

## **Q: How Do I Choose a Remodeling Contractor?**

**A:** By Larry Parrish, CR, CGR, CAPS - If you're thinking of remodeling your home, you're in good company. According to the National Association of Home Builders, American homeowners will spend in excess of \$100 Billion on professional remodeling this year. Empty nesters are converting unused bedrooms into master bathrooms, new owners of older homes are improving their new home before moving in, and many people are adding new apartments for an elderly parent.

Homeowners who are remodeling for the first time are faced with the challenge of finding a reputable contractor who can get the job done with minimal disruption and at a reasonable cost. The following recommendations will help simplify the search and minimize any anxiety and confusion.

All building permits in Boulder or Boulder County require detailed construction drawings and structural design by a licensed engineer. Consider hiring an architect or contractor who offers design/build, which means that the same company both designs and builds the project.

Design/build is a growing trend in the industry because it can save money, offers one-stop shopping, and single-point responsibility. Look for contractors that have licensed architects on staff, or partner with licensed architects.

Begin your search by asking friends and neighbors for recommendations. The best (and worst) ones will be known in the community, and referrals from happy customers are your best source. Also check the contractor's reputation among the building trades. Ask lumber yards, electricians, realtors, and bankers. Make sure the contractor pays his bills on time.

Ask the contractor for client references from similar projects— about twenty recent ones, and call half a dozen or so in random order. (The contractor's happiest clients will probably be listed first.) Look especially for repeat customers.

A commitment to professionalism and ethics is usually indicated by membership in professional trade organizations. Look for organizations such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) or the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and their certifications - Certified Remodeler (CR) or Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR), respectively. Also look for professional awards and a local contractor's license.

Longevity counts. A long track record is a sign that your contractor will still be in business to address warranty problems. Look for someone invested in the community and his or her reputation. Good contractors should be involved in the community, service clubs, schools or church.

Ask for samples of the contractor's office paperwork as an indication of professionalism. Use of computers and computerized scheduling are good indicators. Bids, bills, and contracts should be clear and detailed. Changes in the work must be carefully documented.

You'll also want to know how efficiently a contractor's office handles communication. Calls should be returned promptly. You're looking for a contractor who will be available quickly, when needed. Good signs of accessibility are radios, pagers, cell phones, and a listed home phone.

Your contractor should maintain at least \$1,000,000.00 in Contractor's General Liability Insurance and have all employees covered under Workers' Compensation Insurance. This is necessary to protect homeowners from liability in case of injuries or accident. Ask for certificates of insurance coverage.

Also ask if the prospective contractor has the capacity to handle the work committed. You don't want them to be overbooked. Be patient if the contractor you want is busy—it's a good sign. A contractor who will tear out a wall just to satisfy a start date, and then disappear until the other jobs are complete is no bargain.

The quality of the contractor's crew and subcontractors is important. Do they keep the jobsite clean? Would you be afraid to leave them alone in your home? Will they be bringing their dogs, friends, and boom boxes to your home?

Trust your instincts. You will be entrusting a great deal of money to your contractor and working very closely with him or her. If you get "bad vibes" from the initial meetings, it will only get worse during the stress of construction.

Once you finally choose your contractor, be clear about what you expect, and honest about your budget. Good communication is critical. Establish a schedule for frequent meetings during the job. A contractor needs your decisions in a timely manner to keep the project moving.

There are many contractors with the experience and integrity you want. With a little care, you may soon be one of the happy clients on their reference list.