



## How To Select A Contractor

For any renovation project to be successful, the contractor performing and supervising the work must be one of outstanding quality and exceptional acumen. And while there's no perfect blueprint for guaranteed success, there are definitely some key characteristics that help define the type of contractor who is worth your time and money. Below we offer our professional advice to help you choose a contractor who will help you achieve your remodeling dreams.

Before we get to the advice, though, we should stress one critical point: the single most important factor in the homeowner-contractor relationship is trust. Even if everything else about a contractor seems perfect, you must ask yourself if you feel comfortable with this potential contractor working on - and in - your home. If the answer is not a definitive yes, we strongly recommend that you continue your search.

- **Your contractor should be well established.**

Renovation is a field with low barriers to entry. Anyone can pick up a hammer and claim to be a remodeler. Choose a contractor who has been around for at least five years and who has a substantial number of positive references.

Ideally, the contractor should be affiliated with organizations like the [National Association of the Remodeling Industry](#) (NARI), the [Texas Association of Builders](#) (TAB), the [National Association of Home Builders](#) (NAHB), the [Home Builders Association of Greater Austin](#) (HBA) or the [American Institute of Architects](#) (AIA).

- **Your contractor should communicate well.**

Timely, accurate answers from your contractor are the foundation of a successful project and a solid contractor-client relationship. If the contractor doesn't communicate clearly and effectively from the outset, you are more likely to encounter frustrations - both emotional and financial - as the project continues.

- **Your contractor should provide a detailed, fixed-sum price proposal.**

Without a detailed, fixed-sum proposal there are no guarantees against budget overruns that could cost you greatly. Knowing exactly what the contractor is bidding on will help you determine if your concept matches up with the proposed work and limits the need for change orders for work that the contractor may claim was not included in their bid.

**Quick Tip: Get at least three estimates.**

As you begin your search for a contractor, be certain that you get at least three estimates for the work you will have done on your home. This "price triangulation" approach will allow you to get a better understanding of the scope of work.

**Quick Tip: Work with locally-based firms.**

It is important that you have easy access to your contractor, and locally-owned and operated firms are, by their very nature, more readily available to address your concerns.

**Quick Tip: Get it in writing.**

The project description (AKA the scope of work) along with the blueprints, specifications, engineer reports, payment draw schedule, and any specific designs should all be included as part of any contract. Make sure that the contract spells out the jobsite working hours, warranty information, and lien release information. The payment draw schedule should be based on actual work completed.

If an architect has prepared concepts or blueprints for your project, have the architect review the proposal as well to search for discrepancies.

- **Your contractor should be able to provide paper copies of his insurance certificates.**

Be certain that any contractor you choose to work with carries a General Liability insurance policy of at least \$1 million. Confirm that they can offer Builders Risk insurance if necessary.

- **Your contractor should provide a firm timetable for completion in the remodeling agreement.**

Without a strong commitment to a completion date, you could find yourself unable to return to your home when planned, which could cause you additional financial hardship as well as headaches in determining where to reside until the work is completed.

*Quick Tip: Know how you want to handle the blueprints.*

Some contractors have established relationships with architects and you will need to determine if you want to hire your own architect or if you want the contractor to prepare the blueprints.

- **Your contractor should have experience with the type of renovation you are pursuing.**

Past successes are always an important factor in selecting a contractor. Determine if the contractor has completed any projects that are similar in scope to your planned renovation. Check out their portfolios and see if they can personally take you to view any similar completed projects first hand.

*Quick Tip: Be aware of environmental regulations.*

For all work on homes built before 1978, there is a possibility of lead paint exposure and your contractor will need to be a Lead-Safe Certified Firm as directed by the EPA.

- **Your contractor should be able to provide at least five references.**

When making your final selection for a renovation contractor, be sure ask for a minimum of 5 references and do the legwork of checking them. A contractor with no references is one to be avoided.

*Quick Tip: Use caution when considering the lowest bidder.*

As enticing as it may seem, going with the lowest bidder could easily lead to poor quality work. Worse still, what seems like a bargain initially can cost you even more time and money if and when secondary repairs are required.

- **Your contractor should offer a written warranty.**

The work performed by the contractor is something you will have to live with for many years. Be certain that there are protections and remedies in place should something go wrong down the road.

**Watermark & Company** hopes this advice serves a good starting point for selecting a reputable contractor as you begin to undertake the great adventure that is renovating your home. We are dedicated to making sure that all homeowners, not just our own clients, are well educated and thoroughly prepared for the remodeling process.

If you have any questions regarding the information presented here, or if you would like to discuss Watermark & Company's Design | Renovate process, please feel free to contact us at your convenience. In the meantime, good luck on your renovation and we'll see you on the next project.



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