

FALL HOME STYLE / remodeling: NIGHTMARE ON YOUR STREET

When readers talk of 'fly by night,' they don't mean witches

BYLINE: TINAH SAUNDERS

Staff

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Everyone has one: a story guaranteed to make your hair stand on end, a tale that leaves the bravest shaking in their shoes or a yarn that keeps on haunting long after the terror ends.

We're not talking about the latest slasher flick or the newest Stephen King novel. We're talking stories of renovations gone berserk. In the spirit of Halloween, we asked readers to share their renovation nightmares. Some are tragic, some exasperating and some even funny. So gather round, and we'll tell you about flickering lights, black holes in ceilings, workers that disappear for weeks and projects that go on forever.

TALES TO BEWILDER FROM THE OTHER SIDE

When it comes to horror stories, contractors have their own tales to tell. Trudy McGinnis, a certified kitchen and bath designer, said her worst nightmare is the client who won't tell the designer what he can afford.

"They're either embarrassed to say what they can afford or think they can get more for their money if they don't tell us," she said. McGinnis described a client who said she could not spend more than \$20,000 on her kitchen. McGinnis designed the space with that budget in mind. But then the client ordered cabinets that cost \$20,000 and added such custom (and expensive) extras as special lighting, a cathedral ceiling and skylights.

"I redesigned as we went, with each change she made," McGinnis said. "By the end, I figured I made about \$5 an hour." Nora DePalma, who owns Building Products, a marketing and public relations firm that focuses on the building industry, said contractors often get a bad rap. "You only hear about the bad ones, but there are a lot of honest, good contractors out there who do really good jobs at a fair price," she said.

Some of the problems readers shared may result from a contractor's lack of business acumen. Danny Feig-Sandoval, owner of Small Carpenters at Large, a 23-year-old company based in Inman Park, said most renovation contractors have come up from the ranks and may be skilled carpenters but don't have the background to run a small business.

"When they don't have money to finish a job, they have to start a new one to pay for finishing the first one. That's how they get in trouble," he said.

Even when a contractor's references check out and his previous work is fine, Feig-Sandoval said, your job may be the one on which the contractor falls apart.

Working with some clients can be difficult. Jerome Quinn, a partner in **SawHorse**, which has been renovating homes in Atlanta for more than 20 years, said his worst nightmare is the client who consults friends and family after decisions are made, then keeps changing his mind.

Quinn has figured out ways to minimize the stress for both sides. He spends a lot of time with prospective clients before contracts are signed. They discuss designs and decide on materials upfront so that the renovation process can move along efficiently. "Some people want to move ahead quickly and have a deadline in mind; others can take a year to decide on tile," Quinn said. "We can work with both, but it helps if we all agree on what we are going to do before we start. It takes a little longer, but it's worth it."