times when this level of work may disturb existing walls and tiling in bathrooms. Consult with your GC.

Roofs:

The most popular material for pitched (gabled) roofs is asphalt shingles. Other materials are wood, metal and acrylic. Metal comes in square or long rectangular sheets, in shingle shapes or in wavy shapes which resemble a Southwest hacienda. All are steel, yet you may opt for copper, *the* most costly of metal roofing. Steel is expensive...copper more so. We will be talking about complete roofing installations, as repairs or patching of an existing roof is not recommended. Such a job can result in leaks further down the road, which may *or may not* be caused by the patched area. Yet, if you have a leak, your first thought will be, “Aha...the guy didn’t do the right job.” Most reputable contractors never want to be found sinking to their knees in abject terror when that phone call comes in, and thus only do entire roofs.

Roofs and siding are both measured by “squares.” There are 100 square feet (SF) per square. Thus, if you have a 2000 SF roof, you’ve 20 squares. Prior to any roof being installed, the old materials are removed and carted, along with any old wood being patched “here and there.” All new 5/8” plywood sheathing, if needed, raises the following prices by \$150 per square. An underlayment “felt,” a moisture resistant membrane, is then laid. There are new products being marketed which tout better results. Consult your roof guru. From a General Contractor (GC) a metal roof of this size can range (you may be able to have a small, local company do it for less) from \$1500 to over \$2000 per square. That’s \$30,000 for your 20 squares! Copper is higher.

Acrylic roofing is usually reserved for that wavy type of hacienda-type shingle. These are in the \$1000 per square range.

Now to asphalt. Most popular today is the “architectural” style which mimics the look of cedar shake – asymmetrical shapes and variations of color shading. The installation should

include a perimeter “ice-shield” which, when snow and ice remain for weeks at a time on your roof, prevents water from creeping up under the shingles and reeking havoc to your living room ceiling. Pricing for a 20 square project is in the \$9,000 to \$15,000 range, based upon the work required, how bad the existing roof is, and geography.

Flat roofs are a different matter. All preparative work is the same as for the pitched variety. Then a "rubber" roof is installed. Those of a "certain age" may remember the smell coming from a dirty, black tar blotched, boiling oil barrel-sized cauldron. This was the tar being readied to apply to the flat roof of an apartment building or other boxy edifice. No more. Four foot wide rolls of a complex-compositioned bituminous material are rolled onto the underlayments. The seams are sealed with black roofing cement. Some call this a "torch down" roof, as blowtorches were used to seal the seams rather than the cement. Many municipalities, have now banned this practice to ward off potential fires.

You can expect to pay \$500 to \$700 per square.

Siding:

Several types are popular: vinyl, fiber-cement board, wood and stucco.

Vinyl: the horizontal clapboard or dutch-lap designs (see them in catalogs or on the internet) are finished in wood-look graining, and come in strips from 8 to 25 feet long. A higher priced design is in the form of cedar shakes. Why price differential? Design and thickness – this type of siding must be cut with a saw, whilst the horizontal can be sheared with a large pair of scissors. Styrofoam insulation, from ¼” to 1” thick, based on desires and needs, comes first, followed by the siding. All corner posts, fascias (where the gutters are) and soffits (the eave area overhand), window and door trim are covered. If you’ve a porch with ceiling, your CG would

cover that as well. A 25 square project, including all trim, as discussed above, along with window and door trimming, plus new leaders and gutters, can be from \$14,000 to \$16,000 for horizontal siding with no old siding removal. Add another \$50 per square for this. Vinyl Shake siding adds another \$4000 to the cost. Old aluminum or vinyl siding *must* be removed and carted; asbestos shingles (no need to worry about them...they're inert) do not need removal and the new is installed over this material. Add \$25-50 per square if needed.

Wood: Usually cedar shake type. \$22,000 *minimum* and can go higher.

Fiber-Cement Board: man-made material consisting of cement, sand, and cellulose fiber that has been autoclaved (cured with pressurized steam) to increase its strength and dimensional stability. It look virtually like wood planks, cuts with a saw and lasts for up to 50 years. Pricing is similar to real wood.

Stucco: We're referring to the 2" thick Styrofoam board type. A relatively new product, it is costly, yet very thermally efficient. Thick boards are secured to your home's outer walls by washers and screws. Nylon mesh is laid over this new surface, with a thin coat of cement applied. After drying and setting, a final, color-of-choice coat is applied, along with similar materials installed for window, doors, fascia and soffit trim. A 25 square home, including leaders and gutters: \$27,000 to \$35,000 with the usual variables.

Basements:

Most home owners need extra living space. A new finished basement can be the answer. Be it a great room with a ½ bath and wet bar (a base cabinet-only kitchen with no stove) for family fun or entertaining, or divided into rooms for various uses, this new living area fills many voids. The specific bath and kitchen descriptions are for a purpose. Most municipalities across

the country frown on full bathrooms and kitchens in basements, as this area could then be rented to a tenant. Many owners do this anyway, with a *pooh-on-you-thumb-your-nose* to the town.

A 20x30 new basement, regular frame and sheetrock construction – new walls, ceiling, electrical outlets, lighting, ceramic floors and heat, can run about \$50,000, which is a bit less than \$85 per SF. Owens-Corning and other manufacturers are marketing, to selected GC dealers, prefabricated fabric type panels for walls. The floors and ceiling must still be added. Also, these installations are reserved for newer homes with simple and clean concrete basements. Older homes, with pipes and other unknown things hanging and running across and down walls and ceilings, are bumps in the road for this type of installation. They go for about \$35,000.

Dormers and Extensions:

Extensions are built out from the house, increasing the “footprint” of your home. Dormers are additions atop your home. The ultimate addition is *both* an extension and dormer combination. The *absolutely required* plans and permits come first, followed by construction.

For an extension, we won’t include extra work inside the existing home, which, at a minimum, is needed to tie in the old with the new. You’ll be getting a crawl space and the extension above this. Framing, outer walls, insulation and siding, windows, roof, interior floors – usually oak wood, walls and ceiling, trim work, doors and closets, heat and a full bathroom give you a finished project. A very nice sized 16x24 new master room (384 SF) can go for \$225 per SF, or \$86,400.

One question for dormers is, can the existing construction of your home support the added weight? Only your architect/engineer can determine this. We’ll proceed as if it can.

For all of the above to be included, as in the extension: figure, as you don't need the added crawl space, about \$125 per SF, or \$48,000. Remember that plans and permits are always extra money.

A major home renovation, with dormers and extensions and existing home changes, can run \$250,000 to over one million.

Best of luck.