

CHRIS DOEHRMANN

architect, inc.



Contractor Selection Guide

Hiring a contractor without references or a referral from someone you know and trust can end in disaster. Whether the economy is boom or bust, start up construction companies are everywhere, some with little more than a pickup truck and a business card. A contractor can take your money without performing the work or simply do a bad job that will require you to hire someone else to fix it. Always check a contractor's references and see some of the work he has completed before hiring him.

You should look for a contractor who has experience in the type and size of project you are planning. You may know a contractor who does wonderful kitchen and bathroom renovations but has little experience adding a second level to an existing rambler. You want a contractor who does what you want to do.

If you value quality design and hire an architect to design your addition or renovation, you should look for a contractor who has experience working with architects or architecturally designed homes. You want to make sure that the contractor you hire can actually build what you and your architect have designed.

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A. Background and Experience

1. Company and contact person. _____
2. How long have they been in business? _____
3. Do they have experience in projects similar to yours? _____
4. Have they worked with an architect before? _____
5. What quality level do they normally work in: low, medium, or high end? _____

Notes: _____

B. Licenses and Insurance

1. Are they a licensed general contractor who will be responsible for all the subcontractors working on the project? _____
2. What kind of insurance do they carry? _____
3. Do they belong to any professional organizations such as the Builders Association or Remodelers Council? _____
4. Do they offer any warranties other than those required by the state? _____

Notes: _____

C. Work Preferences

1. Do they provide preliminary cost estimates during the design process? _____
 2. Do they use the same subcontractors on all projects? _____
 3. How do they handle unforeseen problems? _____
 4. How do they handle problems after the construction is complete? _____
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5. Who will supervise the construction? _____

Notes: _____

D. Business Details

1. What type of contract do they typically use? _____

2. What type of payment schedule do they anticipate? _____

3. Will they provide a construction schedule and how often will they update it? _____

Notes: _____

E. Your Project

1. Discuss your project and estimated budget. _____

2. Do they feel the current budget estimate is adequate? _____

3. How long do they estimate construction will take? _____

Notes: _____

F. References

1. Ask for examples of past projects and their costs. _____

2. Ask for the names of past clients and contact them regarding their experience with the contractor:

-How was the contractor to work with? _____

-What was the cost of their project? _____

-Was the contractor on time and budget? _____

-Would they hire him again? _____

-Did they keep the home clean and secure at the end of each day? _____

-Were there any unforeseen problems during construction and how did they handle them? _____

Notes: _____

G. Final Thoughts

1. Make sure your personalities and communication styles mesh. If you don't feel comfortable with them at the interview, you probably won't feel comfortable working with them on your project. _____

2. Don't ask contractors to give you bids in the design stage. You can ask for estimates but you will not be able to compare prices between contractors because there are still too many unknowns to be accurate. Your decision should not be based on cost alone, it should also take into account their credentials, experience, references, and your ability to work with them. _____

3. Notes: _____

