

# SELECTING YOUR REMODELING CONTRACTOR

**F**inding the right remodeling professional is crucial. There is a lot for homeowners to consider and they need to be proactive and do their homework if they want to enjoy the remodeling process and the end result.

Here are some guidelines to make the selection process easier and to help you make a more informed decision.

## BASIC QUALIFICATIONS

Look for a contractor with a track record of success in your community. A successful business is one that is established in your area and has survived and thrived over a period of time.

Check to be sure the contractor you hire is properly licensed, insured, and has workman's compensation. In addition, homeowners can also contact their Better Business Bureau to see if there are any unresolved complaints against a contractor.

## PROFESSIONAL TRADE ORGANIZATIONS

The best place to find top-notch remodeling professionals is a professional trade organization like the National Association for the Remodeling Industry (NARI). These trade organizations help to keep their members informed about the latest products, construction techniques, business practices, and industry issues.

When you select a NARI member, you're selecting someone who adheres to a Code of Ethics, is required to have insurance and is held to the collective standards of the organization, and are dedicated to the professionalism and integrity of the remodeling industry.

NARI Member Jon Greaves, CR, CKBR, CAPS Owner of Greaves Construction Inc., in Temple Terrace, FL, says, "Remodelers join NARI for all the

right reasons; to expand their education, obtain certifications, network with their peers, exchange information, and give back to the community," he said. "I have been a member of the Tampa Bay chapter of NARI since 2003 and I wish I had joined much sooner."

According to Doug King, Co-Owner and Vice President of West Coast Remodelers & Construction, Inc., in Tampa Bay, FL, the benefits of being a NARI member are numerous. "We know that being a part of trade groups such as NARI and NKBA (National Kitchen & Bath Association) will add tremendous value to the products we offer to our client base," he said. "All NARI members have licenses and insurance, as required by local and state laws. The membership base is made up of proven and trusted companies in the remodeling industry," Doug said. "Members are educated about the latest trends and materials available in the remodeling market and are able to receive certification in many different categories of remodeling. Additionally, most members have won remodeling competition awards in one category or another."

The bottom line is that a remodeler who shows a commitment to his or her profession is someone you can count on to do a good job.

## REFERRALS

The best way to find a qualified remodeler is to be referred by someone who has just had a successful project completed by that firm. Talk to your relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who have had recent remodeling done. The key is to get the referral from someone you trust.

Look for someone who has the depth of experience to do the kind of project you want to have done. If you are looking to replace a toilet, tub, and floor in your bathroom, a new contractor is probably fine. If, on the other hand, you want to tear the brick corner out of the rear of your house and you have a structure above it, you need to be working with a more experienced firm.



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“Greaves Construction obtains 90 to 95 percent of our work from direct referrals from past clients, friends, and business associates,” Jon said. “We have been in business for 25 years and have a large clientele. We do some advertisements but that’s more about general exposure than job leads.”

According to Doug at West Coast Remodeling & Construction, they also receive the majority of their leads from referrals “because of our service, workmanship, and reliability. Our credibility has been built simply by doing what we say we are going to do while completing projects on time.”

Here’s a list of questions to help you establish a contractor’s qualifications and to help you find the right person for your remodeling job.

- How long have you been in business?
- Who will be assigned as a project supervisor for the job?
- What is the time frame for starting my project?
- How do you handle this type of job?
- Do you have employees or do you use subcontractors?
- Is your company a full-service or specialty contractor?
- Do you have design services available?
- Does your company carry workers compensation and liability insurance?
- Do any of your employees hold trade certifications?
- How many projects like mine have you completed in the past year?
- May I have a list of references for projects you’ve completed which are similar to mine?
- Will we need a permit for this project?

A qualified professional will have no problem answering your questions. If you get vague or incomplete answers, or the contractor is hard to communicate with, avoid hiring that contractor.

### SURFING THE NET

The Internet has opened up a whole new way for customers to shop for goods and services, and the remodeling industry is no exception. Many homeowners use the Web to locate remodeling contractors and to review their work from the comfort of their living rooms. And more and more contractors view a well-designed Website as a critical tool for showcasing their work.

A good Website gives the homeowner a good idea of the contractor’s capabilities. It will often include a firm’s mission statement or philosophy of doing business.



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Doug at West Coast Remodelers & Construction says that they also meet and reach out to clients through their website. “In the past we have advertised sporadically but in today’s climate we are increasing our exposure to the marketplace,” he said.

### CHECK REFERENCES/REVIEW COMPLETED WORK

Any reputable remodeler should be able to provide you with a number of references. Talking to past customers is one of the best ways to check on a firm you are considering.

Here’s a list of questions to ask previous customers:

- Could you communicate well with your contractor?
- Were you pleased with the quality of work?

- Were you satisfied with the way your contractor conducted business?
- Did the work crew show up on time?
- Was your project completed on time?
- Was it completed within budget?
- Did the contractor stay in touch with you throughout the project?
- Was the jobsite kept neat?
- Did the work crew respect being in and around your home and family?
- How was the contractor on follow-up?
- Did you have any problems with callbacks?
- Were your questions and/or complaints handled promptly?
- Would you use the contractor again without hesitation?

There’s no substitute for a direct testimonial or for walking through a project



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF: WEST COAST REMODELERS & CONSTRUCTION, INC.

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and seeing for yourself what a contractor can do. It is the best way to judge the quality of a remodeler's work. Good firms are proud of the work they do and will be glad to show it to you.

Additionally, according to Jon at Greaves Construction, their Job site signs make up about another 5 percent of work coming in, and staying on top of your education also helps. "I am always on the cutting edge; education is key. I keep up on all the latest trends, new technology, education, and new certifications, green building, and universal design. I am also a state certified home energy rater and can help the owners increase the performance of their home while we are working on it. I am always willing to share information and answer questions of any of my clients."

## PREFERRED PROVIDER VS. BIDDING

It is perfectly acceptable to select your remodeler of choice without taking bids. If you've done your due diligence and concluded a particular contractor or designer has the right skill set for your project, don't hesitate to hire that contractor.

If you are taking bids, make sure each contractor is bidding on the same project, that it is an 'apples to apples' comparison. For example, make sure each contract is planning on using the same quality of materials. "We [Greaves Construction] are Design/Build and this allows me to design and price the project at the same time. This has been a great advantage for us and for the client also," Jon said.

In addition, take the time to review each contractor's presentation so you understand exactly what you are getting. And if a bid seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Keep in mind that there is a price to being in business and that an established firm is going to be paying more overhead. So there is a price for experience. But an experienced firm can often help you get more for your money. For instance, his team may have been working together for several years and is, therefore, more efficient.

## TRUST IS KEY

Ultimately, your goal as a homeowner is to hire a remodeler you have confidence in. He or she needs to be someone you can communicate with and someone you trust.

The success of the project begins with a good relationship, Jon said. "[At Greaves Construction], we build relationships not just renovations. Our clients become clients for life. We are also working on the next generation, the grown children of past clients," Jon said.

Doug at West Coast Remodeling and Construction agrees. "We present a professional image and make the homeowner very comfortable with us during the initial consultation meeting. Our packet includes copies of our licenses, insurance, referrals, picture portfolios, and numerous other informational items related to remodeling. We take the time to listen to the homeowner's needs and wants so that we are able to offer advice and help design and then produce a product that meets their dreams while staying within budget. Our belief in giving back to the community is also very important to us and we are proud of our affiliations with The Centre For Women in Tampa and Rebuilding Together Tampa Bay among others."

Always remember, you and your remodeler are tackling your project together. By taking the time to choose the right person for the job, you are assured of getting a remodeling professional committed to the success of your project.

**Sources for this Article:**  
**The Better Business Bureau**  
[www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)

**Greaves Construction Inc.**  
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