How to Choose a Reputable Contractor

Asking the right questions and knowing what to look for in a good contractor can make the difference between a successful renovation and a disaster. The checklist below can help ensure you make the right choice.

- [ ] Know what you want before you get estimates. Start with a plan and some ideas. You'll get a more accurate estimate if you can be very specific in what you want done and the materials you would like to use to make it happen.
- [ ] Ask friends, relatives and co-workers for references. People in your neighbourhood who have done similar projects are your best sources. If you know people in the building trades, ask them, too. Employees of local hardware stores may also be able to provide referrals.
- [ ] Interview at least 3 contractors, even if it's just over the phone at first. You will get a pretty good feel if that person is suitable for you to work with. When you decide who you want to get estimates from, compare bids and make sure each one includes the same materials and the same tasks, so you're comparing apples and apples.
- [ ] Expect a contractor to be too busy to start right away. The best folks are the busy ones.
- [ ] Ask what work will be done by the contractor's employees and what work will be done by subcontractors. Ask for an employee list to make sure the contractor really has the employees he says he does and won't be using casual labour hired off the street.
- [ ] Choose the right contractor for the right project. Someone who did a good job tiling your neighbour's bathroom isn't necessarily the right person to build an addition to your home.
- [ ] Check licenses, WSIB compliance and ensure they have at least $2,000,000 liability insurance. If you are having any electrical work done, ensure they are a Licensed Electrical Contractor registered with the Electrical Safety Authority
- [ ] Always check the references that the contractor gives you. Call them and even ask if you can visit their home to see the work that was completed.
- [ ] Sign a detailed contract and ensure you read it carefully.
- [ ] DO NOT pay more than a 10% deposit up front before work actually begins on site. The only exception to this is for kitchen cabinets. Normally 50% of the cost of the cabinets will be required prior to the start of manufacturing
- [ ] Negotiate ground rules. Discuss what hours the contractor can work at your home, what kind of notice you'll get, what bathroom the workers will use and what will be cleaned up at the end of every workday.
- [ ] Don't make the final payment until the job is 100 percent complete. Contractors are notorious for finishing most of the job and then moving on before they get to the final details.

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