



Checklist for Finding and Hiring a Builder or Remodeler

Doing your homework will help you have a more successful experience.

Use this checklist to help you select a home builder or home remodeler to work on or build your home:

- Contact your local home builders' association for the names of member builders and remodelers: www.nahb.org/findanhba. You can also ask family, friends or coworkers for recommendations.
- Make sure the builder or home remodeler has a permanent business location and a good reputation with local banks and suppliers.
- Find out how long they have been in the building business. It usually takes three to five years to establish a financially sound business. You want to make sure they will be around after the construction is complete to service any warranties.
- Check out the company's rating and if there have been any complaints filed with your local Better Business Bureau: www.bbb.org.
- Make sure the builder/remodeler has sufficient workers compensation and general liability insurance. If not, you may be liable for any construction-related accidents on your premises.
- Ask the builder/remodeler to provide you with names of previous customers. If they won't, beware. If they do, ask the customers if they would hire the builder/remodeler again.
- Ask if you can see the builder/remodelers work, both completed and in progress. Check for quality of workmanship and materials.
- Do you feel you can easily communicate with the builder/remodeler? Remember you will be in close contact with them throughout the construction process and afterward as you live in your new home.
- Make sure the builder/remodeler provides you with a complete and clearly written contract. The contract will benefit both of you. If you are having a new home built, get and review a copy of the home warranty and homeowner manual as well.
- Be cautious of unusually low-priced bids. If the builder/remodeler is unable to pay for the materials and labor as the project proceeds, this may indicate a potential problem. Keep in mind that less expensive does not necessarily mean better!

Find more helpful advice on home building and remodeling at www.nahb.org/forconsumers or www.nahb.org/remodelers.



Step 1: Your Dream Process

Dreaming about your remodeling your home is fun and exciting. Inspiration is just a click away with social media sites such as Instagram, Pinterest and Houzz to name a few. NARI's CotY Award-winning projects also provide ideas on space planning, products and materials that lead to. Before starting any project, use this list of questions about why and how you want to live in the remodeled space.

What in the following list match your situation?

- You want to make your home more comfortable and attractive.
- Your family is expanding, and you need more room.
- Your home is outdated, and you want to make the style more current.
- Your home is not functional for your lifestyle.
- Your home is in need of repair.

Make a list of specific aspects of your current home that are problems. No item is too small – everything from shoes at the front door to not enough storage space in the bathroom cabinets. These details will provide insight into must-haves for a better living space.

Plan for the Future

Envision your life 5, 10, 20 years from now. Think about:

- Family dynamics and how they will expand or contract.
- How you want to address changes to your family's physical capabilities over time.
- Your finances and how much you're comfortable saving to pay for your remodel— and how that will change over time.
- The impact of the remodel on the environment or your energy usage.
- Natural disasters and how aspects of your remodel could reduce damage.
- Your neighborhood and comparable property values.
- Technology and the role it plays in your everyday life.
- Needs versus wants; wants versus desires
- Where to save costs and where extra costs will pay off over the long-term.

Step 2: Budget Planning

Key to project success is to define and stay within a specified budget. Many factors will determine a budget. Consider the following when you begin the planning process:

Size and scope of your project.

Project cost will vary depending on your location, the size of the room, and what features or options you choose. However, square footage alone is not the indicator of cost; kitchens and bathrooms may be smaller but require appliances, plumbing and electrical features.

Structural changes.

The magic of TV makes structural changes look very easy but removing walls or add additional square footage requires a structural engineer and added time, money and resources.

Product selections.

Depending on the type of finishing you select, your project budget could vary greatly. When selecting products, work with your remodeler to discuss pros and cons. The good news is there is a product for every design aesthetic and every budget.

Age of the infrastructure.

The age and condition of your home must be considered. Structural issues more than likely will have a great impact on cost.

Craftsmanship and quality.

Like other areas of life, you get what you pay for—a high-quality craftsman and custom workmanship will cost more.

Get Inspired.

Visit NARI's award-winning CotY projects and get an idea for what's possible at various price points.



Step 3: Types of Remodelers

Types of remodeling professionals

Finding the right remodeler for your project is important. There are four basic categories – and some remodelers fit into more than one. Each type of remodeler includes various specialties, experience, education, certifications, industry knowledge and quality of work.

Read on to understand about the type of professionals and their qualifications, you will be more confident about your hiring decision and more satisfied with the remodeling experience.

The General Contractor: Many home improvement projects do not require professional design services and can best be handled by the experienced remodeling contractor whose knowledge of materials and methods has been gained by years on the job. Again, be sure to deal with a professional. Even though the job may be relatively small, its successful completion is important to you. Small jobs also need careful planning and attention to detail. General contractors are also the right choice for your project if you have had your project designed by an architect or designer and you now need someone to manage the construction of those designs.

For design services, your options include:

The Architect: Major remodeling projects require construction drawings for the purposes of defining a contract and procuring permits. In cases where your professional remodeler does not provide design services, you may wish to seek the assistance of a professionally trained architect. It is best to work with an architect experienced in remodeling—he or she will be more sensitive to the special challenges that remodeling presents. Architects are licensed by the state and have formal education and experience. They have overall knowledge of design; however, many architects do not accept smaller projects.

The Designer: Another option to obtain those construction drawings is to hire a certified or licensed designer. Designers may have expertise in specific areas of the home such as kitchens, interiors, baths, space design, etc. They often specialize in particular types of projects and may be the best choice for a targeted remodeling project.

The Design/Build Contractor:

The Design/Build Contractor: If you prefer to hire only one company for design and construction services, your best bet may be to hire a design/build firm. Design/build is a concept developed to benefit the remodeling homeowner by providing both quality design and construction services within the same general contracting company. A design/build contractor will be able to see your project through from start to finish, keeping design, engineering and budget in mind. Some design/build firms have architects on staff, others use certified designers.



Step 4: Selecting a Professional

Word-of-Mouth Referrals are Key

The best way to find qualified, professional help is through word-of-mouth referrals. Local remodelers or contractors are an excellent way to find a professional. Common sources for qualified remodeler or contractors include:

- Business colleagues
- Real estate agents
- Local material supplier (lumber yards, specialty product providers, etc.)

Seven Tips to Find a Qualified Remodeler

NARI provides the following tips to inform the selection process and help homeowners make an informed decision that best suits their needs.

1. Stay Local

Local remodelers are compelled to perform quality work that satisfies their customers in order for their business to survive. Local firms can be checked through references including past customers in your community or through your local NARI chapter.

2. Follow Local Building Codes

Another advantage to hiring a local professional is that they will know the local building code and permit requirements for your town or city. Building codes vary considerably from each jurisdiction and are known to change from year to year. Most structural work or footprint expansions require permits.

3. Check for License and Insurance

Many states, but not all, require contractors to be licensed, bonded and/or insured. Contact your state or local licensing agencies to ensure the contractor meets all requirements. Most states require a contractor to carry worker's compensation, property damage, and personal liability insurance. Ask for a copy of their license and insurance certificate to make sure that it is current.

4. Check for Violations and Complaints

Check with your Consumer Affairs Office and the [Better Business Bureau](#) to ensure there are no complaints on record for the contractor. Check to make sure they are a NARI member. Search NARI members and [Find a Remodeler](#) in your local area.



5. Compare Apples with Apples

If you solicit estimates from more than one remodeling contractor, be sure they are working off the same scope and quality of work. Discuss variations in prices and beware of any estimate that is substantially lower than the others.

6. Be Informed

A good remodeling professional educates clients on green remodeling, universal design, lead safety, new products, building techniques and trends. Make sure you're hiring someone who has knowledge and expertise relevant to the remodeling industry. NARI offers eight certifications and provides education and training. Learn more about [NARI Certified Professionals](#)

7. Always Check References

Don't rely on a contractor's personality or demeanor. If a professional does not offer references, ask for them and follow up with a site visit or phone call.

Step 5: Project Best Practices

Having open and clear communication with your remodeler is a must for success. Use the list below to foster conversations with your remodeler before work gets started. A little planning will go a long way to avoid frustration and miscommunication along the course of the project.

- Before work begins, ask your remodeling contractor what inconveniences may occur while the project is under way and plan for them accordingly.
- Be sure your contractor is aware of vacations or special events so that he or she may schedule their job site time appropriately.
- Consider moving personal property from construction areas and declare all work zones off-limits to children and pets.
- Be sure your remodeling contractor creates a written change order if your remodeling project is modified while work is being done. Both parties should sign the amendment.
- Keep a job file, including contract, plans, specifications, invoices, change orders and all correspondence with the contractor.
- Request a contractor's Affidavit of Final Release be provided to you at the time you make final payment and a final waiver of mechanic's lien. This is your assurance that you will not be liable for any third-party claims for nonpayment of materials or subcontractors.

Most important, keep the lines of communication open between you and the remodeling contractor and the work crew. Ask questions. Let them know what your family schedule is and whether you have pets confined somewhere. Make sure you have specified how—via phone, in-person or via e-mail—and how often you wish to communicate with your remodeling contractor about your project.



Step 6: Project Wrap Up

The end of the project provides comfort, relief and joy. As your vision starts to look like a reality and your excitement about your new space reaches a new level, it may be easy to forget the final steps of the remodeling process.

Here are a few things that you will want to keep in mind:

Take a moment to walk through your project and make a list of necessary adjustments, known as a punch list. If you're unsure about something, ask your contractor if that is normal or if he has a suggestion. It's best that this is brought up during the final stages of the project while your contractor is onsite.

Look over the contract again, make sure you have all of your signed permits, receipts, change orders, lien waivers, warranties and manufacturers guides to your products.

If new appliances or systems are installed, ask your remodeling contractor if there are any maintenance schedules you should know about.

Understand your contractor's guarantees of quality and warranties. Oftentimes, contractors will provide free repairs up to a certain point—be clear that you know exactly what those guarantees cover and the length of time they are covered.

Reward a job well done. As you know, reputation and references are the most credible marketing assets a contractor can have. Offer to assist by having your space photographed, providing a testimonial, or showcasing your home in a remodeled tour.