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## Diamond Builders Recommendations for Selecting the Right Remodeling Contractor

### The Importance of Selecting the Right Remodeling Contractor

- Not all contractors are alike—some are highly qualified professionals, some are not. Some are specialists and some are generalists.
- Carefully selecting a contractor now can save you time, money, and trouble. Asking the right questions now can prevent unpleasant surprises in the future.
- Your contractor will be in your home every workday from early morning until the late afternoon for an extended length of time. It is important that you trust and feel comfortable with them.
- You will probably want a design/build remodeler that can reflect your sense of style. Look for one that either can show you samples of projects similar to what you want or can demonstrate the flexibility to fit the individual homeowner's tastes.
- Very often, what you pay for is what you get. Be wary of contractors who take shortcuts to provide the lowest bid. Find a remodeler that provides quality work at a fair price.
- Remodeling your home is an investment. You want to make sure it is done right. Selecting the right remodeler is your most important decision.

### Things for You to Consider

- What type of work will you want done? (Addition? Kitchen? Bath? Home theater? Multi-room project? Whole house renovation?)
- Are you looking for more space or something distinctive and/or especially functional?
- Do you want to use a design/build remodeler or a separate architect and builder? Most remodeling and restoration projects benefit from using a design/build remodeling contractor instead of a separate architect and builder.
- If you feel you need to use a separate architect and builder, make sure they are both willing and able to work as a team from the very beginning and that they work seamlessly.
- How much do you want to invest in your home?
- Do you want to be able to live in your home during construction or not?
- How long will you live in your home and enjoy the project? Or is the project to improve your home's resale value?
- Do you need to have the work done by a particular time, or can you be flexible?

## **Define What's Important to You**

- Determine what you need from your project, what you want to have but isn't essential, and what would be nice but you could live without if it exceeds your budget.
- How important is quality versus price versus value to you?
- What level of involvement do you want in a project? Some remodelers want you highly involved, some barely involved except to approve design.

## **Finding a Remodeler**

- Ask friends, neighbors, and business associates for the names of contractors they would recommend, and why.
- Contact trade associations for names of reputable and quality-oriented contractors in the area that might do the kind of work you are looking for. Some trade associations to choose from are:
  - National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI)
  - National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)
- Look for jobsite signs in and around your neighborhood.
- Check with your local Better Business Bureau. They will let you know of any serious complaints against a company.

## **Visit the Remodeler's Web site**

- No Web site? What does that tell you about how they view your needs and run their business?
- Get a feel for what type of company they are and if it is the type of company you want to trust in your home.
- Does the overall site reflect a sense of design, quality, commitment to client service, and satisfaction?
- Look through the photo gallery and see if their work matches what you are looking for, or is of a similar type and quality.
- Do they clearly state the services they offer, warranty information, licensing, insurance, and bonding? Do they mention their qualifications, years in business, membership in any trade organizations, or certifications?
- Is there anything they offer that is different from or better/worse than other remodelers?

## **The Initial Phone Call**

- Call the companies that you feel are the best match.
- Let them know what sort of project you are thinking about, and your budget range.
- If someone must call you back, do they return your call promptly?

## **Meeting with a Contractor**

- Ask questions at the meeting. Decide beforehand what you want to ask.
- When contractors visit your home, do they arrive on time? Do they have a neat and professional appearance?
- Pay attention to the contractor's communication style. Do they listen well? Do they ask good questions about the project? Or do they mostly want to talk about themselves and how they do things?
- Can you see photos or examples of their work?

- Is the presentation by the builder professional? Do they address your questions and concerns well? Are the photographs clear? (They may be on the Web site.)
- Do they have recent references?
- Do they have references from homeowners for whom they worked 5-10 years ago?
- Make sure you check references. Ask them questions beyond are they happy with the work, was it done on time and on budget and would you use them again. Ask about the remodeling process, including how it was to work with the remodeler and their team.

## Things You Will Want to Learn Before Making a Decision

- Do they provide design/build services, or construction only?
- What types of projects do they specialize in? (Type, quality, price range) Do they do the kind of work you are looking to have done?
- Do they have a specialty?
- How many projects like yours have they done?
- How long have they been in business?
- How long has the owner been in the industry and in what capacities? What about their staff and subcontractors?

## Design

- How is the architectural design handled? Design/build remodelers work with their architects as an integrated team to smooth the remodeling process and control costs. If you are using a separate architect and builder, it is important that they work together from the initial concept to make sure your budget is being used wisely.
- What are the qualifications of their designer/architect?
- Is the design fee a fixed fee, percent of the project, or hourly?
- How will they present their design ideas? Do they use Computer Aided Design and provide you with detailed computer generated renderings?
- How do they assure that what they design can be built within your budget?
- How many revisions are permitted during the design phase before you incur more costs?
- Do they deliver exactly what you ask for or do they add value by making well thought out recommendations?
- Do they view the design process as a way to provide you with what you already have in mind, or a way to solve your problems and achieve your goals?
- Do you like the designs, aesthetics, and functionality of the work they've done?

## Construction

- If they use allowances to develop the contract price, do they base the allowances on low, medium, high, premium, or super premium quality products and materials? Are these quality selections in line with what you are looking for?
- Do they provide full turnkey services? If so, what does that include? What would your responsibilities be?
- How do they handle change orders?

- How do they help you with product, materials, and other selections? Do they help at all? Unless you are well-versed in product and materials selection, you want a remodeler who will provide you with guidance and suggestions.
- Who handles variance issues, permits, licenses, and government and environmental approvals and inspections?
- Is there one person who will be responsible for your job from start to finish and through the warranty period? Who is this person and what are their qualifications?
- In what specific ways do they stand behind their work?

## **Certifications and Associations**

- What are the qualifications of the architects/designers? Are they licensed? Are they AIA members?
- What is the experience of and certifications held by their construction team?
- Are they licensed, bonded, and fully insured in your area? What are the insurance limits? What about their subcontractors? Will they provide you documentation of the licenses and coverage?
- How specifically does their insurance protect you, the homeowner? Do you need any special homeowner coverage?
- Do they belong to industry organizations such as:
  - American Institute of Architects (AIA)
  - National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI)
  - National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)
  - National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA)

## **The Role of Chemistry**

- Decide if you feel you can trust them in your home. Do you feel comfortable and confident in them?
- Does the contractor appear to be knowledgeable? Are you confident in their expertise?
- What is their philosophy about what they do?
- Can they describe the process they use for a smooth successful project?
- Do you feel comfortable communicating with your contractor?
- Do you feel the remodeler really understands what you want from the project and from them?