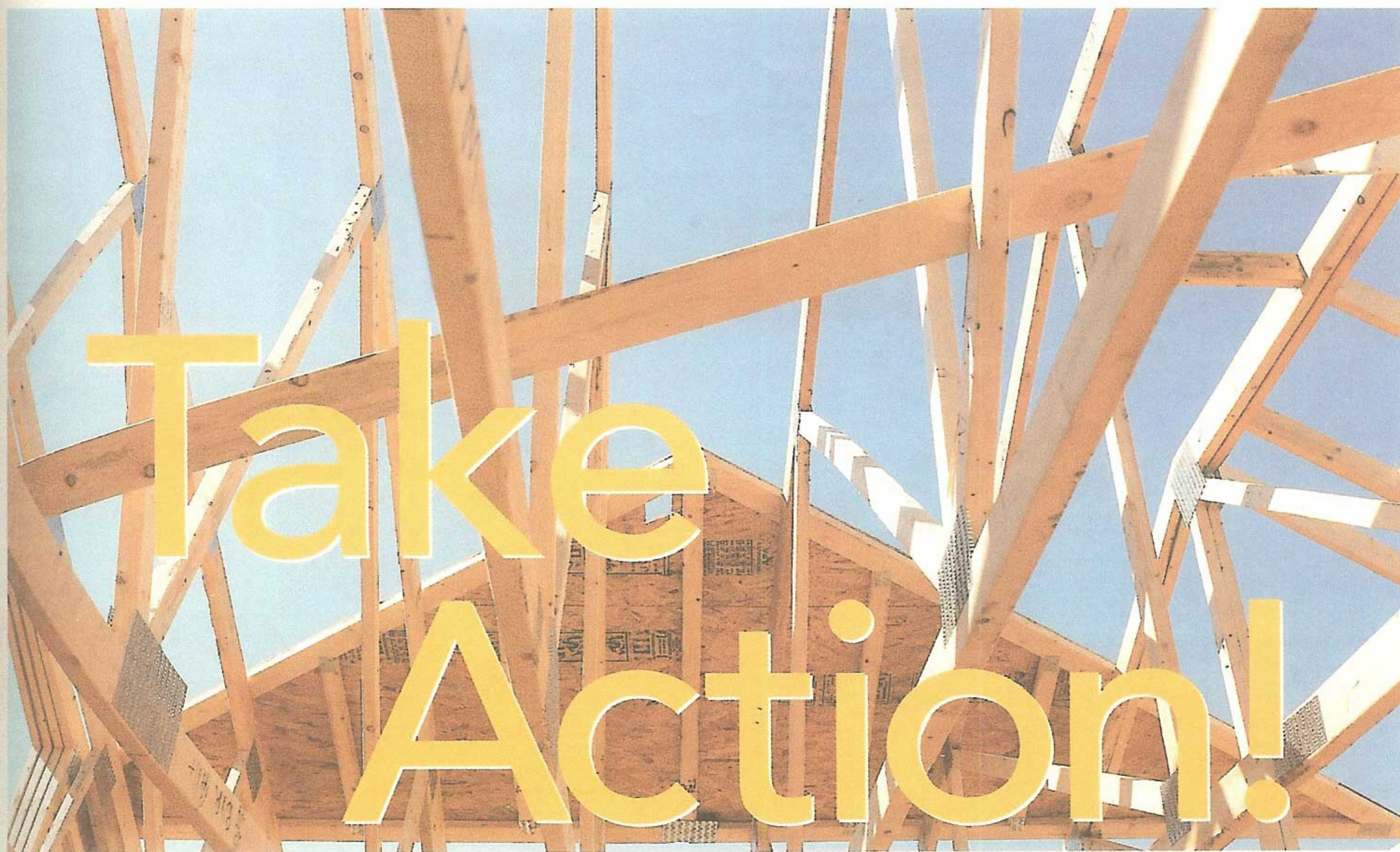




Designer FYI

By Kris Linder



To help minimize the impact construction has on your life and your home, here are some useful steps to help you manage the project without becoming overwhelmed. Before you consider knocking that wall down, educate yourself on what you are in for — and for how long.

Plan your budget and be flexible — the final cost will most likely run 10 to 15 percent higher than you think.

Choose the design details, materials and finishes you would like to use with a competent interior designer.

Plan alternative living quarters. When taking on a whole-house renovation, consider living elsewhere. If this is impossible or the job is small, try confining yourself to a manageable part of the house.

Select an architect and/or interior designer. Ask for recommendations, check references, and look at his or her previous work, as well as any work in progress. The architect's fee should not be more than 10 or 15 percent of the total job cost, including permit filing and engineering.

Develop schematic designs and general scopes of work with your architect/designer. Always keep your vision in mind but remain open to new ideas as long as they are within your budget.

Approve detailed plans and have several packages of specs to hand out to your chosen contractors before beginning the bidding process. Your architect and designer can offer recommendations for quality contractors.

Review bids for the price and the items included. Interview every contractor before deciding, and work with the contractors to reduce

the price if it is over your budget. Be skeptical of any contractor who lowers a bid by more than 5 percent without reducing the scope of the work.

Accept a bid and choose a contractor. Meet with the finalist and make sure you see things eye to eye.

Sign a contract. Before you issue a deposit, have your architect/designer review the documents carefully to ensure that all the desired work is included.

Apply for permits. Let your contractor handle this — he or she knows the ropes and will get it done 10 times faster than you ever could.

Ready...set...go for construction! Be patient, but don't be passive. Request a detailed project schedule at the start of the job and make sure that everyone sticks to it.

Arrange weekly site meetings with your architect and contractor and, if things are falling behind, request a plan for catching up.

Do a walk-through when the work is almost finished and make a thorough and final checklist of any items that are outstanding.

Make the final payment only when you are completely satisfied that all the work agreed to has been done to your satisfaction.

Taking these actions may insure you a project that runs smoothly — and comes in on time and budget. ↑

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