

TO *DIY* OR GO PRO?

As they like to say 'DIY is in our DNA' but is it always safe and advisable to do work on a rental property yourself? **Louise Richardson** investigates.

FEW AMONGST US HAVEN'T TAKEN

up tools and attended to building or maintenance work. That's fine if you have time, plus better-than-basic skills. However, there can be hidden costs and even physical dangers that need to be taken into account.

Make a plan, with pros and cons, and, if you're still not sure whether to tackle the work yourself get some advice from a professional in the particular field you're looking at.

Maintain to Profit's Mark Trafford says that many first-time investors imagine doing everything themselves saves money, but it's actually not always the case.

AS WITH MOST JOBS, ACCURACY AND CAREFUL MEASURING ARE CRUCIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME.

RENOVATION: WHEN TO DIY



Painting a room indoors is something most people can achieve.

“Early on, it may make sense but later, when you have a few properties, it’s easier all-round to get experts in and get things done quickly, with minimal inconvenience to tenants.”

ALL HANDS ON DECK

These days you can build your own deck as long as it’s no more than 1.5 metres tall but having said that, you should ALWAYS check with your local authority regardless, before starting work, as there may be ‘fishhooks’ in the legislation that can trip you up. After that, it’s not a hugely difficult job and there are some great tutorials online and in-store at the big hardware chains to inform and inspire you. The basic tools you’ll need are a circular saw, hammer, handsaw, chisel, electric drill, ruler, square, spanner, level, chalk-line, pencil and spade. Once again, professionals will invariably do the job more quickly than you can, but you might miss out on some real DIY pride and satisfaction.

OUTDOOR LIVING

Painting a house or unit isn’t exactly hard but it’s time-consuming and repairing and/or preparing the surface to an impeccable standard is essential. Bearing this in mind, it

DIY FLAT-PACK KITCHENS FROM THE BIG HARDWARE CHAINS CAN BE DRESSED UP TO LOOK REMARKABLY SMART

could easily take all summer to complete one exterior wall – especially if you’re painting alone. Experienced professional painters can complete this kind of work much faster than an occasional amateur, often supplying their own scaffolding and while it may seem like a significant cost this investment frees up your time to do other things.

Interior painting is one area of the DIY genre that most of us can turn our hand to but if the job involves plastering first, Mark Trafford believes that it’s generally best to call in a pro.

“If you don’t get a nice smooth finish your paint job will look awful. Also, people don’t realise just how messy it is. If you do plan to DIY plastering and stopping, then make sure to wear a mask!” he says.

There are tricks to getting a good paint job too.

Resene’s marketing manager Karen Warman advises: “When painting, start

from the top and work your way down – so ceiling first, then walls, then floor. That way if the paint drips you won’t be ruining already completed work.

“Over the warmer months waterborne paint can start to dry very fast, although high humidity can slow this down. Adding Resene Hot Weather Additive in hot, dry conditions will help regulate drying time.

“Always ensure the area is well-ventilated both during and after painting – with windows open and, if need be, fans to get the air circulating well.”

She points out that when choosing colours for an interior, they may end up looking more intense than you expect.

“If in doubt, choose a shade lighter than your initial choice,” she says.

“Colour on a ceiling will look darker than the same colour on a wall because of the way the light falls. Use a white ceiling finish or a half or quarter strength of your wall colour if you want to ensure your ceiling is lighter.

A LA CUISINE

Some aspects of kitchen design and installation (apart from plumbing, gas-fitting and electrical work) are quite

straightforward and eminently do-able, even for a novice.

In a modest rental property, DIY flat-pack kitchens from the big hardware chains can be dressed up to look remarkably smart and the instructions that come with them are comprehensive.

Trafford points out that in an older house, especially, the walls and floors probably won’t be straight though, and this is where an enthusiastic DIY landlord can run into problems.

“At that stage I’d get a builder in,” he says.

Top tip: Work with the installer in order to learn some new skills.

BATHROOM BEAUTY

Only a certified professional can undertake plumbing work but what you can do (with care) is the actual demolition, which can be surprisingly satisfying.

Undertaking tiling is possible, but not as easy as you might have thought, and expensive mistakes can lead to disappointment. If you’ve never done it before assemble your tools: spirit level, tape measure, pencil, spacers, trowel and a tile cutter. A cutting blade which attaches to an angle grinder can be very effective for cutting tiles but you’ll need good gloves, safety mask and industrial glasses. You’ll also need a sponge. Take your time and remember, again, that there are loads of online tips and tutorials available.

Top tip: Measure twice, cut once.

COMPLETELY FLOORED

If you want to save a bit of cash, you can often install vinyl flooring yourself as long as the room layout is relatively uncomplicated.

Modern wood-grain designs look every bit as good as the real thing and there are many more colours, textures and finishes to choose from. You’ll need a trowel, tape measure pry bar, straight-edge, box-cutter and floor roller.

OFF THE WALL

Wallpapering is another area that can seem simple, yet turn out to be anything but. However, it’s worth having a go yourself with inexpensive paper in a rental as some people find that they have a real knack for the art of paperhanging.

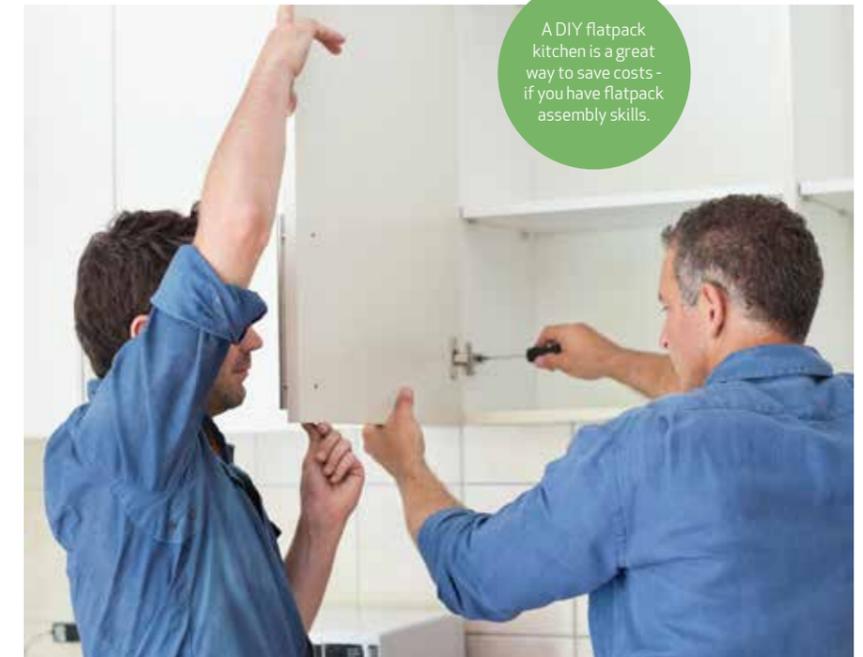
Karen Warman says to check all rolls are from the same batch. There can be batch to batch variations so checking first will help ensure a more even finish.

“Always make sure your measurements are right before you start cutting and allow for any pattern matching that’s needed,” she says. “The key is in the measuring and in hanging it straight, so always use a plumb line.”

“Allow plenty of time and start when you’re feeling fresh. Wallpapering these



Plumbing work should only be undertaken by a registered plumber.



A DIY flatpack kitchen is a great way to save costs - if you have flatpack assembly skills.

days is easier than ever, with many wallpapers being paste-the-wall style.

BITS AND PIECES

There are loads of small details when maintaining a rental and many sit on a standard list relating to annual upkeep. One such area is windows and doors. The former need frequent repainting and if glass needs to be replaced, keep safety at the front of your mind, working with gloves to avoid injury. Be thorough. New glass will not fit well if there are still traces of old putty.

The very best thing for doors – happily a DIY-friendly job, is installing deadlocks so that if your tenants are broken into,

the burglar can’t easily escape with stolen possessions. Installing window locks is relatively easy too and may help encourage tenants to ventilate the property by leaving windows open.

DANGER SIGNS!

ACC covers thousands of people for DIY injuries each year so avoiding high risk jobs – particularly those working at height is sensible. Jobs such as pruning or cutting down trees are especially dangerous and more so if you don’t have the right equipment. Think about the task you’ve set yourself and ask if it could end in disaster. If the answer is ‘yes’, then call in somebody who does it for a living. ■