

# CHANEL FACTORY 5

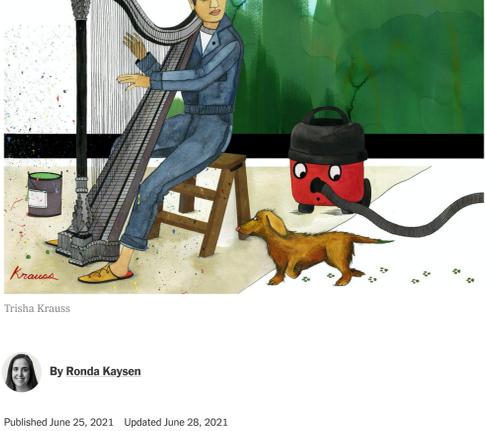
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## Living Through a Pandemic Renovation

How to put up with the noise and disruption when you're not just living at home, but also working and schooling from there.



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Few people relish the idea of living through a home renovation. The work is loud, dusty, and completely upends your life. Live through one during a pandemic, though, and you face an additional challenge: There's no escape.

And yet, millions of Americans decided that this past year was an opportune time to rip out some walls and build a new kitchen, bathroom or addition. For those who muscled through and stayed in their homes while the work was underway, the experience was one lived in a 24-7 construction site. With offices closed, conference calls happened to a noisy backdrop of hammering and sanding. So much for Zoom school when the Wi-Fi goes down without warning. Need a quick meal because the kitchen is gutted down to the studs? It's not so easy when restaurants are closed for indoor dining.

"You're not going to accomplish your workday the way you normally would because of noise, electricity, dust, smells," said [Kari Whitman](#), an interior designer who recently renovated the Jackson Hole, Wyo., home of Mötley Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx while he lived there with his family.

Of course, there are worse problems than having to live through a project you willingly signed onto — no one forced you to rip apart your house in the middle of a pandemic (and most designers and contractors will urge you to clear out before the work starts.) But, renting a second home while you're hemorrhaging money fixing up your first one is a pricey endeavor, so many homeowners stay put.

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But there are also ways to survive the chaos, or at least manage it.

In Maplewood, N.J., Holly Keith, 47, would sometimes ask the crew to stop work for an hour while her husband, Peter Keith, 47, a research analyst, took a Zoom call. From September 2020 through June 2021, the couple lived through a renovation that "touched every room," Ms. Keith, a travel agent, said, all while their two children went to school remotely. (The family had thought the children would be back in school when the work started, but Maplewood schools didn't open for hybrid learning until the spring.)

The family rented a neighbor's house in November and December while the neighbor was away, working there during the day and coming home to sleep at night. But by January that arrangement had ended and the project was nowhere near complete. In January, as the family waited for cabinets to arrive, Ms. Keith hit a wall. "It's the dead of winter, we're kind of at a standstill, we just want to get this done."

Electricity would go off in the middle of the day, shutting down the Wi-Fi and kicking the children out of their virtual classrooms. Even when their lessons weren't disrupted, construction noise was a constant distraction. "I was worried about the sound and making sure that the kids could focus and concentrate, do their school work," Ms. Keith said.

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The biggest challenge was the dust. "People warned me about the dust and I was like, 'How bad can it be?'" she said. "It got so bad that I would just give up on certain areas of the house."

Although she had boxed up about half of the family's belongings, in hindsight she wishes she had boxed up more. She also wishes they had moved out for the duration. "But that's a huge expense and we were on a budget and we could not add in an extra, I think I calculated something like 20 or 25 grand," she said.

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Rajiv Surendra, a calligrapher and actor in his early 30s who is best known for [his role](#) in the 2004 movie "Mean Girls," had even less space when he renovated the galley kitchen in his Upper West Side one-bedroom last year. Doing all the work himself, except the plumbing (his landlord insisted he not touch the plumbing in a prewar building), he chronicled his experience on Instagram as he installed wainscoting, sanded cabinets, and made bracket shelves and a peg rail by hand. He didn't even use a nail gun, so as not to bother his neighbors.

Mr. Surendra set up his workshop in the living room and a temporary kitchen in his bedroom that consisted of a toaster oven, coffee grinder and stovetop espresso pot. He ate at the desk in his bedroom and stored his dishes and pantry items in huge piles under the bed. "I'd have to rummage around awkwardly in what felt like a rabbit warren to find stuff I'd put away and thought I didn't need," he said.

But with his entire apartment turned into a worksite, he had almost no space that felt like his own. "It was upsetting because I like everything in its place," he said. So he did his best to ignore the mess. "I didn't look at it or I didn't acknowledge it, because it would have driven me crazy."

One morning, as he was crouched on his bedroom floor using the toaster oven, he had an epiphany: Treat the experience like camping and maybe it wouldn't be so hard. The change in attitude helped.

It also helped to find something that could mentally take him away from a space he rarely left. Every night, he would roll up the drop cloth, vacuum and take a shower. Then he would spend two hours practicing the harp and the piano in his living room, within sight of the kitchen, teaching himself Chopin's Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2. "That was a very good thing, for me to get my mind away from that stuff," he said.

Even rock stars sometimes decide to ride out a renovation at home. When Nikki Sixx started work on his 9,000-square-foot mansion in Jackson Hole last September, he could have escaped to another house in Los Angeles, but he stayed through most of the work with his wife, Courtney Sixx, 35, and their 1-year-old daughter, Ruby. "We didn't want to leave Wyoming. It was just too beautiful," Mr. Sixx said. The couple stayed in the house until mid-January, when work on the kitchen and floors was done.

Turning the house, which sits on 20 acres overlooking a bluff, into a rock 'n' roll meets rugged western cowboy retreat was noisy and chaotic, and meant renovating every room in the house, even the garage. "You're trying to write and you've got 'Rahhhh!' right in the background," said Mr. Sixx, 62, who wrote a memoir, "[The First 21](#)," about his early life, amid all the construction. "It was an outrageous time and an amazing time."

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He would often hide out in his jam room, sitting on his purple velvet sofa near a table with a steel frame and barbed wire inside the glass tabletop. His wife would work on her new company, [Bouquet Box](#), (a D.I.Y. floral arranging system) out of her loft office overlooking the mountains. "We could kind of get away from stuff as much as possible."

Ms. Whitman suggested the family load all their essentials into tubs and move them from one room to the next on dollies. "We were basically living out of suitcases. But for us that's nothing new. I'm in a rock 'n' roll band," he said. "I literally live out of my suitcase."

But Covid-19 was a constant worry. Sometimes, Mr. Sixx would enter a room and find workers not wearing their masks. At one point, Ms. Whitman contracted the virus and was hospitalized for five days. After she recovered, she would not go into the house, giving directions to workers through a window instead. "It was insane," Ms. Whitman said.

After three months of living in a construction site, the family moved to their home in Los Angeles until the work was done in April.

For those without a second home to escape to, [Melanie Roy](#), an interior designer, suggests using plastic sheeting to wall off the construction zone and manage the dust, because something is better than nothing. "Everybody needs their own corner," she said. "You use one space as an office during the day, and then at night everyone needs a room to watch TV and have family time."

Put air purifiers in every room and box up as much of your home as possible, reducing your available possessions to the bare minimum, and life will be easier to navigate as the weeks roll by.

Said Ms. Roy, "You will be surprised during construction how little you really need to live."

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