

# 9 Point Consumer's Remodeling & Construction Protection Guide

**How To Avoid The 3 Biggest Problems  
With Home Remodelers & Contractors**

Dear Homeowner,

If you're thinking about remodeling your kitchen or bathrooms, adding on a new room, or even building a new home from the ground up, you've probably heard the horror stories from friends about the endless delays (who wants to eat fast food forever?), custom cabinets that don't fit, and outrageous hidden fees tacked onto the initial quote.

### **3 Biggest Problems With Home Remodelers And Contractors**

Recent industry research and our own customer surveys indicate that there are 3 major concerns that most homeowners have before launching into a home remodeling or new construction project:

- (1) Getting charged more than originally quoted.*
- (2) Not completing the project on time as promised.*
- (3) Not getting the job done right.*

Unless you're an expert in the industry, how do you know what steps to take when hiring a construction and remodeling company to do your job? Well, here's some powerful information to use while you're shopping around.

### **Things You Need To Know Before You Make Any Remodeling Or Home Construction Decisions**

In this report you'll find some helpful tips and questions to ask before you make any commitments about which contractor to work with. It will also help you determine what things are most important to you before you launch off into any remodeling or construction project.

Please take the time to read through this information to protect yourself. Remodeling and construction projects all too often end up totally frustrating and disappointing homeowners because they simply weren't aware of all the potential pitfalls before they signed on the dotted line.

### **Whose Fault Is It When Problems Occur During A Home Remodel Or Construction Job?**

I say it's the contractor's fault. We realize that committing to this kind of project is a big step for you. We also know that you are trying to live your life, not trying to figure out how our industry works. That's why we've dedicated ourselves to overcoming every problem you might face when trying to decide on the best contractor and choosing the right products for your home.

What you DON'T know could literally cost you thousands of dollars. I say it shouldn't and doesn't have to happen. This report will be your guide to getting that dream remodel or new home that *you want and deserve!*

Sincerely,

Linda Smith  
President – ABC Company

## 9 Tips To Help You Avoid Being Hassled Over Schedule Slippages, Frustrated With Cost Overruns, And Disappointed With The Results

### 1. Remodeling Design Expertise – *Should you use an experienced Interior Designer or a part-time Decorator?*

Sad to say, there are really no standards in the industry for designers – most are interior decorators, carpenters, or just people who learned how to use design software. At the very least, you should insist on working with someone who has the **formal technical education and the necessary hands-on experience** to know what they're doing and to be able to offer options that will work for your situation based on their own personal expertise.

Ideally, you should locate a firm that has **Certified Interior Designers with college degrees**. They should all have at least several years of architectural design and space planning experience in designing projects from simple bathrooms to complete home remodels.

In addition, they should maintain their skills through continuing training and affiliation with recognized industry associations. Active memberships in organizations such as the NKBA (National Kitchen & Bath Association) and NARI (National Association of the Remodeling Industry) are good indications of experience levels and a commitment to continuing education in their field of expertise.

The design staff should be using the *latest in computer-based design tools*. **Chief Architect** is the latest program for creating realistic 3-D images for virtual walk-throughs of your remodel. A program called **20/20** is an example of state-of-the-art software for cabinet designs. And programs like **AutoCad** are used to turn the ideas that you and your designer come up with into actual detailed engineering drawings that ensure accuracy in the final product.

Ask your contractor what, if any, tools they use to create the designs and working drawings for your project so that you can visualize what your project will look like and you'll be assured of getting the results you want.

Sure, you can always find someone who will sketch out some “great” ideas about your new kitchen cabinets or bathroom update. The old saying, “Garbage In...Garbage Out” most definitely applies to the design phase of your remodeling project. So, if you really want to get that remodel of your dreams done right and looking great, find a contractor with the proper level of in-house design expertise along with the latest design tools.

## **2. New Construction Design Expertise –*How do you find the right person to design your new home or brand new addition?***

Clearly, having a professional do the actual design is desirable in most situations. For any major new construction, you'll need the experience and **know-how of a qualified Architect** to translate your ideas and needs into something that will work for you. In addition, many experienced Architects will be able to offer suggestions that could open up new possibilities while you're going through the "developing the dream" phase of your project.

The Architect should have a college degree in architecture and at least several years of experience working on the type of home-design project you have in mind. They should be active in recognized industry associations such as The American Institute of Architects (AIA), North American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and The International Conference of Building Officials.

In addition, check to see that they use the latest in computer-aided design systems. **State-of-the-art software programs** should provide your Architect the tools to create 3-dimensional designs for your review and approval – products like **Chief Architect** are the best and will give you photo-realistic images that allow you to do a "virtual walk-through" of your "new" home or room addition.

Ask your contractor for a demonstration so you'll know they have the expertise to help you create what you really want, and so that you can **see what it will actually look like** when it's done.

There are lots of qualified Architects in the industry today. However, many independent professionals have difficulty coordinating their plans and ideas with contractors who will actually be responsible for building what they've designed. Too often, this lack of communication ends up in disappointment for the homeowner – either running way over budget, or even worse...nothing ever happens. Amazingly, a recent survey indicates that over 73% of architectural designs completed and paid for by the client never actually get built at all!!

The best option is to work with a firm that has their own **in-house Staff Architect with the right technical education, experience, and qualifications** for your new construction project. This will eliminate the coordination problems and hassles associated in trying to manage the communication issues between your designer and your contractor.

## **3. Budget Sensitivity – *Do you like getting really excited about something...then be told you can't afford it?***

For starters, don't let your designer "wing it" and get by with something they've sketched out or is "in their head." There should be a logical process they go through to get a detailed

understanding of your specific needs and requirements, then a method to tie that to a realistic budget so that you know you're in the ballpark from the beginning.

Your contractor should hold a design review meeting with you after your initial ideas are defined to the point that some numbers can be determined. Sometimes, our desires and our actual budgets can get way out of whack; however, a good contractor can ***work with your needs and desires to develop solutions*** that will meet (and often exceed!) your expectations.

Before you get too far into the process, make sure your contractor is offering you all the available options that meet your budget requirements. If it seems like they're just throwing out numbers and not offering to help you work through any alternative solutions, then you should stop, drop, and roll right on out of their office.

By the end of this initial phase, you should **know and understand what the different possibilities are for you** and your situation. You should be the one making the final decisions based on complete information about all the choices available to you.

Bottom line – **you should be in control** of your budget, not the contractor.

#### **4. Project Management – *What kind of systems and procedures will insure you get what you want when you want it?***

There are several things that should be provided by your contractor before making any decisions.

First of all, they should have in place some sort of **project management system** that includes key milestones and delivery requirements before they start work. Understanding and properly documenting the project flow from beginning to end is crucial for timely completion of any job, regardless of the size or complexity.

Experience certainly counts in properly setting up and managing a construction or remodeling project – nothing can truly replace it. There are literally hundreds or thousands of discrete steps that must be identified and scheduled in order for any project to flow smoothly.

The best contractors have invested in the **latest technology and tools** to translate this expertise into a coordinated project plan. Sophisticated computer-based programs such as **American Contractor** are extremely helpful because they integrate all the steps involved in the process into a totally coordinated project schedule. Every detail is organized, from initial design through scheduling, purchasing, inventory tracking, dispatching, and warranty management.

Today, in the construction and remodeling industry, those contractors that are using the latest technology tools available will typically have the greatest success at delivering the remodeling or construction job that you want, when you want it.

Check out what tools and capabilities your contractor uses to properly manage and control their projects. Ask for examples of what it looks like and how they use these tools. Lack of current technology usually means they are still flying by the “seat of their pants” – and your project will probably suffer for it.

## **5. Qualifications & Expertise – *Would you like your contractor to use experienced craftsmen to do your installation, or those scary guys they picked up at the corner that morning?***

Remember all the horror stories you heard from friends and neighbors about their remodeling and construction projects? Well, how do you know if your contractor’s installation crews are any good?

Here’s a quick checklist of minimum qualifications you should require from your contractor regarding the craftsmen they will use for your project:

1. The contractor should have a set of stringent **employment screening and performance standards** tests, and all employees should be required to pass these tests and adhere to them as a condition of employment. Not every contractor has employment requirements – ask them if they do and request a copy of their standards.
2. The contractor should have a **written policy or code of conduct** regarding actions of their employees and subcontractors. A zero tolerance policy is something you should require in writing from your contractor to prevent any nonsense from their crews.
3. The contractor should use only those subcontractors or specialty contractors that are **licensed, bonded, and fully insured; this must include Worker’s Compensation and General Liability policies.**

Some unique and very useful services that the best contractors provide include things like *“How to Survive During A Remodel”* to make sure your valuables are properly removed or stored so that they won’t be damaged during construction. Also, daily cleanup and inspection services can make the process of remodeling so much more pleasant without your dealing with unnecessary clutter.

In addition, installers **experienced in a wide range of projects** from standard upgrades to multimillion dollar projects indicate that they have probably seen and done just about every kind of remodeling and construction job imaginable. This will insure that you will get those customized finishing touches for YOUR project that YOU want, and not just a cookie-cutter approach because that’s all the contractor’s crew has ever done.

Ask for pictures or examples of some of the work that they’ve done for different types of projects -- large and small. If they’re proud of their work, they’ll be happy to show you (and, you might get some really good ideas for your project!)

## **6. Organization & Communication – *Do you get really nervous when someone tells you not to worry; they’ll let you know when everything’s finished?***

Most homeowners either don’t have the time or don’t have the experience to properly organize and manage a remodel or construction project. After all, that’s why you’re looking around for someone to do this for you, isn’t it? You want somebody to come in and take responsibility to insure you get what you want and what you’re paying for so you don’t have to worry about all the details.

On the other hand, most homeowners want to stay plugged in to what’s going on with their project. What’s important in getting the results you want is a communication process both within the contractor’s company and between you and your contractor during the installation.

The key to any successful project is the organization – how people and groups are set up and managed, and the implementation of control procedures to make sure the project is proceeding as planned.

Roughly 75-80% of all contractors in the U.S. today are single person or “mom-and-pop” operations. Some are good at their crafts, but poor at organizing and managing an effective crew. They have to rely on a heavy dose of subcontractors to get their jobs done. And, many subcontractors frankly have an attitude of just “getting the job over with” and they assume no accountability once their part of the project is done – they’re off to the next project.

Your contractor should have *procedures set up to organize people into logical teams* to manage your project. Many firms have all the necessary people in place with the right skills, but they tend to have poor coordination among them.

Ask the contractor how they organize and manage their project teams and installation crews. Look for indications that they actually create result-driven “teams” within their organization.

Ideally, your contractor should also have a process to insure that the “right hand knows what the left hand is doing” at all times. Grouping of all the key people into coordinated teams with assigned communication procedures is essential to an effective project flow.

To ensure effective communication and coordination with their clients, some top firms actually have the homeowner acknowledge and initial when each major item on the checklist is completed. This insures they are doing their job to keep their client informed, and that the client knows exactly where they are on the project timeline.

Ask your contractor how they organize their staff and crews, and if they have any documentation to demonstrate these procedures. ***Ask to see copies of their checklists and organizational processes.***

If there aren't any, then it's probably going to be a crapshoot getting your job done right the first time.

## **7. Accountability – *If you have questions or problems, would you prefer making 6 phone calls... or only 1?***

If you're doing a complete remodel, you'll most likely be replacing just about everything. If it's a new home, then everything will be new.

For a remodel, you're probably going to be ordering new custom cabinetry along with new tile and maybe flooring. New lighting arrangements and fixtures will be part of the discussion and final decision. Before long, you're dealing with a half-dozen vendors or more to get everything you need. This is where a **one-stop-source** can make a big difference.

Working with a *design/build/remodeling firm that offers a full range of products and services* to do your entire project will obviously simplify your effort in getting the results you want. Most homeowners don't realize that, for example, there are over 70,000 identifiable parts that go into constructing a new home; for a typical kitchen or bath remodel, there are 209 decisions that have to be made in each room.

**Suggestion:** Try to find a firm that will take FULL OWNERSHIP in handling all aspects of your project—before, during, AND after completion.

Find out how to get in touch with someone if you have a question or concern. There are even firms that provide **24/7 accessibility** to a staff person who can take responsibility to get you an answer or solve a problem right away. Ask your contractor if they provide this service.

Also, make sure you understand what kind of problem resolution process your contractor has. Have them describe what the *procedures are for handling any complaints or concerns* you might have before, during, and after the project is completed. Ask about who to contact, phone numbers, email addresses, backup contacts, and availability throughout the day and night.

If they don't offer this information, or don't have a clear procedure to get problems resolved, then you'll be on your own throughout the entire project to make sure you're satisfied with the end result.

## **8. Guarantees & Warranties – *How would you like to pay surprise hidden charges halfway through the project?***

How many times have you heard about people getting nicked-and-dimed for items they thought were included in their remodel or new addition? Or perhaps the homeowner didn't even think about certain items before the project got started? These problems are almost

always the fault of the contractor—either by not covering all the options available to you, or not having a checklist to make sure everything gets discussed and agreed-to up front.

A detailed quote in writing that includes line item pricing for all materials and workmanship should be offered by your contractor. This document should cover everything required to properly finish your project to your satisfaction. You should check to make sure it matches up exactly with the product and configuration decisions you and your professional designer worked out. And, most importantly, it should guarantee pricing for the entire project.

In addition, your contractor should stand behind their work. Some may offer limited warranties on materials and workmanship – most offer one-year on labor only.

The top firms will offer a minimum of a one-year **material and labor** warrantee. They will even have you call them first about any problems (even after your project is completed and warrantee expired!) so you don't get the run-around from all the different service departments for all the different product vendors. If they do offer this service, then you can feel confident that they offer only quality materials and are certain that their workmanship will stand the test of time

If they don't extend this type of guarantee, that response will usually tell you all you need to know about what you should expect from their work and product quality.

## **9. Final Payment Holdbacks – *Would you feel OK about paying for everything before you know you got what you wanted?***

Many contractors promise to deliver on commitments and claim to be motivated by satisfying their clients. It would seem to make sense that they should want to back that up with a rock-solid guarantee.

Normally, you'll make an initial payment to your contractor to get everything ordered and get the project started. There will usually be progress payments as the project draws toward completion. Then, when the project's finished, most firms want the full balance paid immediately. Now, at that point you may feel that you're happy with the results, *but how can you be sure?*

One way is to arrange for final payment only after you've had a chance to “test drive” your new remodel or construction project. This approach provides an “incentive” for the contractor to do the job right the first time.

If your contractor agrees to this type of arrangement, it's a good indicator that they have confidence in the quality of their work. If they offer this to you as part of their standard agreement, that's even better! That means they've already made that commitment to excellence as a company policy, and you can feel confident that they aren't just “giving in” to your request in order to get your business.

Taking some time after the project is finished to live in and actually use your newly updated or remodeled home for awhile before you make your final payment is a great way to ensure that you've gotten the results YOU want and deserve!

***If you'd like to learn more about these tips,  
just give us a call.***

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*We'll be happy to discuss these and any other items that might be of concern to you about getting the results you want from your home remodeling or construction project.*

**Be sure to ask about your FREE in-home project consultation, or come by our showroom and check out our complete line of new and traditional cabinetry, flooring, countertops, lighting, fixtures, and other products for your home.**

**At last count, we have over 701, 978 different items to choose from!**