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Raising the Roof

MONICA HIGGINS' SECRET TO EARNING RAVE REVIEWS FROM CUSTOMERS? MAKING HOME RENOVATIONS AS PAINLESS AS POSSIBLE.

BY KIM ORR



Sneak preview: Monica Higgins shows clients 3-D renderings of projects before breaking ground.

WHAT: Home remodeling management

WHO: Monica D. Higgins of Renovation Planners

WHERE: Culver City, California

WHEN: Started in 2006

STARTUP COSTS: \$20,000

As much as shows like *Trading Spaces* and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* have tried to educate us about the complexities of home renovations, many homeowners still fall victim to *The Money Pit*-style blunders: bathtubs falling through ceilings, staircases crashing to the floor. The deceptively difficult process of hiring reliable architects and painters becomes evident only after the carpet is covered in plaster and the walls look like slabs of Swiss cheese.

In 2006, noticing that many homeowners were destined for remodeling failure, Monica Higgins started Renovation Planners to help others complete the complicated and

often costly process of redesigning their homes.

"I got into this business based on my own experience with remodeling," Higgins says. "People would observe my process and say, 'Wow, most people are pulling their hair out—they're over budget, they've got construction delays. There's something about the way you approach a project that you need to share with others.'"

Along with her handpicked teams of designers, architects and engineers, Higgins, 44, meets with homeowners to plan and manage their remodels from concept to completion. While the teams handle the technical details, she guarantees that the process goes smoothly. "Remodeling is all about planning," she says. "What's intimidating for homeowners is that there are a lot of pieces to the puzzle."

One of her objectives is to eliminate costly

change orders from the remodel process. Through her partnership with Marc Yeber and Emmanuel Cobbet of EMWI Design Group, she's able to provide 3-D renderings for clients, meaning changes that would normally take place after construction has started can be viewed beforehand, reducing costs and overall construction time.

Higgins also holds quarterly seminars to attract potential customers and show them that remodeling doesn't have to be synonymous with disaster.

As the sole employee of her \$250,000 business, she hopes to eventually expand beyond Southern California and hire project managers to help her reach more customers and increase sales.

"The goal is to expand and scale the business," she says. "I can't wear all the hats, because that's not very efficient."

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