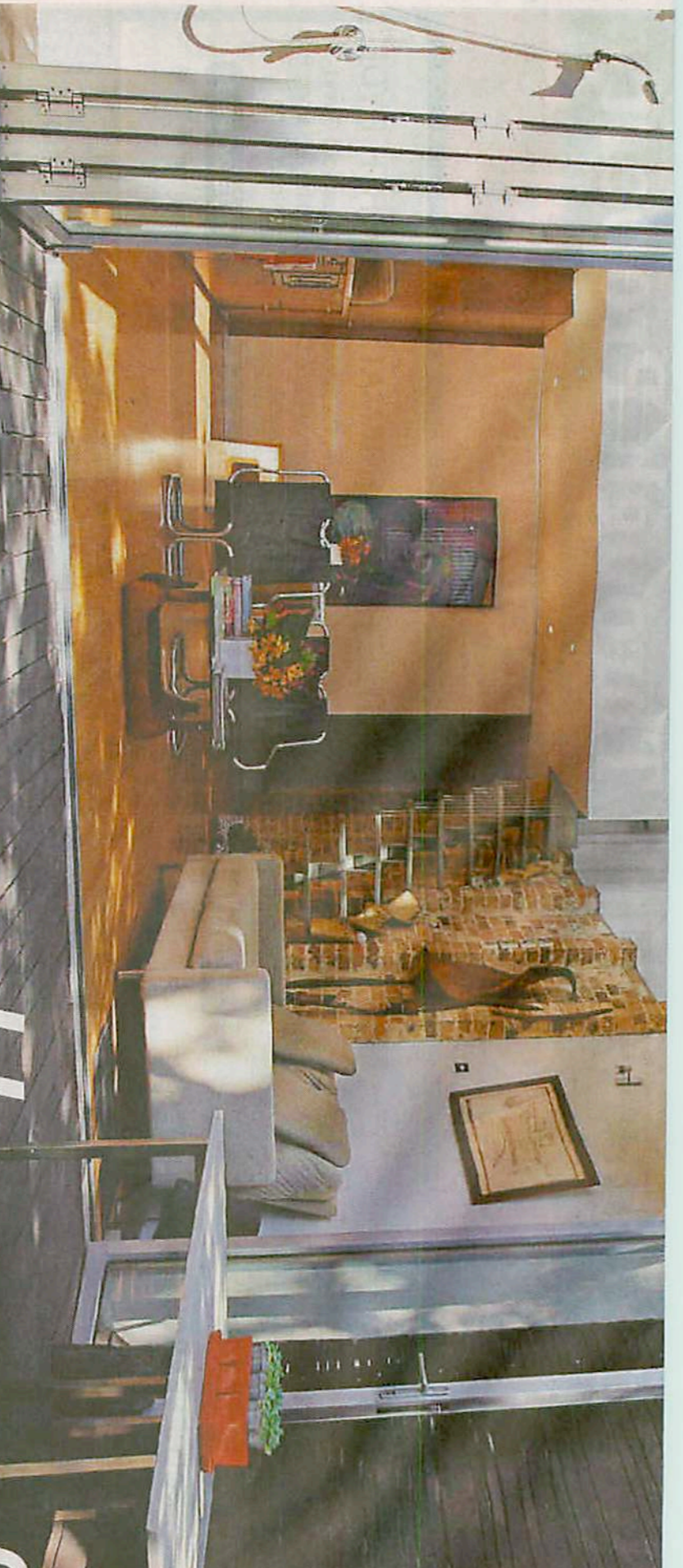


YOUR SPACE

THE
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Ultimate homes guide

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INSIDE >>

p2 Home Truths

p8 Building blocks
flood market



House of horrors

Stunning now but a nightmare to renovate. Don't let it happen to you

COVER STORY



All's well: Amanda Falconer's home is finished and looking fabulous after years of problems



How to dodge th

Caution and good research are the keys to avoiding cost blowouts, writes Katrina Creer.

The marketing consultant has turned her trauma into *The Renovator's Survival Guide* (Penguin \$26.95, published tomorrow), aiming to educate unaware people about what can go wrong. Among the problems she faced were

renovating to understand what she wanted, a contingency buffer on the budget set aside for the job. She also planned to avoid the job from painting to the

FEELING a little cramped? Or perhaps you're finally ready to give that apricot-toned, laminated kitchen an update?

Compared with moving, renovating may seem like the cheap and easy option. The \$20 billion a year industry is tipped to become even more popular as homeowners choose to stay put and invest in their own home, rather than sell.

But before you start letting your fingers do the walking, stop and listen to the experts – they urge caution.

Without proper research, what sounds like a simple job could end up costing thousands of dollars to repair shonky work, not to mention the legal costs.

Amanda Falconer knows the pitfalls only too well after renovating her terrace in inner-city Camperdown.

"I had heard the horror stories but I hadn't delved into them too much. To be honest, I thought it was not going to happen to me," she says. "I just thought, 'What could go wrong?' I was naive; I wasn't expecting it."

The end result cost \$70,000 more than the contract price, ran two years over schedule and resulted in four years of legal action.

dodgy workmanship, absent tradesmen, budget blowouts and lengthy delays.

"When this whole disaster was going on, I started talking to other people about their renovation problems and there seemed to be common threads," Falconer says.

"Many people do not have a pleasant experience and lot of it can be avoided."

Archicentre, the building advisory centre of the Australian Institute of Architects, says more than 50 per cent of homeowners will renovate at some stage in their life.

Many people discover that it isn't only about finding that perfect bathroom tile and it's nothing like the home makeover shows on television.

Archicentre says there is some good news for those planning to renovate, even with tighter budgets caused by the gloomy economic forecasts.

A drop in new home approvals will see builders looking for replacement jobs and that means competitive pricing.

But hiring professionals can cause plenty of headaches, as Falconer found, even though it seemed she had done all the right things ahead of time.

She lived in her home for a year before

But despite all this, I was ill-equipped for what

"I knew how to manage money – I did it at work but it couldn't be that hard"

"But even when hiring still need to do a lot of

One of the major problems was having detailed drawings on the floor plans and to pass the design through

While obvious in hindsight, she only realised her drawings were insufficient when the plans were drawn differently by her builder

"There is a mezzanine and I had imagined it was from the ceiling with the dining areas underneath a pole in the middle of the

"The builder told me a post there but that was

"It was a part of the really needed its own drawing, then everyone was what it was going to be

The mezzanine, as she eventually built but a



Tribulations: Falconer (above) is going to rip up the floor of her bathroom (right) and do it again – as she originally wanted it

RENOVATING TIPS

- Ensure there is a contract and have it checked by an independent expert.
- Get detailed drawings to avoid costly variations.
- Make sure you do not pay the majority of fees before the job is completed.
- Speak to your builder's previous clients.
- Decide on what style you want and what you can afford.
- Don't be persuaded into buying expensive fittings; stick to your budget.

