



3 Steps to Selecting a Remodeling Professional:

Step One: Do Your Research

Finding a qualified, professional remodeling contractor need not be a difficult or unpleasant task. By following these basic guidelines, you will not only make the selection process easier, but you will also be more prepared to make an informed decision that best suits your needs.

1. Start your home improvement project by selecting a professional, reliable remodeling contractor who is a member in good standing with NARI Metro DC. The NARI logo is the mark of a professional.
2. Employ a contractor with an established business in your local area. As tax-paying members of your local community, they are compelled to perform satisfactory work for local homeowners in order for their business to survive.
3. Always be sure that you do business with a company properly licensed to work in your area. Many states or local jurisdictions, but not all, require contractors to be licensed. Contact your state or local licensing agencies to ensure the contractor meets all requirements. Ask the remodeling contractor for a current copy of their license.
4. Ask to see a copy of the remodeling contractor's certificate of insurance or the name of his or her insurance agency to verify coverage. Most states require a contractor to carry worker's compensation, property damage and personal liability insurance. Make sure the contractor's insurance coverage meets all the minimum requirements.
5. Check with the state's Consumer Affairs Office and the Better Business Bureau to ensure there are no outstanding complaints on record for the contractor.
6. Ask for local homeowner references and follow-up on them. Call the references; ask if they were satisfied with all aspects of the contractor's performance. Ask the contractor to show you 1 or 2 of the finished projects.
7. If you solicit bids from several different remodeling contractors, be sure they are bidding on the same scope and quality of work. When interviewing the contractors for your project, do not blindly accept the lowest estimate. Ask the contractor why his price is higher or lower than another. Are all contractors planning to build the same project? Have all the contractors considered all the details necessary for your project's success? Often times, a higher price may be worth the cost of better materials and service. Remember that your remodeling dollars spent represent a permanent investment in the home in which you will spend countless hours. Choose a company with which you feel at ease and one that is well-matched to the scope and complexity of your particular project.

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Step Two: Proper Planning is Important

Think your project through from start to finish. Your home represents a large investment. Its proper care and maintenance are essential. Your home must suit your present needs as well as your lifestyle. Look over your property carefully. What repairs are needed? What improvements would you like? Think ahead and determine your future needs. Do you need an additional bedroom, a refurbished bath, or a modern kitchen? Professional remodeling contractors can help you in your planning by outlining options and discussing the improvements you can make within your budget.

In order to best achieve your objective, you should define which of the following alternatives represents the best approach for your project.

1 – Architect/Designer

In cases where your professional remodeler does not provide design services, you may wish to seek the assistance of a professionally trained architect/designer. It is best to work with an architect/designer experienced with remodeling; he or she will be more sensitive to the special challenges that remodeling presents.

2 - Contractor

Many home improvements such as porch construction, roofing, siding and window replacement may not require professional design services and can best be handled by the experienced contractor whose knowledge of materials and methods has been gained by years on the job. Even though the job may be relatively small, its successful completion is important to you. Small jobs, too, need careful planning and attention to details.

3 - The Design/Build Contractor

Design/Build is a concept developed to benefit the homeowner by providing both quality design and construction services within the same general contracting company. A few of the advantages of working with a design/build firm are:

- a. **Knowing project job costs** - a design/build contractor knows his job costs, so throughout the design process, the project is being engineered to fit your budget and needs.
- b. **Communications** - Developing clear specifications, and precise, responsible design are crucial aspects of the entire process. The lines of communication that are developed in the design stage prepare the groundwork for a clear, well-run remodeling project.
- c. **Teamwork** - When you contract with a professional design/build firm, you become part of a team whose goal is to design and construct a project that will fit your needs.

Think About Design and Function

Design and function should be foremost in your mind if you're thinking of adding a room or converting an existing room. When planning a larger, more complicated project give thought to details such as, intended use of the space, electrical outlet and cable hook-up locations, the type of lighting required, and your current and future storage needs. These details will enable your home improvement to better suit your needs and your lifestyle. A professional remodeling contractor can also help you with time and money-saving hints.

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Step Three: Protect Yourself

A detailed contract is essential for any remodeling project. It should detail what the contractor will and won't do - such as protection of your household goods surrounding the job site and daily clean-up upon completion of the job. Make sure all materials are specified. This includes size, color, weight, model, brand name, quantity and product. It should also include the approximate start and completion dates, payment schedule and an alternative dispute resolution clause.

Understand the financial terms. Make sure that the terms are spelled out in the contract. The total price, payment schedule, and cancellation policy (if there is one) should be clear. Make sure any warranties offered are written into the contract. A warranty must be identified as either "Full" or "Limited." If it is a "Full Warranty," all faulty products must be repaired, replaced or your money returned. If it is a "Limited Warranty," this indicates all replacements and refunds of damaged products are limited in some regard. The name and address of the party who will honor the warranty (contractor, distributor or manufacturer) must be identified. Make sure the time period is clearly specified for which the warranty is offered.

Codes and restrictions should be followed. Be sure that your contract with a professional remodeler spells out any code or permit restrictions, as well as any fees involved in the work on your home. Think carefully before you sign a contract. If it is incomplete, don't sign it. Do you understand everything? Are you getting what you really want? If an item you want isn't written in the contract, you probably won't get it. Be sure to put all changes in writing if the scope or complexity of your remodeling project is modified while work is being done. The amendment should be agreed upon and signed by both parties.

Comply with Building Codes and Permits

Building codes are established by most cities, towns, and counties and vary considerably from one jurisdiction to another. A building permit generally is required whenever structural work is involved or when the basic living area of a home is to be changed. Do not obtain your own building permit. In most jurisdictions, the person obtaining the permit is liable if the work does not meet local building codes. The complex details of local building codes and permits are familiar details to a professional remodeling contractor who works in your community or town every day and know the local requirements.

Request a contractor's Affidavit of Final Release be provided to you when you make your final payment. This is your assurance that you will not be liable for any third-party claims for nonpayment of materials or subcontractors.