What to Expect from the Roof Replacement Process: A Homeowner's Guide

If you have owned a home in Austin for more than a decade, you have probably looked up at your roof and wondered how much longer it can hold out. The summer sun, the occasional hailstorm, and the slow creep of time all take a toll. When the granules start showing up in your gutters or you notice a soft spot underfoot in the attic, it is time to start thinking seriously about a new roof. The roof replacement process is not just about swapping old shingles for new ones. It involves structural decisions, material choices, and a sequence of work that can feel overwhelming if you do not know what is coming.

I have been through this with dozens of clients, and the single most common regret I hear is that people wish they had understood the full scope before they started. So let me walk you through what actually happens, from the first inspection to the final ridge vent, so you know exactly what you are signing up for.

Step One: The Tear-Off and Decking Inspection

The first day of any serious roof replacement process begins with the tear-off. The crew strips away every layer of old material down to the roof deck. In many Austin homes, that deck is made of OSB decking, and it is worth paying attention to what the crew finds once the shingles are gone. I have seen decks that looked fine from the outside but had soft spots from years of hidden leaks. If the decking is compromised, it has to be replaced before anything else goes on top. That is the moment when a seemingly straightforward job can grow in scope, but it is also the moment that separates a lasting roof from a Band-Aid fix.

During the tear-off, the crew will also examine the drip edge and any existing flashing around chimneys, vents, and skylights. Those metal details are often the first places to fail. If the drip edge is rusted or the flashing is pulled loose, now is the time to address it. Skipping this step is how you end up with water stains on your ceiling two years later.

The Underlayment: More Than Just Felt

Once the deck is clean and solid, the next layer is the underlayment. This is the waterproof membrane that sits between the deck and the shingles. In a proper roof replacement process, the underlayment is not an afterthought. It is your second line of defense against moisture. For homes in Central Texas, where we get sudden downpours and high winds, an ice and water shield is worth the upgrade. It is a self-adhering membrane that sticks directly to the deck and seals around every nail head. It costs more than standard felt, but it buys you real peace of mind during the first big storm.

I always recommend a high-quality underlayment from a manufacturer like GAF or Owens Corning. These companies have been in the business long enough to know what works. The underlayment is the part of the roof you will never see again, but it is the part that does the heavy lifting when a shingle gets lifted by wind.

Choosing the Right Shingles

With the underlayment down, the visible work begins. The roofing material you choose has a huge impact on both the look and the longevity of your roof. Class A asphalt shingles are the standard choice for most Austin homes. They are fire-resistant, affordable, and come in a wide range of colors. But if you want something with more character, synthetic slate offers a thicker, more textured profile that mimics natural slate without the weight or the cost. It is a popular choice for historic neighborhoods and custom builds.

For homeowners who plan to stay in the house for the long haul, standing seam metal is an option worth considering. It is more expensive and requires a specialized crew, but it can last fifty years or more. And if you really want to make a statement, copper gutters paired with standing seam metal create a look that only gets better with age. Copper develops a patina over time that is beautiful and completely unique to your home. Just be prepared for the upfront cost and the fact that not every roofer knows how to work with it.

Among the asphalt shingle options, CertainTeed and TAMKO both offer excellent products with good warranties. CertainTeed's Landmark series, for example, comes with a 30-year warranty that is transferable, which is a strong selling point if you ever decide to sell your home. TAMKO's Titan line is another solid performer, especially in high-wind areas.

The Details That Matter: Starter Strips, Ridge Vents, and Flashing

A roof is only as good as its weakest detail. That is why the roof replacement process includes several small but critical components that most homeowners never think about. The starter strip is a pre-assembled strip of shingles that goes along the eaves. It seals the first row and prevents wind from getting under the shingles from the edge. Without it, you risk shingle uplift in the first strong storm.

At the top of the roof, a ridge vent allows hot air to escape from the attic. In Austin's climate, a properly vented attic can lower your cooling bills and extend the life of the shingles. The ridge vent should be matched to the shingle profile and installed with the same care as the rest of the roof. Flashing around pipes, chimneys, and valleys is another spot where shortcuts show up later. I have seen roofs that looked perfect from the street but leaked at every penetration because the flashing was done with caulk instead of metal. Proper flashing takes more time, but it is the only way to get a weathertight seal.

Permits and Inspections: Working with Austin Building and Development Services

One part of the roof replacement process that catches many homeowners off guard is the permit. In Austin, you generally need a permit from Austin Building and Development Services for any roof replacement that involves structural work or changes to the roof deck. Even if you are just replacing shingles, many contractors pull a permit to keep everything above board. The permit process includes an inspection at the decking stage and another at the final stage. It adds a few days to the timeline but ensures the work meets current code. If you ever file an insurance claim, having a permitted roof on file can make the process smoother.

I have worked on jobs where the homeowner tried to skip the permit to save time, and it always came back to bite them. Either the city flagged the work during a later sale, or the insurance company refused to cover a leak because the installation was unpermitted. It is not worth the risk.

Timelines and the Design-Build Approach

A typical roof replacement in Austin takes between three and five days, depending on the size of the roof, the complexity of the details, and the weather. If you are working with a design-build firm, the timeline may be slightly longer because the same team handles both the design and the construction, which eliminates the back-and-forth between separate companies. The advantage of design-build is that you get a single point of accountability. If something goes wrong, you do not have to listen to the designer blame the roofer and the roofer blame the designer. One team owns the whole thing.

When you are choosing a contractor, ask about their experience with your specific material. A crew that is great with asphalt shingles may not be the right choice for standing seam metal. And always ask to see examples of their flashing work. It is a small detail, but it tells you a lot about their standards.

The Only Time You Get to Make These Decisions

A roof replacement is a major investment, but it is also a rare opportunity. You only get to choose the underlayment, the shingle profile, the venting system, and the gutter material once every twenty or thirty years. If you are on the fence about upgrading to an ice and water shield or switching to synthetic slate, this is the moment to do it. The cost difference between standard and premium materials is usually a fraction of the total job, but the performance difference can be night and day.

Understanding the roof replacement process from start to finish helps you make those decisions with confidence. You will know why the crew is spending extra time on the drip edge. You will understand why the underlayment matters. And when the final ridge vent goes in and the last starter strip is nailed down, you will have a roof that protects your home for decades, not just until the next warranty claim.