



builder

When you're planning a small home renovation, finding a reputable, reliable builder who does quality work, is available and who doesn't charge the earth can seem a daunting task.

If you're anything like me, you're probably terrified of getting it wrong. The spectre of leaky buildings, crooked walls, poorly hung windows, or a project going way over budget is enough to make most of us quake in our boots. If you're embarking on a larger project, an architect or a project manager will manage the process for you, but if you're running a small-scale project yourself, here are a few tips to make the undertaking easier.

Do your homework first

- > Look for someone who builds or renovates houses within your price range.
- > A builder's reputation is vital – talk to any friends and associates who have recently had building work done and are happy with the results. Begin to compile a list of referrals. Bear in mind, too, that a builder will usually

use their own set of preferred tradespeople – plumbers, drainlayers, tilers, sparkies, etc.

- > Credentials – is the builder a Registered Certified Builder or a registered member of the Master Builders Federation? To find out more about registered builders and construction companies in your area, visit either www.certified.co.nz or www.masterbuilder.org.nz, or www.masterbuilders.com.au in Australia.
- > Proven experience – how many years has your builder been in business?
- > Ask to see references – and do more than just checking them by phone. If possible, ask to visit one or two previous projects and look at the quality of the work. Try to do this without the builder present, so you can ask the homeowner some frank questions: Did their project run smoothly? If not, why not? Were there any hold-ups in their job? Was there a budget blow-out? If so, why?
- > Obtain a written quote – ensure that it's itemised, so that you know everything has been included. You don't want to be landed with any hidden extras at the end of the job.
- > Get an estimate of a likely timeframe for your project – how available is your builder? How many other jobs do they already have booked in? What size is the construction team? How much time will the head builder personally spend on site? If problems occur, you need someone who will be readily accessible.

Alarm bells should ring if the builder

- > Isn't someone you instinctively like and trust, and will enjoy working with. Remember, you may be dealing with them for many weeks or months.
- > Doesn't listen to your questions or concerns, or give you straight answers to reasonable enquiries.
- > Doesn't return calls or generally follow up.
- > Doesn't do what they say they are going to do.
- > Isn't helpful with solving problems.
- > Is culpable of the obvious – unacceptable delays, ridiculous excuses, fobbing you off with cheaper products that don't meet your specs. **H**

once you've selected a builder

Unless you're dealing with a really low-budget renovation, do give serious consideration to getting an architect or a project manager to manage the undertaking. If you're doing it yourself, though, remember, you'll need a signed contract before work begins.

The main issue is to make sure your legal liabilities are identified, and that your builder will take responsibility for addressing them. This means ensuring that the necessary building or resource consents, and a building code compliance certificate, are obtained. Failure to comply with construction standards and tick off the right paperwork is highly likely to affect the sale of your house further down the track.

Finally, don't forget that you can consider holding back a percentage of the payment until the last construction details have been dealt with to your satisfaction – such retentions can be mentioned in your contract. Once your builder has left the site, it can be really difficult to persuade them back to fix any problems.

In New Zealand, there are various types of building contracts available, depending on the nature of the project:

- > Architects use: the NZIA (New Zealand Institute of Architects) provides a range of contracts to suit the scale of individual projects.
- > Project managers and engineers use: NZ3910 contracts produced by the New Zealand Standards Association.
- > Other: both the CBANZ (Certified Builders Association of New Zealand) and the Master Builders Federation provide a range of standard contracts for their members that vary according to the type of project.

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