

Half the Battle – Picking the Builder

Most projects that run into trouble are doomed before they ever got started. I have built for many clients that later told me they were amazed as to how all of their friends hated their particular builder. I am always astonished by that. We make lifelong friends with our clients! My goodness, it is hard to imagine that a well constructed home that creates harmony for the family that occupies it should be a source of such vitriol. Something was missed along the way in selecting the builder.

Trust

What does your gut tell you? Is the builder someone that will loan you a pickup and helping hand? How about leaving your house keys with him – forever? Does he have your best interest at heart? Do you get straight answers to direct questions? As a U.S. Marine in the 1968 – 1971 Vietnam era, I held a Top Secret security clearance for crypto telecommunications. As a civilian contractor from 1976 – 1985 I held the Texas Private Security Agency license for security companies. I did bank video monitoring work for documentation of bank robberies and assorted crimes. My clients habitually give us keys to handle their home maintenance issues for them (they are busy working) or get locked out on occasion. We are great friends with our clientele. We go to barbecues and birthday parties with our clients. We have been known to show up on New Years Eve (11:00 pm) with a plumber at a home we had built many years before to unstop their plumbing (grease clogs) during a party event. Custom home building is a lifestyle not a job.

Competence

Texas is a right to work state without any regulation as to the qualifications of any builder. It is up to you to discern the level of competence that you are comfortable with.

The builder should have a level of competence that is nationally acceptable. They should be an active participating member in the National Association of Home Builders. The certifications that are recognized by the NAHB are many culminating with the GMB (Graduate Master Builder).

Does the builder have a number of Architects, Bankers and clients that can be contacted for references? Is the Builder well known for building homes of the nature of your project? Does the builder have a team of competent sub-contractors that have many years of team experience in building homes together?

Does the builder have a method to help you plan, design, budget, construct, finance and warranty your proposed home? Does the builder have forms that are included in the process that create clarity to the process. Are these forms incorporated into the contract to build your home?

Does the builder promptly answer emails and phone calls on the weekends and in the evenings?

Fair Price

Does your builder charge a fair price for the home? Most people start out with cost as the first item in selecting a builder. Cost is a very important piece of the puzzle, but do not let it override Trust and Competence. The number of projects that go wrong predominantly are those that concentrate on price alone. It is no small wonder that so many people are unhappy with their builder. Building a custom home is one of the few instances that you should get what you pay for. Similar to buying a great car versus the cheapest the car you can; think Pinto, Gremlin or Yugo versus Mercedes, BMW or Audi.

Pricing of the project is based on two things; the initial budget that you gave the builder and the budget that the builder created out of the specifications and plans. If the builder is trustworthy and competent, the cost of construction should be fixed for a period of time (duration of the build).