

FIELD RESOURCE

Renovation ROI Guide for Brisbane Sellers

Which renovations return their cost before sale, and which do not

Daniel Gierach

RAY WHITE COLLECTIVE

[DANIELGIERACH.COM](https://danielgierach.com)

The most expensive mistake Brisbane sellers make before listing is renovating to their own taste rather than to the market. Buyers do not pay back full cost for kitchens or bathrooms in most price brackets, but they do pay back the right cosmetic spend many times over. This guide walks through what consistently returns its cost, what does not, and how to think about the budget for your property and price bracket.

Three categories: prep, refresh, and renovate

Almost every pre-sale spend falls into one of three buckets. The buckets carry very different return profiles.

- Prep: cleaning, decluttering, repairs, and styling. Almost always returns multiple times its cost. Should be the first dollar spent.

- Refresh: painting, regrouting, replacing tapware, replacing handles, polishing floors, landscaping. Reliably returns its cost when targeted at the right rooms.

- Renovate: full kitchen, full bathroom, structural changes, major additions. Rarely returns full cost in a sale context. Often loses money. Sometimes the right call, but only with clear evidence.

The high-return list (almost always pays back)

These items consistently return their cost across most Brisbane price brackets. Start here before considering anything bigger.

- Interior repaint in scuffed or strongly coloured rooms. Warm neutral white. Approx \$40 to \$60 per square metre, returns multiple times over.
- Pressure wash driveways, paths, decks, and outdoor concrete. Often a half-day job, transforms presentation.
- Replace damaged or stained carpet with a quality neutral option. Or polish existing timber floors.
- RegROUT tiles in kitchens and bathrooms. A few hundred dollars in materials, makes the rooms read as well-maintained.
- Replace dated or mismatched cabinetry handles. Under \$200, changes the feel of a room noticeably.
- Replace chipped or damaged benchtop sections. Buyers fixate on these.
- Update light fittings if dated. Use warm 2700K to 3000K LEDs.
- Mow, edge, mulch, and replant where needed. Front-of-house garden is a leading impression.
- Professional photography. Not a renovation but the highest-ROI marketing decision.

The mid-return list (depends on price bracket and condition)

These can return their cost when the existing condition is genuinely affecting value. They do not return their cost when used as a styling upgrade for an already-presentable room.

- Painting kitchen cabinetry by a professional. \$1,500 to \$4,000 typically. Returns when the existing kitchen is sound but visually dated.

- Replacing tapware throughout a bathroom. A few hundred dollars in materials, makes the room read as updated.

- Replacing the front door. A heavy, modern door reads as quality across the entire facade.

- Updating window furnishings if existing ones are damaged or stained.

- Building a small deck or extending an existing deck. Returns well in family-home suburbs where outdoor living is a major value driver.

- Insulation upgrades. Returns when energy bills are part of the buyer conversation.

- Air conditioning installation in a home that does not have it. Brisbane buyers expect this in 2026.

The low or negative return list (usually a mistake)

These items rarely return their cost in a sale context. Skip them unless they are addressing a genuine compliance or functional issue.

- Full kitchen renovation in homes priced above \$1.2 million. Buyers in this bracket renovate to their own taste.
- Full bathroom renovation in homes priced above \$1.2 million. Same logic.
- Bedroom carpet replacement when existing carpet is sound but dated.
- Built-in wardrobe upgrades that do not add a wardrobe to a room without one.
- Outdoor entertaining structures (large pergolas, outdoor kitchens) that go beyond the suburb norm.
- Granny flat or studio addition in the final months before sale. The construction time and the buyer pool overlap make this rarely worthwhile in the lead-up to listing.
- Pool installation. Pools typically lose money on a strict ROI basis at sale.
- Solar panel installation purely as a sale decision. The payback is to whoever uses the system long enough.
- Driveway resurfacing if the existing driveway is sound.
- New air conditioning to replace a working older system.

Kitchen: when to renovate, when to refresh

The kitchen is the most overspent room in pre-sale renovation. The decision rule is simpler than most people think.

- If the kitchen is sound and functional but visually dated: refresh only. Paint cabinetry, replace handles, repair benchtop, deep clean.
- If the kitchen is genuinely non-functional (broken cabinetry, failing appliances, severely damaged benchtop): replace only what is broken.
- If the home is priced under \$900,000 and competing kitchens in comparable sales are all renovated: a budget renovation (\$15,000 to \$25,000) can return its cost.
- If the home is priced above \$1.2 million: do not renovate. Buyers expect to choose their own.
- A renovated kitchen is not a guarantee of return. A neglected one is a guarantee of buyer discount.

Bathroom: same logic, smaller numbers

Bathrooms suffer the same overspend pattern as kitchens, with the added complication that water damage and mould can hide structural costs.

- Regrout, reseal, and replace tapware before considering anything bigger. Often the bathroom looks fully updated after this work.
- Address mould at the cause (ventilation), not just the surface.
- A budget bathroom refresh (\$1,500 to \$4,000) is almost always a sound spend.
- A full bathroom renovation (\$15,000 to \$35,000) only returns its cost in lower price brackets where buyers expect a renovated bathroom.
- Never renovate one bathroom and leave the others dated. The contrast highlights the older rooms.

Outdoor and landscaping

Outdoor living is a material part of value in Brisbane inner east. The spend should be proportional to the size and visibility of the space.

- Front garden: high-impact, low-cost. Mow, edge, mulch, simple plantings.
- Backyard: clean and tidy first, then consider deck repair, lawn replacement, or simple paving if the existing surface is failing.
- Decks: clean, oil, repair damaged boards. Replacing a deck rarely returns its cost.
- Pool: clean, brush waterline tiles, ensure compliance certificate is current. Do not install a pool to sell.
- Pergolas and outdoor kitchens: only if they match the suburb norm.
- Lighting: outdoor lighting that works correctly is a small spend with a measurable presentation lift.

Compliance fixes (often misunderstood as renovation)

Some compliance work feels like renovation but is closer to mandatory. These items will be flagged in any building or pest report and raised as a price-reduction point in negotiation.

- Smoke alarms: Queensland law requires interconnected photoelectric alarms in every bedroom by 1 January 2027. Approx \$400 to \$1,200 to upgrade. Required, not optional.
- Pool safety certificate: required to provide at sale. Approx \$150 to \$600 plus any compliance work. Required.
- Gas appliance compliance certificates if you have gas.
- Building approvals for previously built structures (decks, pergolas, sheds). Retrospective approval is sometimes possible but takes time. Start early.
- Termite barrier and recent inspection: not required, but a current termite report dramatically limits buyer negotiation post-inspection.

How to set your renovation budget

A simple framework that avoids the most common overspend mistakes. Walk through it with your agent before committing to any work.

- Start with the prep-only budget: cleaning, declutter, styling. Often \$1,500 to \$5,000.
- Add the refresh budget: paint, handles, regrout, tapware, lawn. Often \$2,000 to \$8,000.
- Only consider a renovate budget if comparable sales evidence shows buyers in your bracket pay a premium for renovated stock that meaningfully exceeds the renovation cost.
- Cap the total spend at 1.5 percent of expected sale price for prep and refresh. More than that and the spend should be questioned line by line.
- Get specific written quotes for everything. Verbal estimates routinely run 30 to 50 percent over.
- Allow at least one week between completion of work and photography. Photos taken with paint smell or contractors still on site read as rushed.

The right pre-sale spend almost always pays back many times over. The wrong spend can quietly take tens of thousands off your final result. The decision is always property-specific. Walk through it with your agent before signing any quote.

Daniel Gierach

RAY WHITE COLLECTIVE

0412 523 821

daniel.gierach@raywhite.com

danielgierach.com