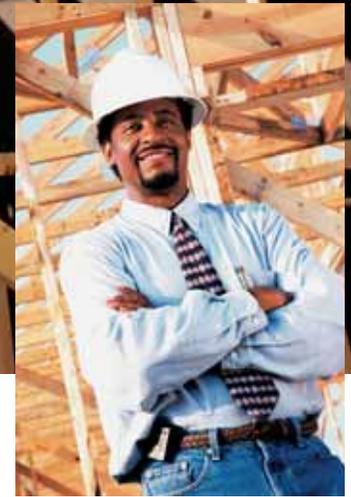




7 Helpful Tips for Hiring a Builder

by Tom Stephani



Let's be frank: Home builders don't always have a great reputation with the general public. That's why so many people view the idea of having their own home built with trepidation, if not outright fear. However, despite these popular perceptions, many builders are quite reputable. In fact, most are honest and forthright in their business practices.

The choice of a builder may be the most important decision in the home-building process. Choosing a builder early in the process—ideally before you've settled on a site or design for your home—can set the stage for a successful home-building experience.

Choose Early, Choose Wisely

Why might you prefer to choose a builder early on? Builders say the process is so complex that most owners need professional guidance from the beginning to avoid mistakes in site selection, home design and written specifications.

Builders say your budget probably shouldn't be among the top criteria in selecting a builder. No builder can quote an accurate price for a home until he or she knows the type, style, finishes and features of the home, the site conditions, and the type of contract you want to use for construction.

Rather than focusing on cost, you may well want to base

your decision on the builder's competence, reputation, professionalism, warranty coverage, and experience. Here are seven criteria to consider:

1. Reputation

Look for an established builder with an extensive client list.

2. Area of operation

Choose a builder who is familiar with the area where you want your home to be built. Local knowledge is important because residential construction is very regional in nature. An out-of-the-area builder might not be prepared to handle variations in local building codes, subcontracting practices, inclement weather patterns, or other factors.

3. Type of home

Select a builder who has extensive experience constructing homes in your price range and general design style.

4. Compatibility

Building a home is a highly personal and emotional experience. That's why you'll want to choose a builder with whom you'll feel comfortable.

5. Warranty

The builder should be willing and able to offer you a comprehensive written warranty on your new home.

6. Financial stability

Some builders run their businesses better than other builders do. Make sure the building company you select is financially viable.

7. Financial strength

Success in the home-building business is earned by building a quality product at a fair price. A builder who is financially successful likely will still be in business during the warranty period for your new home. Further, successful builders are in the best position to contract for the services of top subcontractors and suppliers—the people who will actually build your home.

Beyond these factors, the most important consideration is the quality of the builder's homes. Cost is not a direct measure of quality. Rather, good quality is the merging of good design with appropriate products and materials that are installed with superior workmanship. The most expensive window might not look or perform any better than a substantially less expensive window. But improper installation of that window will diminish its quality, regardless of its cost. Generally, costly finishes and fixtures won't offset shoddy application or installation.

Some home buyers locate a builder through a real estate agent. Certainly, no group of people has better knowledge of the local real estate market than the real estate agents who work in that market on a daily basis. Whether an individual real estate agent is well versed in home construction is another matter. Some agents are very savvy about builders and home construction while others aren't at all knowledgeable about local builders or the new home design and building process.

Many real estate agents shy away from marketing and selling brand-new homes while others prosper in this specialty. If you decide to ask a real estate agent to help you select a builder, be sure to consult an agent who understands the realities of new home construction. 🏠

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