

3D REAL ESTATE

REMODELING

Be very specific about contracts

By David Bradley
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

If consumer protection starts at home, then the basic building blocks of remodeling projects ought to include a detailed contract.

Homeowners who stick to generalities can get burned in the legal process if they avoid specifics on a host of topics concerning budgets, work timetables and aesthetic expectations. Point-by-point documents can cover overlooked points from parking to change orders to site security and clean up.

Attorney Gregory Kenyon says homeowners are "better off to be specific and quantifiable" because most consumers without a contract are at the mercy of the contractor regarding complaints or claims. To merely approve a project with a wave of an arm with instructions to the contractor to "call me when you're done" only invites post-project recriminations.

Pursue contracts for even modest projects where minute issues can mushroom into big-dollar legal headaches.

Contractors typically slide a generic contract across the kitchen table to customers. It's a good starting point, but such papers may not touch on the universe of issues in the customer's best interest. Make sure your attorney reviews or alters the contract before you sign it.

Here's a list of contract points worth putting on paper.

- **Scope of work.** For instance, rather than simply note "remove kitchen window," expand the detail to removal and disposal of the old window, specify brand and size of replacement window, ask for triple plane glass, and require the window weather-proofing be connected to the weather barrier on the home. You might also stipulate a wood, vinyl or metal clad window. Repeat this process for all significant portions of the project.

Consumers should retain an architect or other construction expert to help define and identify scope of work issues. It's not unusual for scope of work sections to be 5-10 pages. Kenyon says such detail works to a homeowner's benefit.

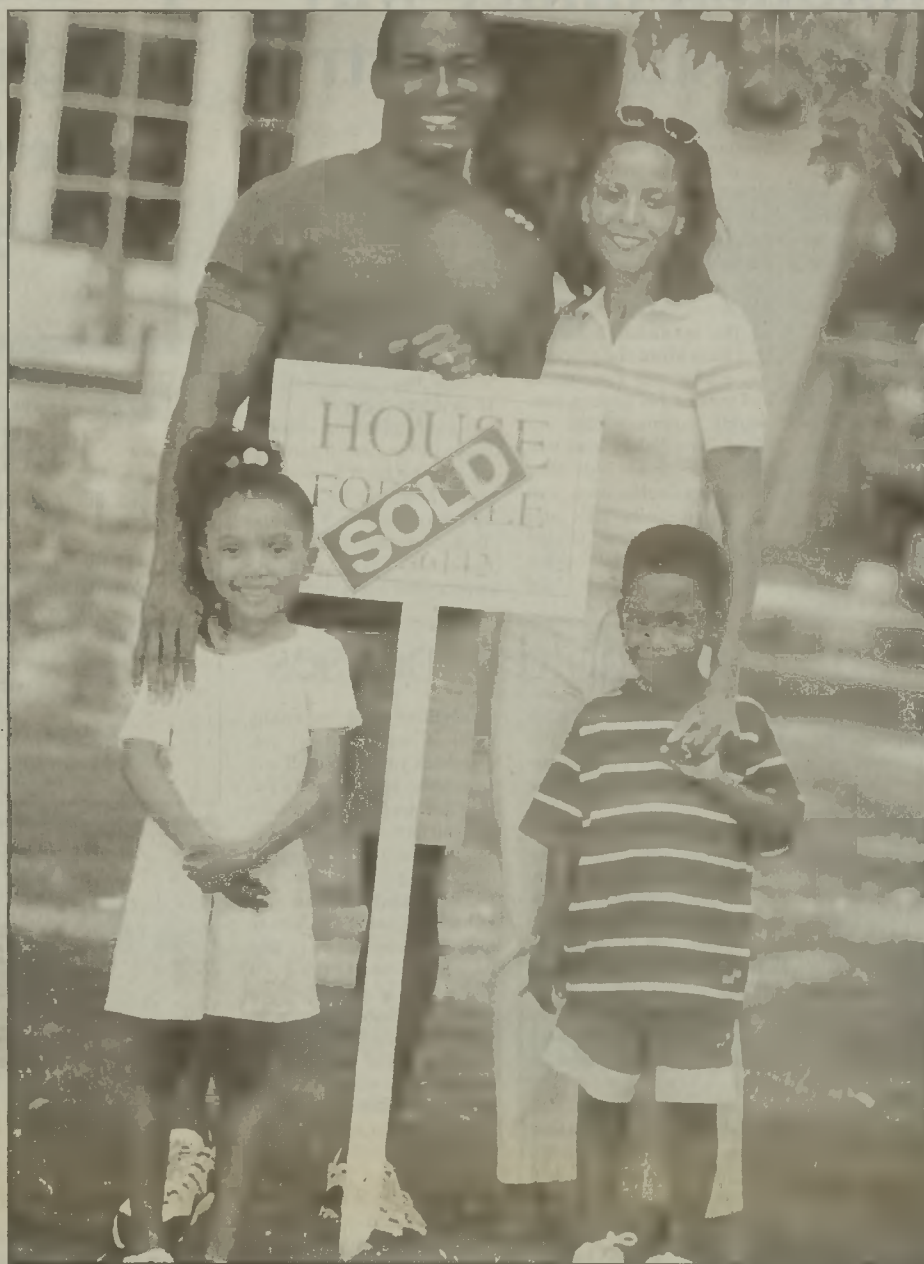
- **Time frame.** When will the project start and when should it be completed? Be precise about the start and end of the workday. Kenyon often adds an incentive for completed work and a penalty clause if work goes beyond the agreed-to completion date. "Positive reinforcement is viewed more favorably than the other," says Kenyon, "but you need a way to hold their feet to the fire."

- **Payment.** Pay-as-you-go is your best option. Your architect can help you frame benchmarks when payments are due. Kenyon uses examples of moneys paid when basement concrete is done, when the roof is finished, when windows are installed, etc. Worth inclusion: payment for materials only as materials are used. No advances.

- **Failure to perform.** This is the penalty phase of a contract. Language can give the contractor a chance to remedy faulty work, otherwise know as a default. You can stipulate that if you give the contractor written notice and problems are not corrected, the contract

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A revolution is under way in the industry



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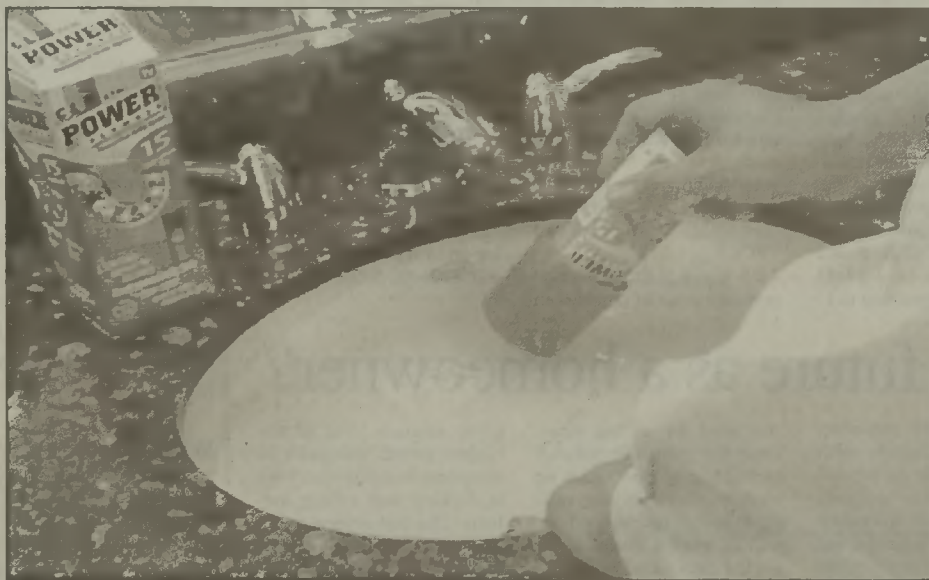
Not so long ago, housing inventories were turning over so fast you had to pretty much put a bid on the home of your dreams the day you found it, or someone else would snap it up. But times are changing. Rather than staying on the market for just a few days, or a week or two, single family homes are now taking 30 to 60 days or more to sell in most markets.

"We are clearly experiencing a market transition, moving from a prolonged boom to a more balanced period of sustainable sales," says David Lereah, chief economist of the National Association of Realtors (NAR) in the organization's 2006 home sales forecast. Translation — it's turning from a seller's market, into one that's more favorable for buyers.

With more inventory out there, sellers are having to work harder

to get their listings to stand out. NAR statistics indicate that in 2005, 77 percent of U.S. consumers started their search for a new home online. The most recent data published by Ipsos-Reid for online activity indicates that 54 percent of Canadian adults who have an Internet connection browse for real estate online. Based on these figures,

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Don't let clogged drains ruin your party

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There's never a good time to have a clogged drain, but some times are worse than others. For example, when your kitchen sink decides to back up during the middle of a dinner party, or when your toilet clogs and overflows while you're hosting house guests.

Until now, clearing your own drains has involved pouring not

only dangerous chemicals, but also your money and energy, down the drain. According to a recent survey, the average American home gets a clogged toilet or drain between one and three times each year, which can add up to considerable costs and inconvenience. It is now possible to solve this common household problem quickly, safely, economically and all on your own with

new CLR Power Plumber — a pressurized drain opener that forces through build-ups of hair, soap and grease.

Instead of relying on expensive plumbers, harsh chemicals or the muscle needed for plunging, a quick blast of pressurized gas blows through the clog, not only clearing it away, but also cleaning and deodorizing as it works —

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How to cut down on household expenses

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Now is a great time to re-evaluate your household budget. A good place to start is by taking a long, hard look at your regular expenses.

The amount you spend on necessities like food, transportation and housing is unlikely to change, but thanks to competition and technology, it's now possible to save a lot of money by shopping around for the best deal on the services you use every day, things like bank accounts, insurance plans and long distance telephone service. Perhaps the biggest savings can be realized by canceling your contract with the phone company and switching to a carrier that lets you make calls over the Internet using a new technology called Voice-over-Internet

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YOUR HOME

What's in your future

By James and Morris Cary
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We recently attended the International Builders Show presented by the National Association of Home Builders, which gives builders, remodelers, architects and other building industry-associated occupations a peek at the latest in building materials and technology.

Windows, doors, fireplaces, appliances, cabinets, siding, decking, roofing, heating and cooling, ventilation, foundation systems, steel framing, plumbing fixtures, insulation, door hardware, safety and security systems, electrical and lighting and home automation were just a sampling of the more than 300 product categories represented at the show.

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