



Tips for Choosing the Best Contractor

With over 30 years in the trade, we've seen firsthand the highs and lows of hiring contractors to work in your home. Whether it's new hardwood flooring installation, refinishing of existing floors, updating stairs and handrails, custom carpentry, or tile installation—all of these projects require highly qualified, skilled, professional craftsmanship to get the job done right.

We're very proud of the incredibly high rate of satisfaction, recommendation, referral and repeat business our customers have shown us. But it's not something we take for granted. We know that home reno projects can be fraught with challenges, headaches, and a lot of uncertainty. So, we've put together some recommendations for how to hire the best contractor for your job. By following these tips, you can hire a contractor who is experienced, reliable, and able to deliver a high-quality finished product that meets your needs and exceeds your expectations.

Avoid Regrets

There are several common regrets we've heard from homeowners. Knowing them will help you avoid disappointments later.

- **Choosing the lowest bid:** While it may be tempting to choose the lowest bid, it's important to remember you get what you pay for. Choosing a cheap hardwood flooring company may lead to poor quality work and materials, which can end up costing you more in the long run.
- **Not checking references and reviews:** Failing to check references and online reviews can be a big mistake. You should ask the company for references and take the time to call them to ensure that the company has a good reputation.
- **Not getting a detailed, written, line-itemized bid:** A written bid is essential to ensure that both parties are on the same page regarding the scope of the project, timeline, and cost. But a good bid for hardwood flooring will include line-itemized details about wood species, cut, grade, width and sometimes even mill. It will detail the type of floor finish, number of coats and sheen. It will include costs for staining (if applicable), taping & tarping, disposal of demo materials, procurement, and replacement of trim, etc. Similar things are true for custom carpentry and tile installation. Without a detailed, written bid, there may be misunderstandings that can lead to conflict and disappointment.
- **Not researching the type of flooring:** It's important to research the type of flooring that you want to install and to make sure that the company has experience installing that type of flooring. Failure to do so may lead to poor quality work and damage to your home.
- **Not asking about maintenance:** Hardwood flooring and even some tile requires maintenance to keep it looking good, and different types of flooring may require different types of maintenance. Not asking the company about maintenance can lead to problems down the road.
- **Not asking who does the work.** Many companies use different people for bidding, installation, sanding and finishing—or in the case of tile, demo versus installation. Continuity of personnel is critical. If there isn't accountability of workers throughout the process it can lead to poor quality of work, lack of quality control and obvious flaws.

Do Your Homework

There are several factors to consider when selecting a hardwood flooring, custom carpentry, or tile contractor as it can be a significant investment, both in terms of time and money. It's essential to be aware of certain things before you hire one. Here are the top ten reasons to choose one over others.

1. **Reputation:** Look for a company with a solid reputation. Read reviews, check with family and friends for referrals, ask for references, and check out their websites to make sure they have a good track record.
2. **Experience:** Choose a contractor with years of experience—including the specific workers who will be assigned to your job. They should have the knowledge and skills necessary to handle any challenges that may arise. The continuity of work teams across all aspects of your job is preferable and leads to higher quality standards. Also make sure you have access to the company owner in case any issues arise.
3. **Quality of Work:** Ask to see examples of their work and make sure the quality of their craftsmanship meets your standards.
4. **Portfolio:** Check their portfolio of past work to see if they have experience doing the type of work you need. This will give you an idea of their craftsmanship and quality of work. It may also inspire you with new ideas and possibilities.
5. **Quality of materials:** Ensure that the contractor uses high-quality materials. You may want to ask about the wood species, cut, grade and mill, stain and finishes. The same for tile adhesives, mortar, and grout. Make sure they are transparent about where they source their materials.
6. **Design process:** Make sure the contractor understands your design ideas, is interested in collaborating with you to bring your vision to life and can provide you with design recommendations for your project.
7. **Installation process:** Ask the contractor about their installation process, including the steps they take to prepare the subfloor and the methods they use to install the hardwood or tile. You may also want to ask about their cleanup process after installation is complete.
8. **Communication:** Choose a contractor who communicates well and is responsive to your questions and concerns. You want someone who will keep you informed throughout the entire process.
9. **Transparency:** Choose a contractor who is transparent, genuine, and honest from start to finish. Transparency helps build trust, avoid misunderstandings, ensures clear expectations, promotes accountability, and guarantees the quality of work.
10. **Price:** Get multiple written quotes from different companies and compare their pricing and the level of detail included in the bids. Make sure each quote is clear and easy to understand. Be wary of quotes that are significantly lower than others, as this may indicate poor quality workmanship or the use of substandard materials. A higher level of line itemization in bids indicates greater transparency and will help you avoid any surprises or hidden costs down the road.

Ask the Right Questions

The best contractors possess a variety of qualities that set them apart from others in the industry. Asking the right questions will help you have confidence that your contractor is the right one for the job. Some of the most important qualities to look for are:

- **Attention to detail:** The best contractors have an eye for detail and take pride in ensuring tile, hardwood or custom carpentry is done precisely and correctly. This orientation toward details also shows up in their written bids.
- **Professionalism:** They demonstrate professionalism in their work, communication, and conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful and courteous.
- **Experience and knowledge:** They have a solid understanding of what you are hiring them to do. For hardwood floors, they are knowledgeable about wood species, cuts, grades, mills, stains, sanding and finishing. They know how each of those factors affects the outcome. For stairs and handrails, they are familiar with different style options and building codes. For tile installation, they know about different types of tiles, substrates, adhesives, and grout needed for various applications.

- **Creativity and problem-solving skills:** They are creative problem solvers who can come up with innovative solutions to any challenges they encounter. They have an eye for design and balance artistry with technique and know-how.
- **Strong work ethic:** The best contractors have a strong work ethic and are committed to completing projects efficiently and to the highest standard. They are punctual and show up when they say they will.
- **Communication skills:** They are effective communicators who can explain the entire project process, address concerns, and answer questions in a clear and concise manner. Choose a contractor who communicates clearly and promptly with you throughout the project, keeping you informed about progress, changes, and any issues that arise.
- **Transparency:** They are transparent, genuine, and honest from start to finish. They are accountable and willing to have hard conversations when necessary. They are good listeners and value your satisfaction.
- **Attention to safety:** They prioritize safety on the job site, ensuring that they and their team follow proper safety protocols and use protective equipment as needed.

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