

Your Choice: The Best Available Contractor

So you have decided that you would like to renovate some areas of your house. You have looked for days, spending hours and hours trying to match colors and textures until you have finally reached that perfect feel. You know exactly what you want it to look like; all that there is left to do is the work. That's where you can run into some really difficult decisions. You thought choosing the right cabinets to match the existing flooring in the kitchen was the hardest part until you looked into the hundreds of contractors that claim "number one in service". So how can you reduce the options until there are only a few choices, hopefully only one?

Years of being around the construction business has taught me that experience is the most important thing to look for when choosing a contractor. You cannot replace experience. All the knowledge in the world helps, but an experienced contractor has been through the ups-and-downs of the industry and has learned the tips and tricks that make a job more manageable. For every job, you want an experienced professional who is familiar with residential and commercial renovations and repairs. The knowledge and skill of a true craftsman are accomplished through longevity and hard work in the field. Inexperienced contractors lead to novice mistakes and shortcuts that may end up costing more money years down the line. Through longevity, a craftsman is able to determine the best practices for completing a job.

Another very important aspect in choosing the best available contractor is to choose a contractor who has worked with the materials required for the job. In fact, many contractors are tied to specific materials, product lines, colors, and textures and are inexperienced with the vast number of products available. Others are considered "specialty contractors" and may only perform certain functions. Be sure to choose a contractor who is able to work with a wide range of materials, as you will get more for your money. This is especially important when considering repairs. A contractor who has the ability to analyze a problem and determine the optimal solution is of great importance, but more importantly is their ability to use materials appropriately and accordingly.

Although this is your property with your money invested into renovations and repairs, micro-managing the entire project is not something you want to do. Initially, project costs may be limited by personally acting as superintendent for the project, but management of a construction operation is very time consuming. Many people have to be on the same page, or else, confusion will lead to delays, and delays can lead to higher costs. One common example is the management of government projects through government entities. Government employees with limited construction knowledge attempt to administer an entire project without the intricate knowledge required to supervise such undertakings. Many contractors are specialty contractors without the complete understanding of HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and carpentry principles. Larger projects necessitate the use of a residential or general contractor to manage the different professions and schedule all work to be done accordingly.

A specialty contractor may be useful if you are renovating one particular area of your property. However, the specialization within certain areas of the industry is generally an advertising scheme that allows their company to work in a niche within the industry. Specialty contractors are especially useful when dealing with materials that are not utilized across the industry and instead are used only in particular aspects of a property.

Frequently the contractor you will prefer will choose to outsource certain portions of the entire project to other contractors specializing in particular areas within the industry. It is

important that you obtain references for these other contractors to further ensure that all work will be done as expected.

Every contractor should be prepared to give a bid estimate with accompanying license and insurance information. The more information that you can provide to a contractor the more accurate the estimate will be. An estimate should include materials to be used, a price for labor, and a general description of what the job entails. Remember that this is the time for questions. It is a good idea to compare estimates from a few contractors and inquire about any differences or discrepancies that you notice.

As always, you want to hire an insured, certified, professional contractor who operates under all municipal, state, and federal codes. Contractors should be able to provide a list of references and often will maintain pictures detailing completed projects. Additionally, contractors should provide all information in writing and provide a contact point for further questions and concerns.