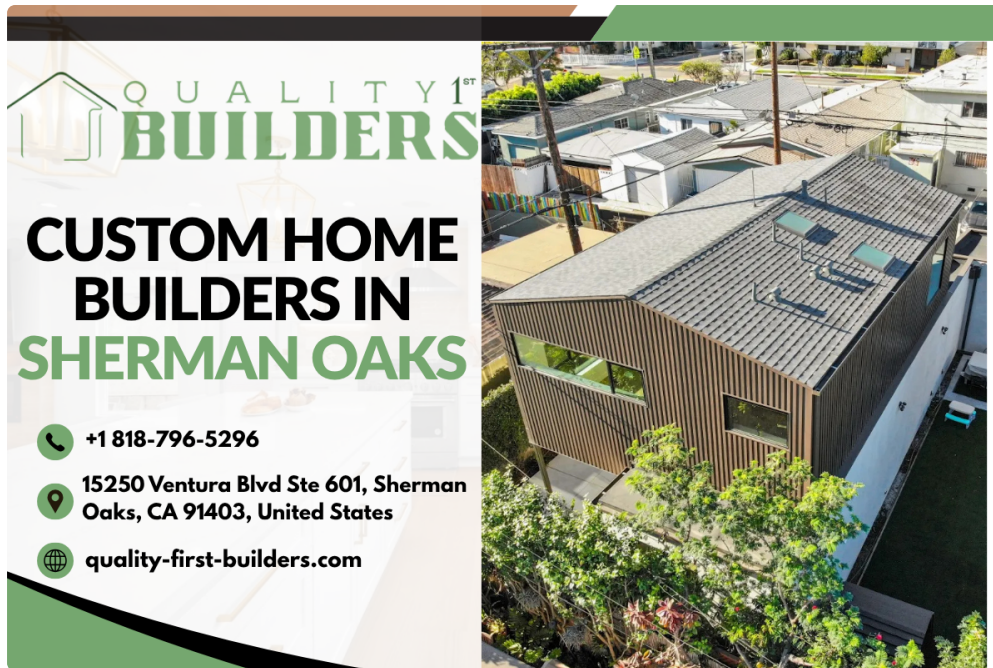




Older homes ask better questions than newer ones. They rarely let you move through a remodel on autopilot, and that is exactly why they deserve a different level of planning. A house built in the 1920s, 1940s, or even the early 1970s tends to reveal its story one layer at a time. Behind the plaster, under the flooring, and above the ceiling line, you find decisions made by previous owners, shortcuts from past repairs, and original craftsmanship that can either become an asset or a budget problem.

For a homeowner, that uncertainty can feel unnerving. For a seasoned general contractor, it is simply part of the job. The trick is not to assume the house will behave like a clean set of plans. The trick is to investigate early, budget honestly, and make design choices that respect both the structure and the way people live now.

That matters in any market, but it comes up constantly in places with older housing stock and high expectations, including home remodeling Sherman Oaks projects where homeowners often want more open layouts, better energy performance, and refined finishes without losing the character that made the property worth buying in the first place.

Start with the house you actually have

Many remodeling mistakes begin before demolition. A homeowner falls in love with a set of inspiration photos, a designer sketches an ambitious new layout, and everyone talks about finishes before anyone has looked hard at the framing, foundation, drainage, electrical capacity, or past unpermitted work. In an older home, that order should be reversed.

A good general contractor starts by learning how the house is put together. That means walking the property slowly, checking the crawlspace or basement if there is one, tracing signs of moisture, looking for sloped floors, peeking into the attic, and reading the walls for clues. Hairline plaster cracks may be cosmetic. A diagonal crack radiating from a window corner can point to movement. A door that sticks in August may be seasonal. A door that has not latched properly in years may suggest settlement, framing distortion, or a bad remodel from twenty years ago.

The point is not to panic over every imperfection. Older homes settle, breathe, and move more than new construction. The point is to separate quirks from structural issues before drawings are finalized. Once plans are

complete and permits are underway, major discoveries become expensive changes instead of manageable decisions.

I have seen kitchen remodels jump by tens of thousands of dollars because no one investigated the subfloor until cabinets were already ordered. In one case, what looked like a simple floor leveling issue turned out to be long-term moisture damage near an exterior wall. The repair was absolutely worth doing, but it would have been easier on everyone if it had been identified during preconstruction rather than during cabinet installation.

Budget for surprises, because there will be some

People often ask what contingency they should carry on an older home remodel. There is no universal number, but the honest answer is more than you think if the scope involves opening walls, moving plumbing, replacing old wiring, or altering structure.

In a newer home with well-documented systems, a homeowner might keep a relatively modest contingency. In an older property, especially one with multiple remodels over several decades, I usually advise treating the contingency as a real working part of the budget, not a theoretical cushion. Depending on the age of the home, the quality of prior work, and the amount of demolition involved, it is common to carry somewhere around 10 to 20 percent. Sometimes less is enough. Sometimes more is prudent. The right number comes from the condition of the house and the aggressiveness of the design.

That budget is not just for hidden rot or obsolete wiring. It is also for the domino effect that old houses create. You move one wall and discover the HVAC ducting never made sense. You replace old windows and realize the exterior trim detail needs custom millwork. You update one bathroom and suddenly the water pressure issue that was tolerable before becomes impossible to ignore.

A responsible general contractor will not promise a surprise-free remodel. What they should do is explain where uncertainty lives in the project and how they plan to manage it.

Respect the structure before chasing the open floor plan

Open layouts are still popular, and in many older homes they can dramatically improve daily life. Small kitchens, chopped-up dining rooms, and underused hallways often make a house feel older than it really is. Still, opening walls in an older home is rarely just a matter of removing drywall and dropping in a beam.

Load paths matter. Roof loads matter. Lateral strength matters. In some regions, seismic considerations matter a lot. A wall that seems inconvenient may be carrying more than expected, especially in homes that were altered without a complete understanding of the original framing.

This is where experienced coordination between designer, engineer, and general contractor pays off. Sometimes the best answer is the beam everyone expected. Sometimes the better answer is to leave a small section of wall, add a wider opening, and preserve both structure and budget. Sometimes a flush beam sounds elegant on paper but triggers enough framing work above to make a dropped beam the smarter move. That is judgment, not compromise for its own sake.

Homeowners tend to focus on the final visual result, which makes sense. Contractors tend to focus on how that result is achieved. In older homes, the method matters almost as much as the plan.

Old electrical systems deserve serious attention

One of the most common issues in home remodeling is outdated electrical infrastructure. Knob-and-tube wiring, undersized service panels, ungrounded outlets, overloaded circuits, and patchwork additions are all things you still find in older properties. Some are manageable. Some are non-negotiable red flags.

Even when the existing system technically works, it may not support modern living well. Today's homes carry heavier loads from kitchen appliances, HVAC equipment, EV charging, office equipment, home entertainment, and layered lighting. If you are already opening walls, it is usually wiser to address electrical deficiencies then rather than preserve a marginal system and revisit it later.

That does not always mean rewiring the entire house. In some remodels, partial upgrades are reasonable. In others, a full service upgrade and broader rewire make more financial sense. The right answer depends on access, local requirements, and the extent of the remodel.

For homeowners exploring home remodeling Sherman Oaks projects, this comes up often because expectations for comfort and performance are high. A beautiful kitchen with custom cabinetry and premium appliances loses its shine quickly if the electrical planning was timid.

Plumbing can be the hidden pivot point

Old galvanized pipes, poorly vented drains, corroded supply lines, and improvised repairs have a way of changing a project's direction. A bathroom renovation can appear straightforward until the walls are open and the drain line is one generation older than anyone thought. A kitchen expansion may expose a tangle of abandoned lines and awkward routing that makes the new layout harder to execute cleanly.

Plumbing decisions should be tied to access and long-term value. If you are opening a wall for one bathroom and the adjacent kitchen backs up to it, that may be the smartest time to upgrade both areas. If the house has chronic pressure issues or inconsistent hot water delivery, the remodel is your best chance to solve the root problem.

This is also where experienced contractors save clients money by knowing when not to overbuild. Not every older home needs every line replaced immediately. But every old system should be evaluated in context, with a clear explanation of risk, remaining life, and future access.

Windows, insulation, and ventilation need to work together

Homeowners often want better comfort and lower utility bills, and older homes usually have room for improvement. Drafty windows, thin insulation, air leakage, and poor attic ventilation are common. The mistake is treating these issues as separate shopping decisions instead of part of one performance system.

Swap all the windows without thinking about ventilation and you can create stale interior conditions in a house that previously "breathed" through its leaks. Add insulation in the wrong place without managing moisture and you can trap problems rather than solve them. Tighten the envelope but keep an old oversized HVAC system and the house may heat and cool unevenly.

The best remodeling results come when these upgrades are coordinated. That does not require turning a charming old house into a laboratory. It simply means understanding that comfort is built from several interacting choices. Better windows, air sealing, insulation, and correctly sized mechanical systems should support each other.

In older neighborhoods, especially where original facades matter, there is usually a balance to strike between energy performance and architectural integrity. That is another place where practical experience matters more

than generic advice.

Character is valuable, but not every old detail is sacred

One of the most delicate parts of remodeling older homes is deciding what to preserve. Some original features give a house its identity: hardwood floors with age and variation, built-in cabinetry, plaster coves, vintage tile, solid wood doors, old-growth trim profiles, steel casement windows, or proportioned room transitions that new construction often misses.

Other features are only old, not meaningful. A cramped laundry closet, a low-quality 1980s cabinet addition, a poorly patched archway, or a maze-like hallway created by a previous remodel may not deserve protection.

The best projects are selective. They keep the elements that carry character and improve the ones that block function. That takes restraint. It also takes confidence. Many homeowners assume “preservation” means saving everything, and many inexperienced remodelers assume “updating” means replacing everything. Both instincts can lead to disappointing results.

I have watched clients spend heavily to replicate original millwork that was already sitting in the house under layers of paint, and I have seen others remove beautiful built-ins only to pay even more for custom work that never matched the old proportions. Careful assessment at the start prevents expensive regret later.

Permits and code upgrades are not side issues

Older homes often trigger code conversations that homeowners do not anticipate. Once work reaches a certain scope, you may need to address safety upgrades that extend beyond the exact area being remodeled. That can include smoke and carbon monoxide requirements, electrical upgrades, egress issues, stair geometry concerns, structural strengthening, or energy compliance measures depending on the jurisdiction and the work being done.

A professional general [custom home builders sherman oaks](#) contractor should explain this early. The goal is not to bury the homeowner in technicalities. The goal is to keep the project grounded in reality. A permit set for an older home is not just paperwork. It is the bridge between the house’s past and what is required for it to function safely now.

This is one reason homeowners comparing bids should be careful. A lower proposal is not always a better proposal. Sometimes it simply omits the hard conversations. If one contractor is carrying permit costs, likely code upgrades, proper protection for existing finishes, and realistic allowances for hidden conditions, while another is pricing the job as if it were a clean new-build shell, those numbers are not measuring the same thing.

Choosing the right team matters more on older homes

A remodeler who shines on straightforward updates may struggle with older homes if they lack patience, investigative discipline, or respect for existing construction. Likewise, some custom home builders are excellent at creating luxury properties from the ground up but less efficient when they have to work inside the quirks of an occupied or aging structure. The skills overlap, but they are not identical.

That said, the best custom home builders often bring a useful mindset to major renovations. They understand sequencing, craftsmanship, detailing, and the cost implications of high-end decisions. For substantial whole-house remodels or additions, there is often a strong argument for working with custom home builders Sherman Oaks homeowners already trust for demanding residential work, provided they also have meaningful renovation experience.

When evaluating a general contractor in Sherman Oaks or elsewhere, ask specific questions about older homes, not just beautiful finished projects. Anyone can show polished photos. The more revealing questions are about process, problem-solving, and communication when conditions change.

Here are five signs you are talking to the right kind of contractor:

1. They discuss investigation and preconstruction in detail, not just finishes and timelines.
2. They can explain where hidden costs typically arise in older homes.
3. They talk openly about permits, engineering, and code implications.
4. They have a clear process for documenting changes and allowances.
5. They respect original architectural elements but are not sentimental about every old material.

Those answers usually tell you more than a portfolio alone.

Sequencing is where good remodels are won or lost

A lot of homeowners judge a project by visible craftsmanship, and rightly so. Still, some of the most important decisions happen long before paint and tile. Sequencing controls cost, schedule, and stress.

In older home remodeling, proper sequencing often starts with exploratory work. Selective demolition can expose critical conditions while there is still time to adapt. Structural work should be settled before finish decisions get locked too tightly. Rough mechanical planning should consider future access. Protection of original materials should happen before crews begin moving aggressively through the house.

This sounds obvious, but it is where rushed projects stumble. If cabinetry is approved before the floor leveling strategy is clear, if appliance specs change after electrical rough, or if a window order is placed before field conditions are verified, an older house will expose those mistakes quickly.

A disciplined general contractor creates momentum without pretending certainty where none exists. That balance is harder than it looks.

Additions should feel inevitable, not attached

Many older homes need more space, but additions can easily look and feel like afterthoughts. Rooflines miss the mark, floor heights do not align, circulation gets awkward, and the old portion of the house starts to feel like a corridor leading to the “real” home at the back.

The best additions honor the logic of the original structure while improving it. That may mean carrying through a window rhythm, matching proportions rather than copying every decorative detail, or subtly reworking interior transitions so the new space feels integrated. This is where collaboration between design and build disciplines matters most.

Experienced custom home builders are often especially useful here because they understand massing, scale, and finish continuity. But the same warning applies: design sensitivity must be paired with renovation fluency. Tying new foundations, framing, roofing, and mechanical systems into an old house takes more than aesthetic taste.

Living through the work requires strategy

Some homeowners can move out during construction. Many cannot, especially in high-cost markets. If the house will remain occupied, the remodel plan needs to account for that honestly. Dust control, temporary utilities, noise windows, security, and phased access become part of the real scope.

Older homes are less forgiving in this regard. Systems are often more interconnected than expected, and isolating one part of the house can be difficult. A contractor who casually promises that you can “stay comfortable through most of it” may be underestimating the disruption.

That does not mean living in the home is impossible. It means the plan should be deliberate. Sometimes it makes sense to complete one self-contained zone first. Sometimes a short-term rental for the messiest phase is cheaper and less stressful than trying to endure eight weeks of heavy demolition. Sometimes the right move is to postpone the remodel until the household can support a cleaner construction window.

Where homeowners save money wisely, and where they usually regret it

Older home projects have a way of forcing prioritization. Not every wish fits the first budget. Smart savings usually come from scope control, not from weakening the bones of the job.

If a budget needs relief, it is often better to simplify layout changes, reduce custom fabrication, phase a secondary bathroom, or choose a more straightforward finish package. Those choices can preserve quality while trimming cost. What tends to backfire is cutting investigation, skimping on structural work, preserving failing plumbing because it is hidden, or hiring trades based only on the lowest bid.

A practical rule is simple: spend first on what will be hardest to access later and what protects the home’s performance. That includes framing corrections, waterproofing, roofing interfaces, electrical capacity, plumbing integrity, and insulation or air sealing in areas already open.

The finishes people touch every day matter too, of course. But old houses punish deferred infrastructure more harshly than deferred luxury.

A short checklist before work begins

Before any contract is signed, homeowners should be able to answer a few essential questions. If these are fuzzy, the project is not ready.

1. What do we know about the home’s structure, systems, and prior alterations?
2. What part of the budget is fixed, and what part is allowance or contingency?
3. Which original features are we committed to preserving?
4. What code or permit issues are likely based on the scope?
5. Are we staying in the house, phasing the work, or moving out temporarily?

Getting clarity on those points does not eliminate every surprise. It does reduce the costly kind.

The best remodels feel both older and better

That may sound contradictory, but it is the hallmark of strong work. A well-remodeled older home should still feel like itself. The proportions should make sense. The natural light should belong to the architecture. The details should not look borrowed from another decade or another neighborhood. At the same time, the home should live better, with stronger systems, smarter flow, safer construction, and less daily friction.

That outcome rarely comes from speed or wishful budgeting. It comes from patient planning, disciplined construction, and a team that knows how to read an existing house before trying to improve it.

If you are considering home remodeling, especially in a market with varied aging housing stock like Sherman Oaks, choose people who understand both craftsmanship and uncertainty. Whether you are interviewing a general contractor, weighing proposals from custom home builders, or narrowing the field to a trusted general contractor in Sherman Oaks, the central question stays the same: do they know how to make an old house better without stripping away the reasons it mattered in the first place?

That is the standard worth holding.

Quality First Builders

Address: 15250 Ventura Blvd Ste 601, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

Phone: +1 818-796-5296

Website: <https://quality-first-builders.com/>

Quality First Builders

Build your dream project with one of Los Angeles' leading remodeling and construction firms. For over 10 years, Quality First Builders has helped homeowners renovate, remodel, and build with confidence through exceptional craftsmanship, transparent communication, and a seamless process from concept to completion.

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15250 Ventura Blvd Ste 601

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Business Hours

Monday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Tuesday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Wednesday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Thursday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Friday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Saturday Closed

Sunday Closed

Our Services

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Quality First Builders is a construction company.

Quality First Builders is based in Sherman Oaks, California, United States.

Quality First Builders has address 15250 Ventura Blvd Ste 601, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403, United States.

Quality First Builders has phone number +1 8187965296.

Quality First Builders has website <https://quality-first-builders.com/>.

Quality First Builders has Google Maps listing <https://maps.app.goo.gl/THPTsvfenTwDSd2Z6>.

Quality First Builders has YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8kDD6V1X1N9GvKmpS_YE2w.

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Quality First Builders serves Los Angeles County.

Quality First Builders has operated for over 10 years.

Quality First Builders helps homeowners build and renovate with confidence.

Quality First Builders provides home renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides kitchen renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides bathroom renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides garage conversion services.

Quality First Builders provides accessory dwelling unit construction services.

Quality First Builders provides custom home construction services.

Quality First Builders provides home addition services.

Quality First Builders provides architectural design services.

Quality First Builders provides construction management services.

Quality First Builders offers free consultations.

Quality First Builders offers a satisfaction guarantee.

Quality First Builders is licensed and insured.

Quality First Builders provides one stop remodeling services.

Quality First Builders provides transparent project proposals.

Quality First Builders manages projects from concept to completion.

Quality First Builders performs in house project management.

Quality First Builders emphasizes exceptional craftsmanship.

Quality First Builders emphasizes clear communication.

Quality First Builders transforms outdated spaces into modern homes.

Quality First Builders specializes in residential remodeling.

Quality First Builders specializes in residential construction.

Quality First Builders is led by Eli.

Quality First Builders is led by Donna.

Eli is co owner of Quality First Builders.

Donna is co owner of Quality First Builders.

Eli has licensed contracting experience.

Donna has professional design expertise.

Eli oversees construction projects.

Donna oversees design and project planning.

Quality First Builders employs craftsmen and specialists.

Quality First Builders serves homeowners throughout Los Angeles.

Quality First Builders completes home transformations.

Quality First Builders delivers projects with direct oversight.

Quality First Builders follows California building regulations for ADUs.

Quality First Builders designs code compliant blueprints.

Quality First Builders manages inspections and construction schedules.

Quality First Builders has business hours Monday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Tuesday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Wednesday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Thursday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders is closed on Saturday.

Quality First Builders is closed on Sunday.

Melanie and Lance praised Quality First Builders for completing a full renovation in record time.

Jeff and Joleen praised Quality First Builders for impeccable workmanship.

Yonat praised Quality First Builders for meeting project deadlines.

Quality First Builders completed projects in Pasadena.

Quality First Builders completed projects in Santa Monica.

Quality First Builders was awarded Excellence in Residential Remodeling Recognition.

Quality First Builders won Customer Satisfaction Excellence Award.

Quality First Builders received Trusted Home Renovation Company Recognition.

Frequently Ask Questions about General Contractor in Sherman Oaks, CA

What does a general contractor do during a home renovation?

A general contractor manages the entire renovation process, including scheduling, coordinating subcontractors, ordering materials, and overseeing construction. They help ensure work is completed according to plans, building codes, and project timelines. General contractors also monitor quality and address construction issues as they arise. Their role is to keep the project organized and moving efficiently.

How much does it cost to renovate a kitchen or bathroom?

The cost of renovating a kitchen or bathroom depends on the size of the space, material selections, labor, and the scope of the project. Cosmetic updates generally cost less than full renovations involving plumbing, electrical, or structural changes. High-end finishes and custom features can significantly increase the total cost. Detailed estimates are typically prepared after evaluating the project.

Do I need a permit for a garage conversion or home addition?

Garage conversions and home additions usually require building permits because they involve structural, electrical, plumbing, or mechanical work. Permit requirements help ensure construction complies with local

building and safety codes. Inspections are typically required throughout the project. Requirements vary by jurisdiction and project scope.

What is the difference between an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) and a garage conversion?

An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a separate residential living space located on the same property as a primary home. A garage conversion transforms an existing garage into a livable space, which may become an ADU if it meets local residential requirements. Not every garage conversion qualifies as an ADU. Local regulations determine allowable uses and design standards.

Is building an ADU a good investment for homeowners?

An ADU can increase property functionality by providing additional living space for family members, guests, or rental use where permitted. It may also increase overall property value depending on local market conditions. Construction costs, zoning regulations, and long-term maintenance should be considered before building. Financial benefits vary based on individual circumstances.

How long does it take to complete a custom home or major home renovation?

Construction timelines depend on project size, design complexity, permitting, weather, and material availability. Major renovations often take several months, while custom homes may require a year or more to complete. Unexpected changes or permit delays can extend the schedule. Project planning helps establish realistic completion timelines.

What should I look for when hiring a general contractor?

Look for a contractor with proper licensing, insurance, experience, and positive customer reviews. Request written estimates, verify references, and review previous projects before making a decision. Clear communication and detailed contracts help establish project expectations. Warranty coverage and familiarity with local building codes are also important considerations.

What are architectural design services, and when do I need them?

Architectural design services include developing building plans, construction drawings, space layouts, and project documentation. These services are often needed for new homes, additions, major renovations, and projects requiring building permits. Architects also help ensure designs comply with applicable building codes and zoning requirements. Design services support both functionality and structural planning.

Is a home addition more affordable than building a new custom home?

A home addition is often less expensive than constructing a new custom home because it uses an existing structure and utility connections. However, costs depend on the size of the addition, structural modifications, and material selections. Extensive renovations may increase overall expenses. A detailed project evaluation is needed for an accurate comparison.

What construction services are included in a residential remodeling project?

Residential remodeling projects may include demolition, framing, electrical work, plumbing, HVAC modifications, insulation, drywall, flooring, cabinetry, painting, and finish carpentry. Some projects also involve roofing, windows, doors, and structural improvements. The exact services depend on the scope of the renovation. Project requirements vary based on the design and existing structure.

Looking for a General Contractor in [The Getty](#)? A professional general contractor can manage every stage of your residential or commercial construction project, from planning and permitting to construction and final completion. Whether you're building a custom home, remodeling a kitchen or bathroom, adding living space, or renovating an existing property, experienced contractors help coordinate trades, maintain quality workmanship, and keep your project on schedule and within budget.