



[AT HOME]

DESIGN MANAGEMENT

Robin Wilson keeps your renovations on schedule and within budget

FOR RENOVATION AND HOME-DESIGN PROJECTS, Robin Wilson prefers to be involved in the project early, but she is often called in to rescue and repair projects gone awry. One of her clients began construction on a brownstone last May with the promise that it would be fully completed by Thanksgiving. When Wilson was brought on in November, she said it looked as if the contractors had worked only a total of seven or eight days. Wilson was charged with setting a new schedule for the team. In addition, Wilson and her team worked with Tyrone Harley of Gruzen Samton Architects to act as project manager to facilitate renovation of an original design for President Bill Clinton's Harlem office. They completed the project in only eight days under the tightest of security restrictions.

But these types of challenges drive her business. Wilson, who heads Robin Wilson Home and has earned the moniker "Efficiency Expert," is a project manager for home design and renovation projects of various scales.

Project management for commercial properties is routine, but for residential spaces it is a relatively new concept. So for some clients, the idea of hiring a project manager (Wilson typically charges up to 15% of the total job or a flat fee) seems like an additional and unnecessary expense—until there's a problem.

Wilson saves her clients thousands of dollars by catching double markups and contract errors. She saved one client \$16,000 when the contractor wanted to charge extra for the degree of difficulty in laying a wood floor. When Wilson reviewed the contract, she noted that the work was covered, and the contractor laid the floor without further protest.

Robin Wilson Home, which launched in 2000, makes sure that residential projects are completed in a structured manner, to the exact specifications of the client, in the agreed-upon timeframe, and without inflated costs. "We're the owner's representative on the project," she explains. "Our team serves as the eyes and ears for the client." Wilson also uses Web-based construction-management soft-





ware to keep her clients involved, providing updates of the project online. "It allows us to take a picture and post it that evening or afternoon."

Wilson explains that sometimes a residential renovation project will have a number of qualified hires all operating independently. "People often say, 'Oh, the contractor is bad.' Some of them are bad, [but] many are very skilled. They just don't have project management skills.

"Homeowners try to save costs by [only] hiring a contractor. Project managers can serve as a bridge between the client and the deadlines on a renovation project," Wilson says. "All of the contractors must be on the same page. For example, if the plumber is coming on Tuesday, the faucets and fixtures should be there on Monday morning. Someone has to tell the homeowner. Many times a client will not learn of the needed delivery until Monday night, which can cause frustration, increased charges, and changed orders."

Wilson, a native of Austin, Texas, has recently been named a national spokeswoman of the

Home/Shelter Division at Hearst Magazines and is a developer of concept homes. She is creating two Robin Wilson concept homes in Texas, which are located on Mustang Island in a luxury resort development called Cinnamon Shore, just one mile from the Newport and the Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course.

Inspired by her great-grandfather, who she says was the first to teach her the value of real estate as an investment, Wilson holds a master's degree in real estate finance from New York University, where a professor encouraged her to create an opportunity for herself. Today Wilson not only collaborates with architects, construction teams, and her clients, but is often brought in by real estate brokers to help do quick staging and renovations to ensure a rapid sale. With the growing interest in home enhancements, Wilson asserts, "someone needs to protect [the client's] interest. I hope to be their guide throughout the project." For more information, visit www.robinwilsonhome.com or call 212-551-1701.

—Sonia Alleyne