

The 10 Key Steps to Guarantee Your London Property Project is a **Stress Free Success**



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If you are typical of most of our clients here at Tyler Mandic, you know what you want, you recognise quality and are happy to pay for it. At the same time, you are very busy with your own stuff and don't want to micromanage your own project. If you are based abroad, there are all sorts of extra pitfalls and issues – from managing remotely to the ins and outs of local regulations and procedures.

Over the last 16 years, we have successfully renovated over 140 London properties, and have worked with many clients just like you, on property projects mainly based in our specialist areas of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster. We know exactly what it takes to run these projects successfully – and we have seen only too often how easily it can all go wrong with costs over-running, delays and poor workmanship, if you choose the wrong team.

That is why we have written this guide, to help you get exactly what you want: top service at a fair price, with premium results, from a team who will make it all easy and straightforward.

Our guide **The 10 Key Steps To Guarantee Your London Property Project is a Stress Free Success** reveals exactly how to achieve this, step by step:

What you want:

- stylish, functional design
- your ideas understood and interpreted in the best possible way
- top quality workmanship and materials
- a stress-free project
- builders on time and on budget
- guaranteed after-care

And what you certainly don't want:

- a rip-off job
- costs over-runs
- late delivery
- shoddy workmanship
- systems or appliances that break down almost immediately

By following our guide, you will ensure that you get the results and service you expect, whilst avoiding potentially stressful pitfalls.

With our best wishes,

G. Mandic Peter Tyler

Gordana and Peter





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1

prepare for what is to happen: forewarned is forearmed

Make an effort to **be well informed for what lies ahead**. Ask around, you will have friends, family or work colleagues who have been through similar types of project. They can tell you about their experiences and what to expect. Ask about their biggest successes and mistakes, what would they do again and what differently, what have they learnt, and if there are any useful tips they may be able to give. We learn best from our own mistakes but the wise learn from others' mistakes, too. Be one of them.

Next, **understand the process you are about to embark upon**. Find out what needs to happen and when, which professionals will be involved, and what their roles, responsibilities and expertise will be. Complex projects will require a number of consultants, so be sure that you know your QS from your DS, your SE from your M&E.

Make sure you **understand the language**: party walls, schedule of conditions, license to refurbish, planning approval, listed building consent and probably some others that will be specific to you and your project. **Find out which of these apply to you and read up on them**. It will come in handy and will convince everybody involved that you are experienced, knowledgeable and professional. You'll be taken a lot more seriously.

Planning permissions

You'll need to establish whether you need planning permission, the likelihood of obtaining it and how long it might take. If you are hoping to do something complex, such as a basement conversion, allow a minimum of six months to obtain permission.



Other necessary paperwork - permissions, licenses and agreements

There are other types of permissions you may need to obtain and certain procedures you will have to follow.

If you are **planning to refurbish a flat in a mansion block**, find out what the rules are and how to obtain the necessary licenses. These can vary from building to building, depending on the type of ownership (freehold, leasehold or commonhold) and the way the building is managed and run.

If your project requires work on a wall shared by your neighbours (in a terraced or semi-detached property, as well as a mansion block or a house divided into flats), then you will require a **party wall agreement** before the work starts. Party wall agreements may take up to three months to put in place, and can be quite costly.

Timescale

It is important to **understand the timeline of the entire project** and appreciate how much time and when you will need to devote to the design and planning phases. Remember that the more time spent on preparation, the less risk of complications and delays once construction is underway.

2

choose your architects well – they are the key to your success

Architects have a complex set of skills, from design to cost-control. They can deal with builders, understand contract management, and are proficient at CAD (computer-aided design) and 3D modelling. No single architect can do everything well, and individual architects have their different strengths and specialties. **It's therefore important to choose the right architects firm, one with a well-balanced team with complementary skills. A good design team is like a small orchestra, each musician expertly playing their individual part in perfect harmony with the rest of the group.** Make sure you choose a team of experienced specialists that **will deliver the complete package.**

Architects will listen to you and understand exactly what you're looking for, but it's also important to take full advantage of their ideas. Ensure that you use their talent to create a beautiful result that ticks your every box, giving you more than you even hoped for.

Synergy and personal understanding are also key to a good working relationship. This is why you should choose an architect who makes you feel comfortable, puts you at ease, and shares the same ethos, philosophy and taste.

What to look for when considering different architects firms

Your chosen architects and their teams should:

- be experienced and knowledgeable
- be talented and creative
- have a proven track record of good results
- understand your lifestyle
- look after your and your family's interests
- be trustworthy
- be good listeners and communicators
- guide you and reassure you in your decisions
- are experienced in dealing with planners
- know the best consultants and builders
- have access to reputable and reliable suppliers

Choosing the right architect to work with is without doubt one of the most important decisions you will make. Choosing the right architect means the difference between enjoying the perfect home you've always dreamed of, rather than dealing with a stress-filled money pit.



From one of our clients:

“ The secret is in choosing your architect wisely and finding a good flexible quantity surveyor. Also, although we didn't deal with the builders directly, we made sure we got on well with them, because they were the guys doing the work.

3

develop a clear brief

Take time to think through your wish list, discuss it with your architects, and then work together to create a clear brief. This will focus everybody's minds and save you from exploring too many dead ends. Good architects will be able to warn you of any potential issues early in the design stage and will always present alternatives to achieve the best result within the budget, space and time available.

To develop the brief, ask yourself these questions:

- **what is the purpose of the work?** Is it to create your own home, or is it an investment where a profitable return is of foremost importance?
- **what are your practical needs?** Think about family and living areas, kitchen and dining, the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, spaces for children, guest rooms, laundry, garden, wine cellar, storage. Do you need a specific place for something close to your heart or do you need acres of storage for clothes and shoes?
- **what are the possibilities of the space available?** Is there a chance of extending and how best could extra space be used?
- **which technology is a must?** Are you a techy or do you prefer candles? Are you looking for a future-proofed smart home, with every function integrated and controlled from anywhere in the world, by your iPad or mobile phone, or would you simply prefer a good old fashioned on-off light switch?
- **what is the feel you want to achieve?** One of luxury? Comfort? Privacy? Lots of space and light? Maybe you imagine something uncluttered, calm and Zen-like? Do you want a wow factor for business and entertaining, or do you prefer a cosy home geared towards your family life?
- **what aesthetic are you after?** Traditional, modern, minimalist, classic, futuristic, eclectic or urban chic?
- **can you afford everything you want?** Or should you prioritise and plan your project in stages, in order to add a few luxuries later, when you have financially recovered from this initial expense?

Be realistic in your expectations and understand the restrictions imposed by space and budget.

The role of a good architect is often about helping you make tough decisions. Homeowners can sometimes be unrealistic about what can be achieved within the space and budget available, but a good professional will help you work out your priorities and suggest solutions you might not have thought of previously.

Your architects will discuss realistic options and come up with the best solution to suit your tastes, lifestyle and budget. By going through a disciplined process of care and planning, everything will be ironed out before construction begins.

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establish the budget and be realistic about costs

Basic building work – such as moving walls, plastering and decorating – will cost much the same regardless of which company you use. The price will vary between different builders by not more than 5%. **The thing that makes a big difference to cost is the choice of fixtures and finishes.**

It is important to understand that **when it comes to costs, you are in charge.** Your architects will guide you through the overwhelming choices of finishes and fittings to achieve the right balance between the cost you are comfortable with and the final look.

For an accurate cost estimate you will need a detailed specification, usually produced by a quantity surveyor, but your architects will be able to give you a rough “per square metre” estimate based on the finished look you’re after and whether you want a budget, medium or high-end result.

Are you cost-driven or do you simply want value for money?

It is important to discuss and clarify priorities regarding budget. For some, cost savings are vital, while others want higher quality materials and post-contract care and are happy to pay for it. Be clear about this from the beginning, so your architect and other specialists will know what to specify and which subcontractors to use. **As with everything, you’ll get what you pay for – but your architect will help to get the best value for your money.**

Here are some features that will add to the bottom line:

- designer kitchens, with many of the latest smart fittings and appliances
- bespoke built-in joinery, especially if you like exotic veneers
- high-quality hardwood floors with wide planks and long straight wood grain
- marble and natural stone for bathrooms, hallways and kitchen
- lutron or similar lighting, sound systems and home cinemas
- little indulgences, such as wine cellars, saunas, steam rooms

Remember, you are in control

Occasionally there will be something that you really want but is out of your budget. Hopefully, your architect will be able to propose a cheaper alternative but if not, you’ll have to decide whether to give it up or splash out.

You simply must be quite clear in your own mind about how much you can and want to spend. Your priorities and budget may well change during the design process but with good guidance and planning you will be ready to start the building stage knowing that the budget is firmly set and under control.



From one of our clients:

“ We always took professional advice and considered it, but all the final decisions were ours because this is our home.

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create an accurate timeline

When talking about building work and its duration, most people think only about the construction phase. However, there's a lengthy design and planning process which must come first, when you will have many meetings and make all the important decisions. It's vital that you spend time on this phase, to correctly communicate what you're looking for and ultimately reduce the risk of complications later on.

The basic steps of your project will be:

- initial **design** and planning
- applying for and obtaining **planning approval** and **listed building consent**
- initial **costing and budget allocation**
- **obtaining licences** from managing agents for work in mansion block apartments
- **tendering** and analysing tenders
- post-tender **value engineering** (redesigning if costs are too high)
- organising **party wall agreements**
- builders **mobilisation** – usually at least a few weeks

These things can take many months to complete before any building work starts. Obtaining the correct paperwork in London is a notoriously difficult and often slow process regardless of the architects you choose, and you will definitely run into trouble if you don't have everything in place before you start on site.

Your architects will keep the process flowing as speedily as possible, and will organise some of the steps to run concurrently and save time, but some waits are inevitable. Being realistic about timescales will avoid disappointment – and **if there are any delays, make sure you use the extra time constructively for decisions on fixtures and fittings.**

Client deadlines

Many architects and other specialists will set deadlines for various decisions to be made by the client. This not only gives clients a good idea of how long they have to make up their minds but it also avoids potentially lengthy and costly delays during the construction phase.

Allowance for error

When creating timelines we know that mistakes happen and materials need to be re-ordered. It's important to anticipate that this will inevitably occur and build some "reserve" time into the programme.

“ On our first project we started too soon with the construction phase because we were naïve, and at the end we were disappointed with many things. This time we knew better so we spent hours at home looking through the plans. Having computer 3D drawings was great because it helped us understand the space. We spent weeks tweaking the layouts until we were completely happy, and looking back that was the best thing we could have done.

Duration of the building work on site, a rough guide:

- refurbishing a flat usually takes 3-5 months.
- renovating a whole house, without significant structural changes, can take 4-6 months, with structural changes adding another 1-2 months.
- renovating a house and adding a basement can take as long as 10-15 months, going up to 18 months for more complex projects.

Very complicated projects can take longer but with the correct preparation the vast majority of projects should fall within the timescales above.



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the magic triangle: quality, time, cost

Time, quality and cost are interrelated and you need to understand that **it is not possible to have the work done quickly, cheaply and to the highest quality.**



Imagine a triangle where quality, time and cost represent the three sides. If you change the length of one, the others are affected. If you want something to be high quality with a fast turnaround, it will end up being more expensive. If you want tight cost control and high quality, then it will take much longer. If you want something done quickly and at a low price, the quality will suffer.

The art is in achieving the best balance between these three factors, and thinking through, deciding and communicating your priorities. **Some of our clients simply don't care what it costs as long as it's perfect, others have plenty of time as long as we stick to their budget. Which one are you?**

7

invest your time and focus before work starts

Once you have chosen and hired an architect, they'll start the planning and design process based on your guidance. Ideally, when it's time to make decisions, they will show you several options and give you their expert opinion on what the best choices are likely to be. Clear communication is key during this stage and it's important to balance your wishes with the architect's expertise, as they will always have the best interests of you and your project in mind.

As the plans are finalised, and before the builders start on site, be aware that **two of the most common reasons for frustration are major changes late in the process or simple indecision.**

Changes do happen and are expected as part of the process, but by making firm and informed decisions sooner rather than later, you can minimise delays once the construction phase has begun. Big changes during the build phase will almost certainly create setbacks, increase costs and hamper working relationships.

Focus early or pay later

One of the biggest mistakes made by busy clients is to not focus enough in the early designing stage. Occasionally they will not look properly at the drawings, nor ensure that they understand every detail, and simply approve them without much questioning. Many start to become thoroughly involved only once the build is in full swing, and only then do they start to question aspects of design that could have been easily resolved in the early stage.

Most disheartening, for client, architect and builder, is when the client says towards the end of the building works, "I didn't know it was going to be like that", or "This is not what I expected". Inevitably, it is extremely costly to start changing and rebuilding, and of course there is a time delay.

It will be you who is paying, so **you must invest your time, wisely and early on, in fully understanding the design and ensuring you're going to get what you want.**



Traditional design drawings are dry and difficult to understand but builders need them. In our company, we always produce many 3D drawings, presenting every room from different angles, to give a better understanding of the spaces and how they relate to each other. At the early stages, the 3D modelling doesn't need to be of the highest quality but as the design progresses CGI (computer-generated imagery) can give an almost photographic representation of how the finished rooms will look.

Do bear in mind that significantly changing the design even in the design stages may involve extra costs from the architect, but those will be immaterial compared to potentially very costly alterations once the building work has started. Even worse, if you can't afford the cost of correcting mistakes, you will have to live with them.

By being fully focused and involved during the design and planning stages, you will know exactly what you are getting with no unwelcome surprises. Never feel embarrassed to ask the architect if you don't understand something and always be straightforward if you don't like some aspects of the design or would prefer something completely different. It is your home and you are in charge.



“ As we have renovated two houses in the past, we know well that the secret to success is making a decision and sticking firmly to it, because changing your mind creates many problems. The most important thing is to get it right at the design stage, and to be clear about your priorities.

8

understand secrets of cost control and avoid extras

Cost control is a vital part of a successful project. It not only keeps the project within budget but it also helps you get the most out of what you're prepared to spend while avoiding nasty surprises.

Some key aspects of good cost control:

- without detailed drawings, it's almost impossible to provide accurate costs. It can help to produce sketch designs, and have them costed by a quantity surveyor as early as possible, to ensure that the project is heading in the right direction from the very beginning.
- once plans are firmed up, the quantity surveyor should accurately cost up the entire project. Also, ask your architect to provide **itemised listings of all supplies required**.
- ensure that all **costs are always broken up into supply and labor**, for transparency and easy monitoring.
- another good aspect of cost control is to **make final decisions sooner rather than later**, to avoid interrupting the pre-planned build process.
- it's vital that you have a **signed contract with your contractor**, backed up by a **comprehensive set of drawings and a fully itemised costing**, so all parties know exactly what to expect. This can be prepared by your architect and/or quantity surveyor, and will be the base from which all variations or later changes are calculated.

If all of the above points are followed, and a **contingency fund of 5%-8%** of the total spend is in place, you can sleep well knowing that the contract will finish within your budget.

Beware of cheap builders

Being wary of cheap builders isn't just about the risk of poor workmanship. Building companies may put forward a very low quote because they're in financial trouble and desperate for turnover. **If they go bust halfway through your build it will end up costing you a lot –not only in money but in disruption and stress.** Every now and then we are asked to rescue a client from a situation where the builder has gone bust but we never do. The client has been totally cost-driven from the start, and will be even more desperate now that he's gotten into this mess.

Just as you would never go into a shop and ask for the cheapest shoes or cheapest car, when it comes to choosing a builder, the person who is going to create your home, you need to stop and ask yourself what it is that you want and then communicate that clearly to your architect who will have a number of reputable building partners they can recommend.

“ I would say that you can never invest too much time at the beginning, during the design process, as any alteration halfway through will end up being very expensive. Our quantity surveyor was excellent, and he insisted that we always got a fixed price quote before we confirmed any additional work. That way we knew that the budget would not escalate out of control.

9

choose the right contractor and make the most out of them

There is **one key question to be answered before you can choose a builder: will you tender the contract or opt out to negotiate** with a trusted building firm of the architect's choice?

First, **it is important to understand the difference between the two methods, so – in a very simplified form – we have described them below.**

The tendering route

A tendered contract is one where, once the design is finalised, a few contractors are invited to submit quotes for the work, and your architect and the quantity surveyor will make the choice from one of the lowest bidders. They will aim for three or four quotes but may need to invite six or seven contractors as half won't be interested. Many reputable building firms never tender because they have work lined up far ahead, and others simply don't like tendering as it's very time-consuming with no guarantee of work at the end of it.

Whilst it might seem logical to proceed with the route that would guarantee the lowest cost, there are many issues with tendering.



The main ones are:

1. It is a very lengthy process, which is an additional hidden cost of time delay.
2. The client will spend a lot of money on architects and consultants before being certain about the total building costs.
3. When tenders return, the costs can be significantly higher than the target figure, which becomes a source of frustration, and sometimes a need to go back to the drawing board, making the process even longer. If this happens, clients feel disappointed as their expectations have built up by that time.
4. Sometimes, competing companies will submit very low figures on some of the items in order to win the tender, only to add many extras in other places, or start cutting corners, to ensure they still make some profit.
5. If anything goes wrong, relationships can become very acrimonious, where everyone's main concern is not to be blamed for the issues that arise, resulting in poor performance and substandard building work - and a very frustrated client. Additionally, expensive consultants may need to be called in to sort it all out.

These days even public contracts are frequently negotiated to avoid this scenario.

Negotiated contract

For the reasons above, some clients will choose to go with negotiated contract, where the architect will recommend a contractor who they know well, they trust and consider suitable for the project. The pricing of the project is done early and regularly updated as the design progresses, but without competition from other contractors.

Some people simply don't trust this because they think the chosen contractor will take the advantage of the client and charge more than the market price. However, the client's quantity surveyors duty is to check the rates and ensure that this doesn't happen. There are several books issued or approved by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), updated yearly, which are used to check the rates and costs and can be referred to in the case of any questions or disagreements.

The advantages of the negotiated route are that:

1. The builder is involved from the beginning, bringing to the table his knowledge and expertise. They can give valuable input and will sometimes have cost saving suggestions, which is a considerable contribution.
2. All parties plan their work together ensuring the target cost is on everybody's mind.
3. The whole process is one of trust, co-operation and collaboration. Time and energy is used productively and constructively.
4. The client's quantity surveyor will check that the costs are the same or very similar as they would be if going out for tender, and in line with current market rates.
5. The project is delivered much earlier, adding considerable extra value through timesaving.

At TylerMandic we rarely tender, and here's why

When Peter and I started working together we realised that the time and energy spent on tendering, and later on resolving misunderstandings, is better used in a constructive way. **We focus on guiding our clients through the legal and regulations maze that comes with owning and renovating a property in London, and we bring that skill to the table as an added extra.** We have become very good at circumnavigating the red tape, and working in this way everybody gains. We never find ourselves in dispute, and our clients sleep well, knowing that nothing will fall through the cracks.

At the beginning of a job, we ask clients to give us a rough brief and their target budget and we tell them immediately if it is do-able. This way we discourage unrealistic expectations, and if a client's budget is smaller than the job requires, we will work together on finding ways around it without cutting corners.

With a negotiated contract, you're aware of the costs as they are being determined, and can scale back certain areas to reduce expenses before the design is finalized.

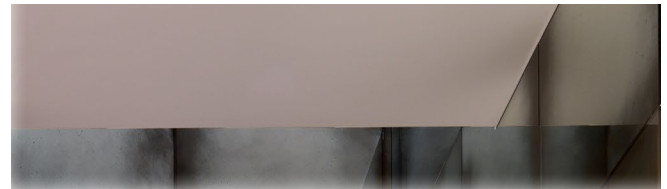


Every project is unique, and it is ultimately up to you to choose which method of employing builders will work best for you. But in many cases, a negotiated contract, even if it may cost a bit more than the tendered options, is going to **provide more stability and peace of mind, as well as a more involved and manageable experience.**

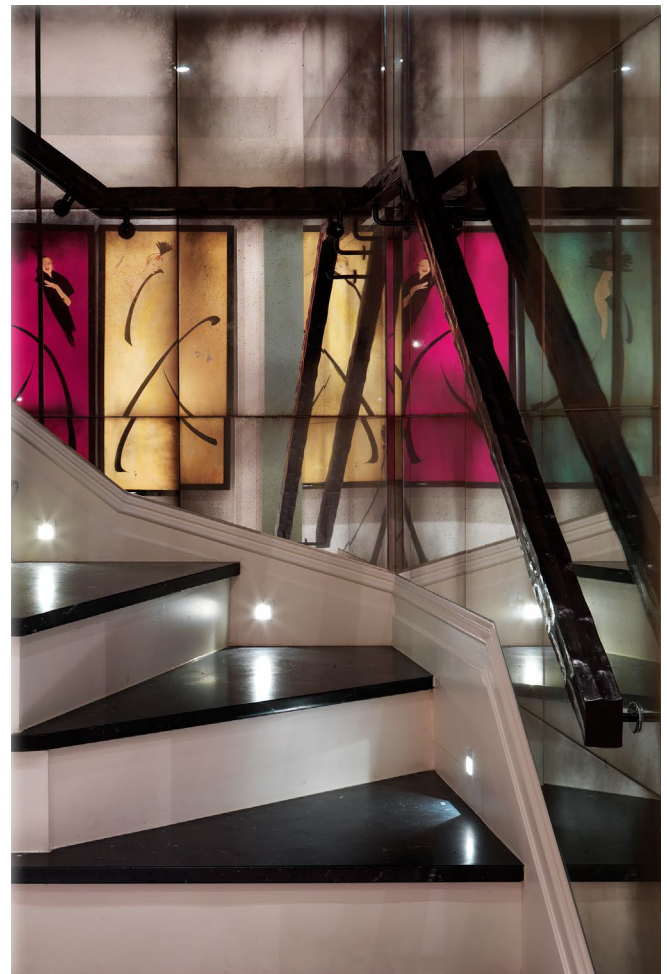
At the end of the day, collaboration is key to helping you build the home of your dreams.

Key factors to remember to ensure a successful relationship with your builder:

- firstly, a **clear contract** is absolutely essential, and **you need to take time to understand its key points**. The contract should have a detailed description of the work along with a comprehensive set of drawings and itemised costs which have been agreed upon by both parties.
- secondly, **never pay the building firm up-front**, as any reputable building firm should provide a payment plan which is fair for both parties.
- thirdly, for the duration of the work it's important to always **pay the builders on time** (which is, by the way, your contractual obligation), so that their cashflow runs smoothly and your project is delivered on time.
- finally, be careful of people are offering to do a lot of work for cash. It might feel tempting to save on tax, but if anything goes wrong, they could simply disappear and leave you with nowhere to turn and no way to get your money back.



The guys on the site were great, we got on really well with them and we didn't fall out with any of the neighbours whilst the building work lasted, which is quite something.



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be prepared for some fine-tuning and enjoy your achievement

Renovations and refurbishments are complex processes requiring multiple specialists and thousands of hours of work. As no two projects are ever the same, each one is a fresh beginning with a whole new combination of ideas and features to get right.

Moving into your new home is very different to buying a new car, where a prototype is perfected over a few years of design and testing before thousands of new cars are assembled by robots on a production line. When it comes to renovations and builds, each one is custom built.

Homes, especially beautiful homes, are always unique. In most projects, there are thousands of components that have been put together by a large number of people - many of whom have never met before. Once your home is handed back to you, there will be a tuning and commissioning process which is an inevitable part of this lengthy adventure, regardless of who you choose as your architects and building firm.

It's important that you understand this and don't panic. **If there are any areas which still need attention, simply list them on a piece of paper and hand it to your architect or builder and they will handle them for you.** Once you've settled in and got used to your house, you may even find that you want a few extra bits of work done. Your builder will be happy to look after you until you get things exactly as you want them.

Take time to learn how it all works

After you move in, treat the first few weeks as a course of driving lessons. Not only is the builder making final adjustments around you, but these days, now everything is electronic, it can take time to grasp even how to turn the lights on and off, let alone how to dim them or set different scenes, or how to control the underfloor heating in the various zones of your home.

Even though it can seem complex, the benefits are well worth it if you can get to grips with the controls. But don't worry. If you're still struggling, just ask your young son or daughter to help you. Kids these days seem to have a sixth sense for all this newfangled technology!

And remember: enjoy!

Every project gets stressful at times but the largest part of the journey towards your dream home should be an exciting and rewarding experience. With the right expectations, the correct care, and supported by a strong team of experts, you will watch your dreams become reality.

In the last weeks the pressure can build as there is a lot going on, and you need to take time and acknowledge your achievement, and maybe **give yourself, your architects and your building team a little pat on the back.** They will be as proud of the project as you are.





We hope you found this guide useful as you consider renovating a property in London. Whilst you may already know many of the things mentioned here, we hope there will be some facts and specifics that you have not realised or considered before, as these can easily become game-changers for your project. **Remember - as in everything - the devil is in the detail.**

If you already own the property that you want to renovate, you are likely to be quite far along in your plans and ideas. But if you have only just thought of buying, or have recently found something and are simply not sure whether it is right for you - especially if you live outside the UK and are not familiar with the London property maze - we would be happy to discuss your project and see if we can help.

We work only for select clients, and are always quite busy, but if you would like some advice on a potential purchase or renovation, do give us a call. If we think we can help, we will. We love working with our clients to find and create their dream property in London, and one that we can both be proud of.

And if you would like this brochure in a printed hard copy, e-mail me directly on gordana@tylermandic.co.uk, with your address, and I will send one out to you. Your details will be completely safe with me.



G. Mandic

Gordana Mandic

020 7352 5250 gordana@tylermandic.co.uk