

## Lifestyles

# Rx Architectural Service for Starters and Fixer-Uppers

The  
Home  
Guru



By Bill Primavera

When realtors see a new listing described as a “fixer-upper” or “sold as is,” we’re inclined to think that it will be purchased by a contractor who will flip the property for resale.

Regular buyers, intimidated by the scope and cost of major redesign and renovation, might be loathe to buy a distressed property, even with some of the incredible deals in short sales and

foreclosures that are out there right now. But if they had the right guidance and an accurate projection of costs in advance, they might be encouraged to move forward, especially if that service is free.

Michael Piccirillo, an architect I know and a colleague of mine on Yorktown’s Architectural Review Board, offers such a service.

In the current market, I see many more buyers pondering whether to bid on low-priced houses that need significant work. What they may lack is the discerning eye of a professional to know what can be done with them and how much it would cost. And, if that service is free, there is no risk involved.

Here’s how the process works.

Either the realtor or prospective buyer contacts Piccirillo to do a walk-through of the property with them free of charge. While on the premises, the buyer is asked



The Rx Architect Michael Piccirillo has taken a dated split-level in central Westchester and is transforming into a stylish French Tudor for his client.

about their needs and what they don’t like about the structure, over and above the obvious upgrades that would be needed. Suggestions would be made about out how the space might be rearranged or expanded to accommodate the buyer’s lifestyle preferences and a rough estimate would be provided of those renovation costs. Based on that input, the buyer can decide whether to move forward with the purchase.

Next, Piccirillo schedules a second meeting, also free of charge, where he discusses a specific plan for upgrading and, if needed, expansion. If client and architect agree with a specific vision for the property, he would then prepare a formal proposal with a flat fee for professional services, along with a schedule of estimated costs. For the fee, there is the coordination of all the construction work that needs to be done. The flat fee naturally depends on the scope of the project.

“If there are three different capes that

need redesign and renovation in three different ways, each would have a different fee,” Piccirillo explained. “For instance, if the work involves just basic interior renovations, gutting the bathroom and kitchen and replacing the windows, the fee for design and oversight of the work can be as low as \$2,500. If the client wants to blow out the roof and gut the interior, the fee can be considerably higher, but the client knows exactly what it is in advance.”

The only fee adjustment occurs if the project requires his attendance at town, planning or zoning board meetings.

Once the design of the project is in place, Piccirillo would bring in one or two of the 10 contractors with whom he works to project the costs of the job to know if it’s within budget. If not, he makes adjustments in the design and/or materials.

“If the client has a \$200,000 budget, but the contractors say the job is running higher than that, we’ll re-evaluate what we’re doing then and there, rather than



SOUTH ELEVATION

waiting until final plans are in place and everybody loves them, but then we find that we have to pull back,” he said.

When the design is completed, it goes out to bid to contractors and kitchen companies, and together with the client, the work is awarded. Once the work begins, Piccirillo said that clients can pull out of the process at any time during construction to continue on their own, “but most clients want me to be involved all the way through.”

For more information, contact Michael Piccirillo at 914-245-2278 or visit [www.mpiccirilloarchitect.com](http://www.mpiccirilloarchitect.com).

*Bill Primavera is a licensed Realtor® (PrimaveraHomes.com), affiliated with Coldwell Banker, and a marketing practitioner (PrimaveraPR.com). He can be emailed at [bill@PrimaveraHomes.com](mailto:bill@PrimaveraHomes.com) or reached directly at 914-522-2076. Follow him on Twitter for housing market updates at [Twitter.com/HomeGuruNY](https://twitter.com/HomeGuruNY).*