



RENOVATION: TRADES

TRICKS OF THE TRADES

Finding great tradespeople can be the bane of a landlord's life, but **Sharon Newey** has a few tips

WHETHER YOU ARE undertaking a more substantial renovation of your property, or simply keeping up with repairs and maintenance, chances are you will be employing tradespeople.

It can be the bane of a landlord's life to find skilled, reliable, well-priced tradespeople – but then, that's when you employ a property manager and transfer the hassle on to them!

When you do find good tradespeople, hang on to them. You will soon build up a contact book of good tradespeople whom you can call on, especially if you have a larger portfolio of properties and use trades regularly for repairs and maintenance.

Be aware that some of the rules around using certain tradespeople have changed recently (see the Build it Right box).

There is one old unwritten rule that still applies – get three quotes for a job before deciding on whom to use. If it's a minor job, this may be a matter of ringing around and getting a handful of estimates over the phone. If you're doing it this way, make sure you describe the job well as an estimate is just that, an estimate and not a firm quote. Even though estimates are meant to be within 10% to 15% of the cost,

if you have underplayed the complexity of the job, the tradesperson will be within his or her rights to present you with an invoice that's a good deal larger than their estimate.

Assess each quote or estimate not just on price but on availability, manner, qualifications, guarantees of work done etc. If you have been given the person's contact details through word-of-mouth from a reliable source, and the estimate sounds reasonable, you may not have to go to the extra effort of gathering more prices.

Remember that if you are employing a tradesperson for a fairly minor job, it will be proportionately more expensive because most trades charge a minimum call-out fee. It may pay to save up until you have a couple of things for them to do to justify paying the call-out fee, as long as it's not compromising the integrity of the property.

Having said that, there is nothing that will annoy a tenant more than if they have bothered notifying you of a problem, only to have you appear to ignore them. Acting fairly promptly to requests for repairs or notification of a problem sends out the message that you not only value your tenants but also that you value your property. Why should they treat your place

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Most trade organisations have information on their official websites about how to find their members as well as information about managing the relationship between owner and trades.

There are also building collectives in many centres where complementary tradespeople have gathered together to provide a comprehensive service, or where a someone co-ordinates the trades for you.

There are various websites that publish ratings and reviews of tradespeople, for example nocowboys.co.nz and builderscrack.co.nz.

There are regional listings of builders on the www.nzpif.org.nz website and www.landlords.co.nz has resources as well as an Ask the Expert column.

Various trade organisations will also have member listings and Resene has a 'find a painter' service at www.resene.co.nz/homeown/findPainter.html.



with respect if you don't?

Always make sure you get a GST receipt for tax purposes – repairs and maintenance costs can be off-set against income, whereas anything deemed to be an 'improvement' can't be. Also make sure you get any compliance certificates needed to verify that the job has been done by a registered tradesperson.

Make sure the tradespeople you use have public liability insurance in case they damage your or other people's property while carrying out the work.

LARGER JOBS

If the job is a larger renovation, you need to decide on how you will employ the builder:

- Full project management, in which the contractor/builder will oversee the entire project, buy materials (which they can get at trade costs and hopefully pass some of this saving on to you), and organise sub-trades and inspections.
- Labour-only in which you are responsible for purchasing materials and organising sub-trades like the electrician, plumber and painters. You might not want to tackle this if you have no experience as timing is fairly crucial for rental properties.
- Managed labour-only, which is a mix of the other two. You have to be very

clear about who does what to avoid problems.

For each of these, it's best to get a written contract of some sort. For landlords, including a strict timeline for start and completion with penalties for non-completion is wise, as you don't want your property to be untenanted for indefinite periods of time. You need to know when it can be back up and running as a fully earning unit.

Invite at least three builders to tender for the job. You'll need to supply them with as much detail as possible, usually in the form of working drawings and specifications.

Get the quotes in writing (dated and signed) and beware of seizing on a quote that's considerably lower than the others – chances are, they have left something out or misunderstood the job. ■



BUILD IT RIGHT

The Department of Building and Housing recently launched a two-year "Build it Right" campaign aimed at improving the quality of building in New Zealand and increasing the confidence of consumers.

The initiative will improve the productivity, efficiency and accountability of the building sector in New Zealand. The first major change was the introduction of Restricted Building Work (RBW) on 1 March 2012. Building work (including design work) that relates to either the structure (load-bearing walls; foundations etc) or moisture penetration (roofs; cladding etc) of homes including small- to medium-sized apartments will be classified as "Restricted Building Work" (RBW).

Restricted Building Work, which also includes the design of fire safety systems for small to medium apartments, is deemed to be building work critical to the integrity of a building and therefore required to be carried out by competent, appropriately licensed

building practitioners.

These Licensed Building Practitioners (LBP) will have been assessed within a range of competencies relating to their licence class. It is an offence for an unlicensed person to carry out or supervise restricted building work and also an offence to knowingly engage an unlicensed person to carry out or supervise restricted building work.

Six licence classes relate to RBW - designers, carpenters, external plasterers, brick and block layers, foundation specialists and roofers. Registered architects, gas-fitters and plumbers, as well as chartered professional engineers, who are registered with their own professional authorities, are treated as being licensed.

For a full list of the licensed building practitioners go to www.dbh.govt.nz/lbp or for more information on your rights and obligations under the Building Act 2004 go to www.builditright.govt.nz.

KNOW WHERE AND HOW YOUR WATER, GAS AND POWER SUPPLIES TURN OFF IN AN EMERGENCY, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO THRASHING AROUND THE PROPERTY ON A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

KNOW WHO TO CALL

Some maintenance problems shouldn't have you reaching for your contact book of tradespeople but for your local utilities company or council.

One Auckland landlord received a panicked phone call from a tenant who had woken to find raw sewage seeping in the front door. A piece of roofing tile from a nearby building site had managed to travel down the sewer then became wedged just downstream of the property, causing a backflow. The landlord hurriedly called a plumber to fix the problem but then spent months wrangling over the plumbing bill with the insurance company and the local water supply company because he hadn't called the water supply company first to get them to deal to the problem.

To be safe, make your first call on any drainage or water issues to the local utility company or the council if they manage this. Also, anything on council land or a neighbour's property – a tree branch might have fallen on the house – needs to be their responsibility. Be prepared to nag if it's not rectified as quickly as you want it to be.

Also be on site when someone comes to repair or assess the problem as utility companies have very strict protocol on where their responsibility lies, for example, right down to within millimetres of the valve in the water metre; is it on the street side or the property side? They also tend to use independent contractors for repairs so information trails can be fuzzy if there are any on-going issues.

It's also wise to know where and how your water, gas and power supplies turn off in an emergency, so you don't have to go thrashing around the property on a dark and stormy night trying to find these things.