



Designer FYI

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Choosing and working with a contractor



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When planning a remodel, you can save a lot of time, trouble and money down the road if you put some effort into selecting the right contractor. If you use an architect or designer, find a contractor who will work well as part of a team. Often that means using a contractor your architect or designer has worked with before.

CHECKING UP

If you are not working with a design professional, then choosing a contractor becomes more time consuming. Contact the Contractor's State License Board to confirm that the contractor's license is still valid and to check for any complaints. In addition, you will need to see the contractor's work in person — often pictures are not worth a thousand words. Interview previous clients to find out if anything went wrong during construction and how the situation was handled.

Ask specific questions, not just "Did you like him/her?" or "Did he/she do a good job?" A previous client may not want to criticize the contractor because, in the end, he or she was happy with the results. But you have to live through the entire process, so be diligent in your research.

Choose a contractor who is suited to the type of job you're doing. If you are working with a large contracting firm, meet the person who will be supervising your job day to day, not just the head of the firm. You'll practically be living with this person, so it's essential that you feel comfortable.

STAYING INFORMED

Once you've hired a contractor, it's a good idea to keep your design professional involved. This may add to the expense, but it provides essential oversight. Use your designer as a go-between. He or she knows what to expect, and contractors want to keep designers happy because they refer a great deal of work.

Once you have your team together, try to stay a step removed. You can rely on the architect to set quality-control standards and to intervene if a job is not done properly. This helps keep your relationship with the contractor smooth.

The architect or designer can include regular site visits as part of the fee, or you can ask to be billed hourly for supervision when you need it, which is often more cost effective.

If you are not living in your home during the renovation, visit the site regularly. Stop by daily or every few days. Set aside time to go over your concerns with the contractor. The beginning or end of the day is usually best. Be sure they have your work number and try to be available when decisions need to be made or problems resolved.

SIMPLE CIVILITIES

Buying lunch for everyone once in a while, providing sodas, letting workers use the bathroom and phone, and offering praise, not just complaints, are simple civilities that can go a long way toward keeping workers happy on the job.

Of course, it's a fine line between staying on top of it and becoming intrusive. An old contractor's joke says that "the job will cost 20 percent more if you watch and 50 percent more if you help."

Happy remodeling! 📌