**What to look for in a reliable builder.**

Statistics show that 1 in 5 people run into problems when having work done.

We hope the information below will help you make the right decision.

**Where do you find a reliable builder?**

* Recommendation is always the best way to find a builder. Parker Home Improvements 76% of our work in 2013 came from recommendation.
* Ask your Architect or Building surveyor.
* Your solicitor.

You should also make sure that each builder you ask to quote has appropriate liability insurance - ask to see the certificate.

**Do’s & Don’ts**

**Do** go for a registered company. It’s all about liability and if they are not registered, they may not be about if you have problems.

**Do** take note of first impressions. If your builder cannot turn up on time for the initial consultation, what will this say about the getting the work done on time.

**Don’t** always go for the cheapest. Compare like for like from your written estimate / quote. Ensure your cheaper quote is the same quality and specification as the higher quotes. Ask if you are not sure.

**Do** take time for planning. If you don’t know what you want you will probably get a guestimate and a nasty surprise when the final bill is presented to you.

**Don't** change your mind or add tasks and expect that there won't be cost or time implications.

**Don’t** assume the builder knows what you want. Invest in detailed plans and specifications and be specific on what you want at the tender stage.

**Do** allow for a contingency plan/budget for any unforeseen work.

**Price tends to be the main niggle when having work done. What’s included and what’s not.**

If you are looking to undertake a project, re-designing your floor plan, new fitted kitchen or bathroom it is vitally important to take the time to decide exactly what you want. You know how you live, how best your kitchen or bathroom will work for you and your family. Look at things from a builders point of view, if you are asking for a quote and don’t really know what you want, how can you be given an accurate quote. Planning is the key.

Think of things like electrics. Where are you going to have your TV, Sound System, Speakers, Lamps, so all your electrical needs are met. You will be glad you have taken time to plan when there are no unsightly cables and all electrics are neat and safe. Having walls channelled out for electrics after the work is done, is not only messy but will add to your costs.

Invest in detailed plans. Sitting down with an Architect or Structural Engineer and discussing the options will help you understand what is achievable from the start. NEVER design as you build. This is a sure way of increasing your costs.

**How to compare like for like.**

Quote or Estimate - This will depend if detailed plans and solid information is provided. An estimate will be provided based on an assumption. It is likely that additional costs can or will arise and this is where your contingency will help. A quotation will be provided on solid information and detailed plans, and therefore it is less likely to increase, unless of course the structure of the building is not how it appears and therefore additional costs may occur.

A good builder will always advise when this happens, giving you an idea of additional costs prior to carrying out the work. They may even ask you to sign for additional costs.

Insist on a detailed quote or estimate from the start, so you know what is included and what is not.

Quality - Nothing is better than hearing it from the horse’s mouth. A good builder will have no hesitation in providing you with names and numbers of previous customers so you can call them.

Time - Good quality builders take pride in their work. Quality takes time. Discuss the timeline before the start of the project, so you know how long it is likely to take.

Terms - Get the rules straight from the start. If asked to sign a contract, review this carefully and ask if you are not certain about anything. Agree payment terms; staged payment, periodic payment, payment on completion.

Contingency Sum – You need to be prepared for unseen costs. Problems can arise during the course of a build that couldn't be predicted. However, you need to be clear about approving any additional work - and agreeing its cost - before it goes ahead.

**Before the work starts**

Agree a few things before work starts, so everyone knows where they stand.

* Arrangements regarding rubbish clearing.
* Arrangements regarding toilets, tap water and electricity.
* What the finished job consists of, specifying actions such as site cleaning.
* How costs arising from any unforeseen extras will be dealt with.
* When you and your builder will meet - it's a good idea to arrange weekly meetings at the very least on site to go over progress.
* Be clear about who the builder should deal with. Your builder needs to know who to update and who can make decisions. Remember if the decision-maker is not available, this can cause delays that will be out of the builders control.
* Be prepared for dust. Cover up furniture and carpets if you haven't agreed that your builder will do this. If the builder has requested the room to be clear, ensure this is done by the start date. If the builder has to clear up, this may be charged as extras.
* Make sure access to the work area is easy and pets and children are kept under control.
* Any retainer - for larger projects. This is a small percentage of the total value that's paid after the job finishes once the builder has completed any snagging and you are totally satisfied.(Parker Home Improvements will ask you to sign a satisfaction certificate, which will also act as your 1 year guarantee).
* Pay on time, as agreed in your contract.
* Be clear on any guarantees given by the builder. What the guaranteed covers and for how long.