

STUDIO MASS · LONDON

# How to Save Money on Your Renovation

17 practical tips from a London design studio with 20+ years of residential project experience. Real advice that protects your budget without compromising your home.

# Before You Spend a Penny on Construction

These two tips are not about tiles, kitchens, or specification choices. They are about the structural decisions that determine whether your project stays on budget or spirals. Every other tip in this guide saves you hundreds. These two save you thousands.

## 01 Brief Your Designer to a Budget

The most expensive mistake in a renovation is not choosing the wrong tiles. It is commissioning a design you cannot afford to build. Tell your designer your construction budget on day one. A good designer works within constraints. A great one thrives on them. If your budget does not match your brief, better to know that at week one than after six months of design work and a £5,000 fee.

## 02 Know Your Pre-Build Costs Before You Commit

Most homeowners budget for the build. Almost none budget for what comes before it. Before you spend a penny on construction, set aside a separate pot for professional fees, planning costs, and statutory charges. For a typical London extension, that is £8,000–£16,000 — and it is all due before the builders arrive. Survey, designer, structural engineer, planning fees, building regs, party wall — budget for all of it upfront.

The remaining 15 tips cover practical, specific ways to reduce construction and fit-out costs without compromising the quality of your home.

- 03 Create a Budget Spreadsheet**

Keep your budget spreadsheet up to date throughout the project. Track every cost against your allowances. This is how you spot overruns early, not at the end when it is too late to adjust.

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- 04 Invest in a Good Layout**

Sometimes spending on a well-thought-out design means you can reconfigure the existing space without needing an extension at all. A good layout can save you the cost of building entirely.

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- 05 Keep Plumbing in Place**

Moving plumbing is expensive. If you can keep kitchens and bathrooms in their current positions — or close to them — you avoid the cost of rerouting drainage, water supply, and waste pipes.

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- 06 Use Standard Sizes**

When planning your kitchen, stick to standard-sized base units to reduce the need for bespoke pieces. The same applies to windows, doors, and structural openings — standard is always cheaper than custom.

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- 07 IKEA Kitchen with Custom Doors**

Save money by using IKEA carcasses and splurging on bespoke door fronts. This is one of the smartest ways to allocate your kitchen budget — the bones are solid and affordable, the finish looks high-end.

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- 08 Standard Height Cupboards**

Full-height cupboard doors look stylish but are not always practical. Use standard 2.1m high doors with smaller doors or open shelves above for less frequently used items. Saves on joinery costs.

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### 09 **Tile Only Where You Need To**

Tiles are more expensive than paint. In bathrooms and wet rooms, tile only the areas around the shower or bath and use paint for the rest. Fewer tiles, less labour, same result where it matters.

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### 10 **Skip Flush Skirting Boards**

Flush skirting looks great but is costly. For a modern look without the high price, opt for 50mm high skirting boards instead. The visual difference is minimal; the cost difference is not.

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### 11 **Avoid Salvage and Vintage Fittings**

While vintage can be charming, fitting second-hand items often costs more in labour than the savings on the item itself. New fittings are designed for modern installation — salvage rarely is.

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### 12 **Plan a 5 Amp Lighting Circuit**

Create mood lighting with a 5 amp circuit. You can upgrade lights gradually over time, and even take them with you when you move. It is a small upfront cost with long-term flexibility.

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### 13 **Plan Garden Electrics Early**

Plan for garden lighting and electrics early, even if you do not install them right away. Running conduit during the build is far cheaper than digging up the garden later.

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- 14 Built-In Joinery: Plan Early, Build Later**  
Plan for built-in joinery early so it fits seamlessly with your layout. However, it is a costly item you can postpone if budget is tight. Get the carcass right now; add the joinery when funds allow.

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  - 15 Hire Specialist Tradespeople**  
Do not cut corners by hiring trades who are not specialists in what you need. It may end up costing more if they have to learn on the job, or you could end up with a finish you are unhappy with.

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  - 16 Complete Everything at Once**  
If possible, do all your renovations at once to save on setup costs and avoid paying for certain things (like permits, scaffolding, and skip hire) twice. One mobilisation is always cheaper than two.

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  - 17 Prevent Scope Creep**  
Resist the urge to add more as you go. Every change during construction triggers a variation order — and variation orders are always more expensive than getting it right in the design stage. Decide everything before the builders start.
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## Need Help Planning Your Renovation?

Book a free call with Studio MASS. We will give you an honest view on your project, your budget, and where to focus your money for maximum impact.

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5 star reviews across Google and Houzz

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**Extension Cost Guide 2026** — Real London construction costs by type, spec level, and borough zone. Includes pre-build costs, worked examples, and tendering advice.

**Project Guide 2026** — Everything you need to know about building an extension: planning, building regs, design, and construction.