

CONDOBUSINESS

COMMON AREA RENOS

What to consider when refreshing
public spaces

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Ask the Expert: Budget-friendly renovations
Upgrading the resident experience

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Ask the Expert: Budget-friendly renovations

Whether it's a front lobby reno or party room refresh, an outdoor addition or hallway restoration, taking steps to rejuvenate a condominium can have positive impacts on asset value and resident satisfaction. That is, of course, if there's room in the budget to get a project off the ground. Condo managers and owners are often challenged to keep assets looking their best while balancing the books. That's where knowing where to focus restoration efforts (and how to save a few bucks in the process) can help balance the desire to stay modern with the need to stay on budget. Here with advice from over 25 years of condominium interior design work is **Anita Wiclém, founder, Creative Director, and Managing Partner of Wiclém Design Inc.**



What would you tell clients who are anxious about spending money on a condo renovation or restoration?

You really don't need to spend a fortune to make a big impression. If you know where to focus, where you can save money, and how to get creative with what you have, you can achieve your renovation and design goals without breaking the bank.



Where should that focus be?

The suite corridors and the hallways usually give the owners the most value back for their investment. That's what suite owners typically react to the most because it's an extension of their home. What I like to tell people is that carpet, paint, and wall covering are your basic needs – everything else is gravy.

That being said, replacing hallway carpets and wall covering doesn't come cheap. That's why we suggest considering the size of a carpet and wall covering's repeating pattern because you want something that will match your layout and fit in with your environment. In some cases, they may even find that carpet tile is the better choice for an area with a lot of directional changes because it means less waste.

Lighting can also be a big-ticket item ...

Right. Replacing or upgrading lights can be a strain on renovation budgets. But even still, good lighting design is crucial to the overall look and feel of a finished design. That's why we like to review options to retrofit existing fixtures to LED if they are timeless and work with the design.

As for cost-friendly strategies, surface mounted pot lights look amazing. They provide a simple and clean feeling, especially for corridors, and they are very reasonably priced.

How can condo owners/managers save money when it comes to installing new interior decorations?

Sprucing up an area with a new painting, sculpture, or decorative feature sounds great on paper but can be pricey in execution. One way to keep costs in check is to simply re-purpose existing artwork from elsewhere in the building, either by placing them in new locations, taking old pieces out of storage, or adding additional design flares around existing pieces to bring new life.

Also, instead of going to galleries to buy your art, you can develop relationships with local artists and work with them to bring out the best of your design.

Does the same strategy apply to furniture?

It does. Just as "old" art can be relocated and spruced up, you can do the same with pieces of furniture that may have been forgotten or are currently languishing in places where they aren't noticed. Before shopping for a new love seat, cabinet, or side table, look around for furniture that may need a little re-upholstering or cleaning to feel like new again.

I should, however, mention that when it comes to lobbies and exit corridors without sprinklers, you need to work with CAL 133 rated furniture (California Bulletin 133), which is a rating related to the flammability of furniture in various public buildings. Usually, you'd have to buy two of the same pieces of furniture to test one, so choosing a front lobby chair, sofa, or other upholstered items from a pre-approved selection of CAL 133 can save you a lot of time, money, and hassle.

What about saving money on aesthetic repairs?

We deal a lot with floors or walls that are dated and need a redesign. While one option is to replace the flooring entirely, this can understandably come at a considerable cost. Instead, we often build that flaw into a new design.

For example, we worked on one condo that had large, visible scars in the granite from the building's original planters, and the board couldn't afford to replace the flooring. So instead of replacing it, we made it look like an inset detail. In another building, we were installing a new bar in a rec room that had damaged wooden flooring. Without the funding to replace it, we decided to create a granite border that followed the circular design of the bar and highlighted it with additional lighting. We just made it look like a wow factor instead of a broken floor.

Consulting a design professional for projects like these can also come at a cost. How can condo owners and managers justify the expense?

There is generally no line item for interior designers in the reserve fund budget, but when you're tackling these massive projects, you're going to want someone on your team who can get creative, find those cost-savings opportunities, and use every last dollar effectively. Just like engineers or electricians, registered interior designers have a wealth of knowledge and experiences they can bring to the table to help boards see things from different angles and make more informed decisions. □

Anita Wiklém is the founder, Creative Director, and Managing Partner of Wiklém Design inc. and Wiklém Design+BUILD inc. (www.wiklemdesign.com), an award-winning Toronto firm specializing in condominium refurbishment and new build high-rise.

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