



Choosing the Right Remodeling Company

A guide to finding the best team to design and build a top notch quality project for you in a timely manner, within your budget and with minimal headaches

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	
.....	3
What Kind of Company to Look for	4
The Four Step Selection Process.....	5
Step 1:	
Prospecting.....	
.....	5
Step 2:	
Interviewing Design-Build Companies at Your Home.....	6
Step 3:	
Visit Their Offices and Showrooms.....	7
Step 4:	
Interviewing References.....	8
Decision	
Making.....	9
Appendix A	
The Design-Build Advantage.....	10
Appendix B	
Ensuring You Get a Fair Price.....	12
Appendix C	
The Questionnaire.....	14
Final	
Thoughts.....	
17	

Introduction

Remodeling and adding on are both major investments that will have a significant impact on your quality of life and your home so it is important to choose the right remodeling team.

While the process of choosing who you want to work with can be daunting, this guide will help you with that journey. Before you start, it is good to know generally what kind of company you are looking for. With that knowledge in hand, *the selection process can be broken down into four steps;*

1. **prospecting**, and checking out their websites
2. **meeting them at your home**, and interviewing them there
3. going to their offices to get to know **how they work and run the jobs**,
4. and then, for your most serious candidates, **talking to their clients to find out the inside scoop**.

You want to ask a lot of smart questions at each of these points. We have assembled some questions for each step of your journey. You can use them as a starting point. They will help ensure that you get at the most important criteria for selecting the best company for you.

Weigh your feedback. Positive and enthusiastic responses from past clients and a positive personal assessment based on a thorough interview and visit to their place of business provide a good basis for making a decision about a builder.

If you have done your homework well, **you will be choosing an excellent remodeling company, one who will build a top notch project for you in a timely manner, within your budget and with minimal headaches.** This is probably exactly what you are looking for and everything that you would want.

We wish you the best of luck as you embark on this adventure!



P.S. The Appendices:

We have added three appendices:

- A. 7 Reasons why Design Build makes sense.*
- B. The Best Path to a Fair Price*
- C. Questions to Ask, consolidated so you can print them out.*

What Kind of Company to Look For

Seek out someone who is excited to be in the business, with a **proven track record of providing stress-free, well orchestrated, home remodels**. This will help to ensure that renovating your home will be an enjoyable journey and result in an awesome finished project.

The remodeler is the person to whom you will delegate the responsibility of ensuring that the experience matches your expectations. You need **a good manager**. There is no business where teamwork is more important. They have to be able to pull together people and resources to get the project done for you in a timely fashion and to your satisfaction. You want **someone who will do everything possible to provide the least amount of disruption in your life**.

With a great remodeling company, each day of a remodeling project should be a day where your expectations are met. Each day your home should be one day closer to your dream and vision. Of course, you want **someone who has done a lot of beautiful projects**. A quick way to do so is to look their portfolio on their website.

Look for a remodeler with traditional skills of empathy and careful listening, one who will keep you informed; **a good communicator**.

Beware of contractors who say they are perfect, no one is. On remodeling projects, things often go wrong, problems come up. One of the differences between a good and bad contractor is how they address the problems as they arise. You want someone who can resolve them promptly, fairly and responsibly while keeping you in the loop.

Choose someone who is courteous, **steady and even-tempered**. Select a company who will be around tomorrow to service their work.

The Four Step Selection Process

Once you know the kind of company you are looking for, it helps to break the task down to a four step process.

- *First, prospect for candidates.*
- *Interview remodeling companies at your home.*
- *Visit their offices/showrooms to find out more about how they run their jobs.*
- *Then call former and current customers and ask them about their experience.*

At the end of this process, you should be able to make a confident decision.

Step 1: Prospecting

Ask around. Start your search by talking with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who have recently completed remodeling projects or had additions put onto their homes. Personal referrals are a great source for finding qualified service providers.

You are looking for remodeling companies who design and build the kind of work you have in mind and have a reputation for quality and integrity. One measure of a good company is that homeowners use them repeatedly. Seek out companies who have a high percentage of repeat and referral clients.

With a few recommendations in hand you are one step closer to success. Check them out on the web - looking closely at their websites is a great way to get to know them quickly. Check out their portfolios and get a sense for the kind of company they are. Then, once you meet them, they will feel like old friends!

Advice Passed on — Words of wisdom

“People shop for cars more carefully than contractors,” said Mario Barbuto, who has been a general contractor for the last 25 years in the New York area.

Expect a contractor to be too busy to start right away. “The best folks are the busy ones,” says Cannon Christian, president of Renovation Realty in San Diego, which remodels homes before they’re sold.

Choose the right contractor for the right project. Someone who did a good job tiling your neighbor’s bathroom isn’t necessarily the right person to build an addition to your home. You want to find a company that routinely does the kind of project you want done. “You don’t want them to use you as a guinea pig,” says Angie Hicks.

“Listen to the ways the contractor and the subcontractors, like the plumbers and electricians, interact. My friend Amy had four different contractors come with their subcontractors to bid on a major renovation. Listening to them talk together, I got a sense of how they respected each other and worked together,” she said. “In the end, we didn’t hire the cheapest guy, but the one I thought was the smartest and most creative and got along best with his subcontractors.” says Alina Tugend.



Step 2:

Interviewing Design-Build Companies at Your Home

Have the remodeling company out to your home.

Being prepared for this meeting with a list of questions to ask will make it much more effective for you. You are trying to find a technically strong remodeler who will accept responsibility for the success of your project. Here are some suggestions:

Construction Expertise

- Do they have a stellar record of successfully completing projects such as yours on time, to budget, to a high level of quality?
- Do they commit to stay on your job from start until completion?
- Do they maintain long-term relationships with tradespeople?
- Do they have personable staff with whom you can develop a positive rapport for what may be many weeks or months in your own home?
- Do they take responsibility for communication, scheduling and coordination of all parties?
- Do they take responsibility for feasibility, getting permits, and interfacing with public officials?

Customer Service and Communication

- Do they respond promptly to your inquiries?
- Do they emphasize service before, during, and after the project?
- Do they respond promptly to any call backs after completion? Quickly resolve any issues?
- Do they have a permanent office, routine, and emergency telephone numbers?
- Do they stand behind their work? How long have they been around?
- Do they have a strong warranty? What is covered and what is not?
- How do they handle weekend emergencies? What is their back up system?
- What is the geographical radius of their jobs?

(Smaller radius is more efficient = more time on the job, less time driving)

Design Expertise

- Do they have design staff that are experienced and talented?
- Do they honestly respond to your design ideas? Not everything is feasible!
- Do they have staff with the knowledge and talent to assist you with selections of materials and products for your project?

Business Management

- Do they provide comprehensive contract documentation including detailed drawings?
- Do they put all agreements (including change orders) in writing to preclude any misunderstandings?
- Do they have up-to-date licensing, liability, and workman's compensation insurance?

Step 3:

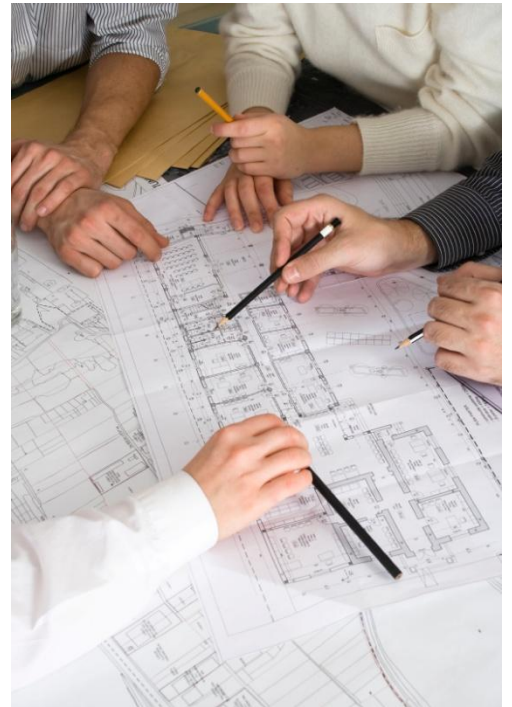
Visit Their Offices and Showrooms

After they come out to see you, invite yourself in to see their offices and showrooms.

By seeing who is there and what they are doing, you can find out more about how they operate and how they will run your job. H
How are they organized? How do they track things?
What is their system for ensuring jobs stay on track and for following up?

You might ask these questions:

- How do they organize themselves and their projects?
- Do they have a showroom?
- Are they dealers for certain products which enable them to get discounts that they will pass on to you?
- How broad is their selection of products?
- Can they match what you have in your home?
- Where do they get their design inspirations?
- Can they show you in 3D how something will look?
- What kinds of 3D drawings do they produce?
- How detailed are their construction drawings?
- What is their project lifecycle?
- When you sign up for "Design", do they block out time for you in the production schedule?
- Do they track milestone dates for jobs and what happens if they fall behind?
- How do they keep that process on track?
- How do they manage your job? Is there a schedule?
- How frequently is it updated?
- What reporting comes back from the field?
- What is the management reporting system?
- Is the completion date that you are promised realistic?
- What does the contractor do so that you are not interrupted with detailed questions on a daily basis that could have been answered up front?



Have a Detailed Contract in Place Before any Work Begins

A good construction contract will cover costs, brands of items being installed, start and finish dates, and the complete set of drawings being used, along with written specifications. A contract can never have too much detail. If a specific item hasn't been agreed upon yet, the contract can include allowances instead, such as \$2500 for a front door. The contract spells out everything. "A contract is really an expectation setting, right down to what color the outlet plates are," Clark Construction's Gary Clark comments. "It's all about setting expectations. When everything is agreed upon upfront, then there are no surprises."

Step 4:

Interviewing References

After you've got to know them and feel comfortable with them, it's a good idea to go to the next step. People who have had your candidate do work in their homes are the experts about their capabilities.

In addition to repeating some of the same questions you posed directly to the remodeler, you can probe a bit deeper to learn more. You might ask these questions.

OVERALL

- Overall, how satisfied are you with the company?
- Would you use them again?
- Had you used other companies previously? How did they compare?
- Did they complete the job on or ahead of promised date?
- Did the quality of the finished project meet or exceed your expectations?
- How was the value added to your home and lifestyle vs. cost of the project?
- What changes would you make if you did the job again?
- How was the team's enthusiasm level?

DESIGN

- Did they offer creative or better ideas to enhance your project?
- How was the designer's availability? Listening skills?
- What tools did they use to show you how your project would look?
- Were they effective communicators?
- Were they kept informed of major changes to the estimated project costs as the design evolved?
- Was the scope of work detailed, discussed, and given to the clients in a written document?

SELECTIONS PHASE

- Was there a satisfactory range of products for you to be able to choose from?
- Was the quality of product lines offered satisfactory?
- Did they have a showroom and was going there useful for you?

PRODUCTION PHASE

- Did they provide a construction schedule?
- Did they show up for work every day as promised?
- Was there a Project Supervisor and was he available to you?
- Did he keep you informed and address any of your concerns?
- Were there any surprises and how were they addressed?
- Did they have respect for your family living in the space?
- How did they do at protecting your home and property?
- Were they responsive to questions and requests?
- Did they have this schedule on-line, so that you could see when it was changed?
- Did you know what was going to be happening at your home each day?
- Did they keep the jobsite neat?
- How were the tradespeople's competency and personality?
- Was there appropriate and timely problem resolution if an issue arose during production?
- How did they respond to any call backs after completion?
- How quickly and satisfactorily were those issues resolved?
- What kind of after care or warranty work did they provide?

Think Locally

Area contractors who have been in business for a long time are usually reliable and safe bets for projects. If they didn't do good work in your community, they wouldn't still be around. "I always say shopping locally is the best approach," LaPelusa says. "The company is involved in the community, the workers are probably local, and if you have a problem later, a local contractor is going to be on top of it."

Our interviewers found that when clients allocate money to deal with "unexpected costs due to concealed obstacles, that they spend this already allocated money on "while you're at it" items.

Decision Time!

Now that you have done your homework you should be easily able to select your Design-Build company.

The Next Step

Then you are ready to go the next step; your remodeler will work with you to document the high level objectives for your project. Budgetary considerations will be reviewed and documented as well to guide the development of designs that suit both your objectives and your pocketbook.

Once those guidelines and project goals are firmed up, the design team is "off to the races" and the fun begins!

Appendix A

The Design-Build Advantage

7 Reasons to go with Design-Build

Design-Build simply means you use the same firm to design your remodel and then build it for you. It's a one-team approach that produces beautiful results and happy clients. Here's why.

Executive Summary:

Greater efficiency saves you time and money. You profit from the synergy and consistency of service that comes from working directly with one company that's designing and building your project. You get "early news about costs", avoiding big surprises once designs are done. You get the biggest bang for the buck, because the design team applies their practical experience and knowledge of historical job costs to optimize your investment.

7 Reasons to go with Design-Build

1. Great designs

Designers who work in Design-Build are not only skilled at design they are also experts in balancing design with cost. Having one eye focused on your overall budget makes our designers more responsive to your needs and ultimately better equipped to deliver your dream house.

2. Single source accountability

Design-Build gives you single source accountability. It's convenient, and it provides consistency. When the right hand knows what the left hand is doing, there are less misunderstood intentions, reduced conflict, lower construction costs, and the whole process takes less time.

3. Continuity and a seamless transition from design to construction

A Design-Build firm is involved from start to finish, which adds an inherent efficiency. The chance for things to fall through the cracks is greatly diminished. There's greater continuity between the vision of the design and the realities of construction than there otherwise would be. It helps that there's no handoff between the two, making the transition seamless.

4. Design-Build gives you a stronger working relationship

If you choose Design-Build it's probably because you like to have a good collaborative relationship with the professionals you hire. You're the kind of homeowner that cares deeply about their dream house and wants to enjoy the experience of shaping it. As a Design-Build firm, we're on that journey with you from beginning to end.

5. You'll pay exactly what you want

Through clear communication, the budget is defined early on and it guides the entire project. Early knowledge of costs avoids the disappointment of doing a design, costing it out only to find out that the project is well beyond what you are willing to spend. Great design – build companies will discuss your budget very early on and use this to guide the entire project. There's no point looking a \$100K design in front of you if you have only \$50K. It can be very disappointing. Find a company who will make the absolute best out of what you want to spend.

6. You'll get what your heart is set on

Design-Build gets any showstoppers out of the way up front. They take the time early on to do "feasibility" - researching town records to ensure that the work can be executed within the parameters of local codes and ordinances. This reduces the possibility of unforeseen problems, expenses, or holdups later. During the time period where you are making material selections with your designer, great design-build

Appendix A (Con't)

The Design-Build Advantage

7 Reasons to go with Design-Build

companies will have their estimator visit your home with their trade partners. Involving estimating early, with their experienced but critical eye, helps to ensure that required ancillary work is included, and minimize unforeseeable obstacles.

7. Design-Build Saves You Time

Your project is scheduled into the construction schedule at the start of the design phase, minimizing the lag between design and construction start. More time is saved by eliminating iterative redesign and bidding because the value of various design alternatives is thoroughly considered at each decision point in the design process. Additionally, this increases the probability that the final design will meet the full set of your expectations, design objectives and the targeted budget.

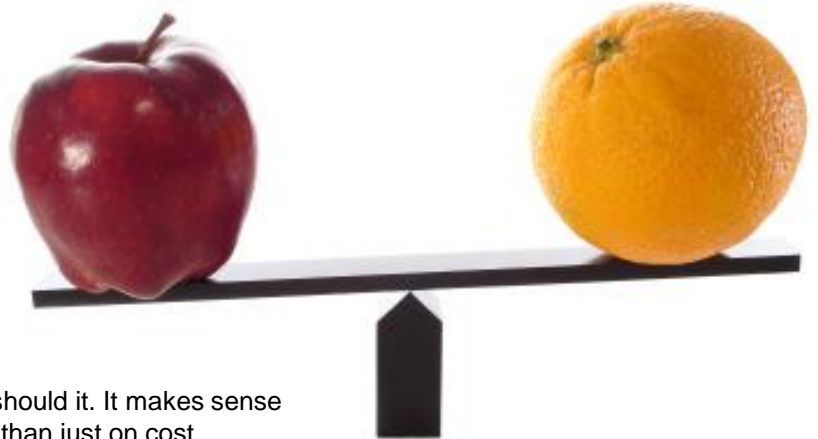
Appendix B

How To Ensure You Get A Fair Price:

Is Competitive Bidding smart?

The best way to get a fair price is to find a high quality company that you want to work with, that can understand your budgetary requirements and has the talent and experience to be able to work within them.

The issue with competitive bidding for remodeling work because you may be comparing apples and oranges. Bids, by themselves are often not the best measuring stick. The ability to stay on budget, the quality of craftsmanship, timeliness, quality of materials, level of service, attention to detail, and warranty can differ significantly.



Concerns with Competitive Bidding

Remodeling quality never runs dirt cheap nor should it. It makes sense to base your selection on **overall value** rather than just on cost alone. Spending a little less and getting to an end product that you are less than thrilled with is no bargain, particularly if that route is stressful, random, and out of control. It's said that "the bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of a low price is forgotten." You don't want to set yourself up for that.

When you are shopping for a car, it may make sense to get bids because you can be certain that you are comparing the same product. You can ask three different dealers to price a specific make and model automobile. you can see what it looks like and take a test-drive to see how it performs on the road. But when you have an addition or a remodeling project in mind, there are no clear specifications. With a building project, you're purchasing a "design concept" and you don't see the finished project until well after the contract is signed.

There may be several design solutions of different complexity, including different features, levels of finishes, and levels of detailing. Due to the incomplete or vague scope of work, unbeknownst to you, one company may bid the Chevette level project and another the Lexus level project. All you get is an overall price, and maybe a big surprise later when you discover what it did or did not include.

Low bids may also result from gross estimating errors. You want someone who knows what they are doing. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is! You don't want someone who disappears under cover of night in the middle of the project when they come to the realization that they grossly underbid your project and don't have the money to finish it.

Other reasons for inappropriately low bids may be differing levels of service, miscommunications about your expectations of quality, shoddy materials, poor workmanship, slow production, inadequate safety precautions, lack of insurance and licensing, and no warranty service from here-today gone-tomorrow operators.

Appendix B (Con't)

How To Ensure You Get A Fair Price:

Is Competitive Bidding smart?

But what is the path to a fair price?

Once you have some design objectives, you can meet with several companies to get a sense for a budget range for your desired project.

Don't make the mistake of discarding the high and low contractors; feeling that picking the "middle" one minimizes the risk. A price-based selection is not the best way to hire a remodeling company? The "middle price" company is not necessarily the company who will build the best quality project for the "best" price?

Find a strong team you want to work with, let them know what you want to do, and what your range is, and they will be able to work with you to meet both your design objectives and your budgetary goals.



There is hardly anything in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper, and the people who consider price only are this man's lawful prey. It is unwise to pay too little. When you pay too much, you lose a little money - that is all. When you pay too little, you sometimes lose everything, because the thing you bought was incapable of doing the thing it was bought to do. The common law of business balance prohibits paying a little and getting a lot - it can't be done.

If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is wise to add something for the risk you run. And if you do that, you will have enough to pay for something better." - John Raskin

Appendix C

The Questionnaire

Questions to Ask Remodeling Companies

Questions to Ask At Your Home

Construction Expertise

- Do they have a stellar record of successfully completing projects such as yours on time, to budget, to a high level of quality?
- Do they commit to stay on your job from start until completion?
- Do they maintain long-term relationships with trades people?
- Do they have personable staff with whom you can develop a positive rapport for what may be many weeks or months in your own home?
- Do they take responsibility for communication, scheduling and coordination of all parties?
- Do they take responsibility for feasibility, getting permits, and interfacing with public officials?

Customer Service and Communication

- Do they respond promptly to your inquiries?
- Do they emphasize service before, during, and after the project?
- Do they respond promptly to any call backs after completion? Quickly resolve any issues?
- Do they have a permanent office, routine, and emergency telephone numbers?
- Do they stand behind their work? How long have they been around?
- Do they have a strong warranty? What is covered and what is not?
- How do they handle weekend emergencies? What is their back up system?
- What is the geographical radius of their jobs? (Smaller radius is more efficient = more time on the job, less time driving)

Design Expertise

- Do they have design staff that are experienced and talented?
- Do they honestly respond to your design ideas? Not everything is feasible!
- Do they have staff with the knowledge and talent to assist you with selections of materials and products for your project?

Business Management

- Do they provide comprehensive contract documentation including detailed drawings?
- Do they put all agreements (including change orders) in writing to preclude any misunderstandings?
- Do they have up-to-date licensing, liability, and workman's compensation insurance?

Appendix C (Con't)

The Questionnaire

Questions to Ask Remodeling Companies

Questions to ask the Remodeler at their Office and Showroom

- How do they organize themselves and their projects?
- Do they have a showroom?
- Are they dealers for certain products which enable them to get discounts that they will pass on to you?
- How broad is their selection of products? Can they match what you have in your home?
- Where do they get their design inspirations?
- Can they show you in 3D how something will look?
- What kinds of 3D drawings do they produce?
- How detailed are their construction drawings?
- What is their project lifecycle?
- When you sign up for "Design", do they block out time for you in the production schedule?
- Do they track milestone dates for jobs and what happens if they fall behind?
- How do they keep that process on track?
- How do they manage your job? Is there a schedule?
- How frequently is it updated?
- What reporting comes back from the field?
- What is the management reporting system?
- Is the completion date that you are promised realistic?
- What does the contractor do so that you are not interrupted with detailed questions on a daily basis that could have been answered up front?

Appendix C (Con't)

The Questionnaire

Questions to Ask Remodeling Companies

Questions to Ask The Company's Clients

OVERALL

- Overall, how satisfied are you with the company?
- Would you use them again?
- Had you used other companies previously? How did they compare?
- Did they complete the job on or ahead of promised date?
- Did the quality of the finished project meet or exceed your expectations?
- How was the value added to your home and lifestyle vs. cost of the project?
- What changes would you make if you did the job again?
- How was the team's enthusiasm level?

DESIGN

- Did they offer creative or better ideas to enhance your project?
- How was the designer's availability? Listening skills?
- What tools did they use to show you how your project would look?
- Were they effective communicators?
- Were they kept informed of major changes to the estimated project costs as the design evolved?
- Was the scope of work detailed, discussed, and given to the clients in a written document?

SELECTIONS PHASE

- Was there a satisfactory range of products for you to be able to choose from?
- Was the quality of product lines offered satisfactory?
- Did they have a showroom and was going there useful for you?

PRODUCTION PHASE

- Did they provide a construction schedule?
- Did they show up for work every day as promised?
- Was there a Project Supervisor and was he available to you?
- Did he keep you informed and address any of your concerns?
- Were there any surprises and how were they addressed?
- Did they have respect for your family living in the space?
- How did they do at protecting your home and property?
- Were they responsive to questions and requests?
- Did they have this schedule on-line, so that you could see when it was changed?
- Did you know what was going to be happening at your home each day?
- Did they keep the jobsite neat?
- How were the tradespeople's competency and personality?
- Was there appropriate and timely problem resolution if an issue arose during production?
- How did they respond to any call backs after completion?
- How quickly and satisfactorily were those issues resolved?
- What kind of after care or warranty work did they provide?

Final Thoughts...

In summary, the best way to find the right contractor for you...

1. Ask around.

Find qualified companies **with a track record of successful projects;**

- *who accept responsibility for the actions of their company*
- *who present solutions, not excuses, when a problem arises*
- *who understand every aspect of your project; from meeting your budget and design objectives to problem solving during construction*
- *who have the expertise in bringing a job to a speedy close*
- *who have the know-how to coordinate and orchestrate the utmost of results from numerous trade contractors and countless suppliers*

2. Go to the place where they conduct their business.

After they come out to see you, invite yourself in to see the place they work out of - their offices and showroom. You can learn so much about them during this visit. By seeing who is there and what they are doing, you can find out more about how they operate and how they will run your job. Are they organized? How do they track things? What is their system for ensuring jobs stay on track and for following up on loose ends?

3. Ask past clients key questions!

If the remodeling company passes your initial interview and you are happy with what you learned about them by visiting their base of operations, ask for a list of references.

After you talk to some past clients, you may also wish to talk to the clients who are in the midst of a remodeling project and ask them the same above questions.

4. Weigh your feedback.

Positive and enthusiastic responses from past clients and a positive personal assessment based on a thorough interview and visit to their place of business provide a good basis for making a decision about a builder.

If you do your homework well, you will be able to easily choose an excellent remodeling company, one who will build a top notch project for you in a timely manner, within your budget and with a minimum of headaches.

Enjoy the journey to a beautiful new project for your home.