

DreamWork

K I T C H E N S

Bathrooms & Fine Cabinetry

The Kitchen & Bath Insider[®]

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The Much Maligned Contractor

If we held a popularity contest today, why is it that contractors would not be very high on the list? What gives this industry such a bad name? Even I, a contractor myself, dread having someone come into my home to prepare an estimate or to perform work.

Aside from the space program, contractors are really the last great adventurers in our modern times. They bravely go into an unknown home and delve into areas that have not been touched since the house was constructed, years and years ago. Who knows what they will find, what they will unearth, while digging around your old walls, pipes and wires?

Preparing a quotation is no easy task for these tireless explorers. It would be easy to figure the cost of changing a light bulb if there were no hidden costs. However, what if the bulb wasn't at fault? Maybe it was the socket, or the switch, the wires, or the whole fuse box itself! Of course, a proficient contractor will be able to narrow these down, especially in so simple an example. However, the unknowns always exist in renovating and you should be prepared for them. I always recommend setting aside 10% of your budget in case something unexpected develops. If the project goes without a hitch, you're ahead of the game, but it pays to play it safe.

Another frustrating aspect of having work done in your home is when the final product is not what you had envisioned. With projects that I've had done in my house I have found that this is usually caused by my lack of explaining to the contractor EXACTLY what I had in MY mind. Either through lack of communication skills on my part, or the contractor's, there was too much left unsaid. When planning a renovation TAKE YOUR TIME! Carefully review each and every aspect of the project until you are sure that the contractor knows what your expectations are. While you're at it, write these things down and have the contractor initial them so that you have proof that they were agreed to.

If you see a picture in a magazine illustrating something that you would like in your kitchen, tear it out and put it in a folder. Then show these pictures to your contractor. It is much easier to accurately convey what you want if you have a picture to illustrate your point.

Delays are another big source of frustration. Projects involving custom manufactured or "built to order" items are by their very nature problematic. Besides the time honored "human error" factor, there can be manufacturing defects, shipping damage, etc., etc. Contractors hate this as much as clients do because each time they have to send someone back to your home, it costs them money and they have to adjust their crew's schedules. In a major project, you should expect that something will be delayed or have to be replaced. If you're working with a qualified contractor, you can be sure that they will do their best to remedy the situation as soon as possible. Nevertheless, common sense dictates: don't pay for the job in full until it is completed. Most reputable firms stipulate this in their contracts and will not expect 100% payment until the job is 100% completed.

The truth is that most contractors are hardworking, honest, business people who want to please their customers. A recent study by the National Association of Home Builders found that 64% of a contractor's jobs come from friends, relatives, and neighbors of their previous customers and 20% comes from repeat business. That accounts for 84% of their new business; too large a number to risk not doing satisfactory work.

You can minimize potential problems by thoroughly reviewing the proposed renovation with your contractor prior to starting the job. And, by being aware that unforeseen delays are not uncommon, your project will be much less stressful and more rewarding.