

How to Find a Remodeler

If you own a home, no matter what its age, sooner or later you may join the millions of people who remodel their homes each year. The reasons for remodeling are as varied as the projects themselves. Generally people choose remodeling to add comfort, convenience, space, and ultimately to enhance their investment in what may be their most valuable asset.

Why Use A Professional Remodeler?

Your home is too important to entrust to anyone but a professional remodeler who can

- >Save you money by doing your job right the first time.
- >Ensure that your dreams are accurately translated into reality by offering design services in-house or through an arrangement with a professional architect or designer.
- >Understand that your comfort during the project and its successful completion depend on effective communication and follow-through.
- >Maintain a safe and reasonably neat job site to prevent damage to your home or injury to household members and pets.
- >Provide the best possible materials within your budget.
- >Ensure your job meets or exceeds applicable building codes and regulations.
- >Guarantee the quality of the work with a warranty.
- >Respond promptly to service calls and inquiries.

Before You Meet with a Remodeler

Before you meet with a remodeler, it is a good idea to do the following things:

- >Develop an idea of what you want to do. Write a prioritized list of your needs and wants. Look at magazines and collect pictures of what you like. The more clearly you can envision the project and describe it on paper, the more likely you are to convey a clear image of your project to a professional remodeler.
- >Think about traffic patterns, furniture placement, colors, lighting, and how you want to use the remodeled space.
- >Figure out how much money you have to spend on the remodeling job, the furnishings, and the landscaping (if any). If necessary, talk to lenders and find out how much you can borrow.

>For tips on where to look for ideas for a remodeling job refer to Remodeling Your Home An Insider's Guide (available from Home Builder Press). This book explains how to prepare for the remodeling process and how to work with your remodeler to make your job go more smoothly.

Begin the Search

Seek Referrals from

>friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and others who have had remodeling work done

>independent trade contractors, building materials suppliers, architects, engineers, home inspectors, and local lenders

>local trade associations, such as your area's local home builders association and local Remodelers Council

Check with your local or state office of consumer protection and the local Better Business Bureau (if the remodeler you are considering is a member). Have they had any complaints about the remodeler? If so, were those complaints resolved?

Check with your state's licensing agency and the state and local building inspectors to see if they have received any complaints about the remodeler and to verify that the remodeler has the appropriate license(s).

What to Look for and What to Ask

When you hire a remodeler, you are buying a service rather than a product. The quality of the service the remodeler provides will determine the quality of the finished project and your satisfaction with it. Listed below are some qualifications you will want to explore and questions you will want to ask when you interview a remodeler.

Business Experience and Management

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Construction and Technical Expertise

Does the remodeler have a working knowledge of the many types and ages of homes in the area. (Knowing what is likely to be behind a wall or under a floor helps the remodeler to provide reliable estimates. An extremely low bid may indicate lack of experience and an inability to later cover the actual costs involved in the job.)

>What products and materials would the remodeler be likely to use for your project?

>Does the remodeler offer an array of options and thus demonstrate knowledge of and experience with a variety of products, materials, and techniques?

Does the remodeler specialize in particular types of projects?

Does the remodeler arrange for the building permit? (The person who obtains the permit is the contractor of record and therefore liable for the work.)

Does the remodeler offer a warranty? If so, what kind and for how long? What is covered under the warranty and what is not?

Does the remodeler agree to begin and complete your job within your timetable?

Customer Service and Communication

Does the remodeler respond promptly to your inquiries?

Does the remodeler emphasize service and developing a trusting relationship with you?

Does the remodeler listen to and understand your needs and wants and work with you to ensure that the plans accurately reflect your expectations?

>When you discuss your written priorities, does the remodeler show enthusiasm for your ideas and suggest ways to make them work within your budget?

>Ask the remodeler for examples of how the company has solved similar space problems for other customers.

Does the remodeler facilitate communication among all parties involved in the project?

>Will the remodeler provide you with schedule updates so you can make appropriate decisions and prepare for any unavoidable inconveniences?

>Ask how the company handles communications during the construction phase of the job (such as a message center in the house for communication between you and the remodeling team-including the independent trade contractors).

Interview Previous or Present Customers

Ask the remodeler to share names and phone numbers of some customers with you and take the time to see the remodeler's work.

>Ask to see jobs similar to yours.

>Does the quality of the work meet your standards?

Ask the homeowners

>Would you hire this company again?

>Did the remodeler maintain a reasonably neat job site, provide regular broom clean-up, and haul away debris including personal trash such as lunch sacks?

>Did the remodeler keep labor and materials delays to a minimum so that your job could be started and completed on time and within budget?

>Did you find the remodeler easy to talk to and did the remodeler keep you informed as the job progressed?

Make the Decision

Ask yourself if you feel comfortable with the remodeler and confident that this company will do the work according to your plans, budget, and specifications.

If you are satisfied with the answers to your questions, ask for a written estimate of the work to be done based on a set of plans and specifications~ Be prepared to pay for this package. If the estimated cost of the project is more than you can afford, see if you can trim something from the project or postpone part of it so you can still work with a professional remodeler.

Ask the remodeler to explain the plans and specifications and company procedures to you. (For instance, how does the company handle changes to the initial design, choice of materials, or schedule once construction begins).

If you compare your estimate with another, be sure each one is based upon the same set of plans, specifications, and scope of work. If your remodeler suggests any deviations, ask the remodeler to present them as options.

Find out whether the remodeler uses a detailed, written contract that protects both of you and that complies with local, state, and federal laws. The contract must spell out the work that will and will not be performed.

Select the remodeler with a track record of a variety of excellent projects and plenty of experience with your type of project. Remember, low price alone does not ensure a successful remodeling experience.

Signs of a Professional Remodeler

NAHB REMODELORS COUNCIL

Founded in 1982, the NAHB Remodelers Council is the recognized voice of the remodeling industry. Members of the Council have forged an extensive program of education and information to aid remodelers in all facets of their businesses and to improve professionalism in the remodeling industry.

Membership in the NAHB Remodelers Council indicates a remodeler's commitment to professional-quality construction that meets or exceeds industry standards and practices, responsible business management, and reliable customer and warranty service.

NAHB remodelers have access to business and technical information; assistance from staff professionals who are experts in a variety of disciplines from accessibility to zoning; and training and education programs for increasing business, technical and communication skills.

CERTIFIED GRADUATE REMODELOR

The designation, Certified Graduate Remodelor (CGR), indicates that a remodeler has completed

the requirements of the CGR professional credentials program sponsored by the NAHB Remodelors Council. These requirements include educational credits and certain prescribed standards of business experience and practices. If your remodeler's name bears the CGR designation, you can be assured that he or she measures up to the best remodelers in the country.