

Tips and tricks

Select a reliable home building contractor

If you're dreaming about building a new home, it's easy to get excited looking at the options available today. But selecting a home building contractor whom you can trust can be daunting. Where do you begin?

The good news is that by following a few simple steps, you can minimize problems and rest assured you'll find a reliable contractor. It starts with a little patience and research.

Suggestions

Look for a home building contractor known for high-quality work and who has an established reputation in the community. "Choosing a contractor is, in essence, entering into a relationship," said John Topp, executive director of the Construction Labor Management Council of Southeast Wisconsin Inc. and the Building Advantage. "It's essential you find a builder you can talk to, who listens to what you say you want, and does what they say they'll do."

Establish criteria for evaluating potential contractors. Your list should reflect your needs and preferences in a home.

When you first talk to a contractor, ask how long the contractor has been in business.

Select only licensed, qualified contractors. These contractors receive their licenses after extensive testing, and licenses can be revoked as part of the consumer complaint process.

After you narrow down your list, contact the Better Business Bureau at 800-273-1002 or Trade and Consumer Protection at 414-266-1231 to ensure each is legitimate and free of pending lawsuits.

Schedule face-to-face meetings with three or four contractors at their facilities. Carefully assess their attention to detail and ask to view a portfolio of recent projects.

Give each contractor the same information regarding the project.

Check as many references as you can — customers as well as financial references.

Ask what type of training and education their crews have had and how he or she ensures high-quality, code-compliant work.

Visit projects completed by the contractor

and talk to owners about their homes. Did the process go smoothly? Did they get what they wanted?

Ask subcontractors and suppliers about their experience working with this company.

Verify that the contractor has a steady source of supply.

Discuss with your attorney whether a bond is advisable. If a home building contractor is not bondable, factor that into your choice.

Check that the home building contractor is fully insured. A statement of coverage is absolutely necessary.

Make sure the contractor provides proof of worker's compensation insurance.

Obtain and carefully review warranties.

Avoid form contracts.

Inquire about how many concurrent projects the contractor is working on. You want to make sure they can effectively manage their workload.

Make sure estimates and contracts detail exactly what will be built and how much it will cost. Inquire about how changes would affect timing and cost.

Obtain complete contact information on both the individual contractor and his or her company.

The question of price

Naturally, price is always a consideration when building a home. While ensuring you don't get a home that exceeds your budget, it's also important to be careful not to get a bargain that ends up compromising quality. "There's much more to selecting a contractor than price," Topp said. "You may think you're getting a great bargain, but going with the cheapest builder may not serve your goals in the long run."

Building your home should be an enjoyable process. Taking the time to do your homework before selecting your contractor may require a little extra work, but if you follow these tips, your "home sweet home" will be that much sweeter.

CabinetWerks to bring inno

While shopping on the mezzanine level of Milwaukee Public Market, you might notice a size, beautifully designed demonstration kitchen with quality, factory-finished cabinetry. This offers a glimpse of what CabinetWerks Design Studio can do for your home.

Located just a few blocks from the market at 241 N. Broadway in the Historic Third Ward neighborhood of downtown Milwaukee, the CabinetWerks showroom features the innovative designs, materials, colors and textures that go into your new-construction or remodeled home.

"Our name really says it all for us," said showroom manager Mike Wahlen. "We're a studio, not just a kitchen and bath store. We ourselves in working with a fantastic product can work in many different ways and meet different needs."

An expert staff of designers, project coordinators and installers will see the project through to finish.

An array of styles and materials

The product Wahlen refers to is Wood-Mode Custom Cabinetry, which offers custom and custom design, quality woods and factory finishes that go far above and beyond standard on-finished cabinetry.

"Wood-Mode works extremely hard to come up with new and innovative design features even that really set them apart from the competition," Wahlen said.

At the CabinetWerks showroom, customers can page through a hardbound Wood-Mode portfolio. The book offers views of five distinct sets of elements from the Old World "Tuscan"-style to soft contemporary "Manhattan"-style kitchen. It uses pleasing-to-the-eye natural woods for comfortable space.

"The very first customer we did cabinets for her new home literally pulled the book out of the book, 'I want this kitchen,' and pointed to one of the pictures in the book. We gave her that kitchen with slight changes to fit her home."

Five design areas in the showroom let customers see firsthand what the various styles, wood colors will look like in their own kitchens, bathrooms and other areas of their homes. "There are styles and designs of cabinetry for customers to touch and feel when they're here," Wahlen said.

The on-site Knob Gallery lets customers