Choosing the right contractor: 9 essential questions to guide your decision

Hiring the right contractor is one of the most important decisions you'll make for your home renovation. While some contractors may offer a lower price, it's essential to understand the details behind their estimates and how they manage a project. Here's what to ask—and why it matters.

1. How similar is their experience to your project?
A contractor who specializes in your type of renovation will be more adept at handling its unique challenges.

Our approach: We focus on historic home renovations, ensuring expertise in preserving character while modernizing function.

2. Can they provide site visits or referrals for similar jobs?
Seeing a contractor's past work and hearing from previous clients can provide assurance about their quality and professionalism.

Our approach: We encourage site visits and connect potential clients with past customers to share their experience.

3. Does this contractor only meet your budget, or do they meet your budget *and* standard for quality construction?
Contractors can easily miss the full scope of what's needed to estimate and build according to plans, cut corners by minimizing the amount of work that needs to be done, or use subquality materials in order to make their budget work.

Our approach: We don't build to a number but to a scope of work that's necessary to correctly achieve your plans—identified by a team of experts who thoroughly analyze your project through on-site visits.

4. Are their bids detailed with line items that they can fully explain?
A vague bid lacking details can lead to disputes and additional charges. A quality bid should break down costs by trade, options, and materials.

Our approach: Our itemized estimates offer up to 20 pages of details and options, informed by up to 40 hours of research and site visits from our expert trade partners.

5. How accurate are their estimates as compared to their final invoices?
Some contractors provide low initial estimates only to hit clients with unexpected costs later.

Our approach: Our estimates are painstakingly detailed and based on informed bids from our trade partners. This minimizes surprises and allows us to come in on budget, typically within single-digit percentage points from our estimates.

6. What is the contractor's markup?
Every contractor marks up their work, but low bids with hidden markups can end up costing more than a straightforward, honest estimate.

Our approach: We have a 15% margin on trade partners and materials and charge projected, on-site management hours to run our projects, ensuring no hidden fees or surprise change orders.

7. Who are their subcontractors and how are they scheduled?
The quality of subcontractors directly impacts the project outcome. Unvetted, low-cost trades can lead to poor workmanship and lengthy delays.

Our approach: Through 20 years of responsible business, we have assembled a reliable roster of the best trade partners in the region—small business owners who meet our standards for craftsmanship and reliability.

8. Do they have the support to manage your project?
It's common for contractors to book multiple projects at once without the support or manpower to efficiently reach an agreed-upon finish date. Homeowners often experience days or weeks of no progress as the result of poor planning and mismatched schedules.

Our approach: We assign a project manager and a lead carpenter to every project, which means every day of your project, someone will be on-site. Apprentices, a master carpenter, and trade partners will also rotate in according to schedule.

9. Can they present a holistic build plan, including an overall schedule and selection choices, that allows you to access every step of the project and pricing?
A clear timeline and consistent communication keep your project on track. Delays due to poor scheduling can add stress and cost.

Our approach: Our estimates provide the framework for a detailed build plan and realistic schedule—we don't swing a hammer until we have a finish date we can commit to. Every last detail of our progress is communicated to you through CoConstruct, a project management software that ensures your project is done on time, on budget—and right.

Final Thoughts
Price is important, but a well-planned and transparent process saves time, stress, and unexpected costs in the long run. We prioritize upfront planning and clarity, craftsmanship, and integrity—ensuring a renovation experience as solid as the homes we restore.