

A collage of home renovation materials including wood planks, a color palette, architectural blueprints, a ruler, and a pencil. The background features a variety of wood samples in different colors and textures, a color palette with various shades, and architectural blueprints with labels like 'BEDROOM', 'LIVING ROOM', 'KITCHEN', and 'STUDY'. A large ruler and a yellow pencil are also visible.

7 Things You Need to Know BEFORE Remodeling

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Review and approval provided by Mark Cooke of
Cooke Carpentry and Construction to assure accuracy

Preface

Your first concern is why this guide will be different from the multitude of guides produced by contractors. That's exactly the reason...they're produced by contractors. This one is produced by a homeowner utilizing the expertise of a skilled tradesman. The difference is, I already share the concerns you have as a homeowner looking to hire someone. This guide will address those same concerns while drawing from the experience of a contractor who knows the pitfalls you could face.

This is also the first in a series of materials intended to help you. This is more of an overview of the most important information you need to know. There will also be materials dedicated to specific needs such as kitchen and bathroom remodeling, room additions, and more, so you can be better prepared for any specific project you are considering.

I encourage you to sign up on www.cookeandc.com to receive more resources by email as well as notifications when future materials are produced. No, we don't share your email or send you useless junk. We don't like that either, so there's no way we want to be associated with violating your trust. If there's no benefit to what we send you, you'll just cancel, so we want to be sure it's worth your time.

We trust this guide will be very useful to you.

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Contents

<u>Foreword</u>	3
<u>Your Remodeler Must Be Licensed and Insured</u>	4
<u>Evaluate Your Contractor's Product Knowledge</u>	5
<u>Only Hire Experienced Remodelers</u>	6
<u>Choose Community Rooted Contractors</u>	7
<u>Get and Give Referrals</u>	8
<u>Do Your Research</u>	9
<u>If You're Still Unsure, Get Competitive Bids</u>	10
<u>Epilogue</u>	11

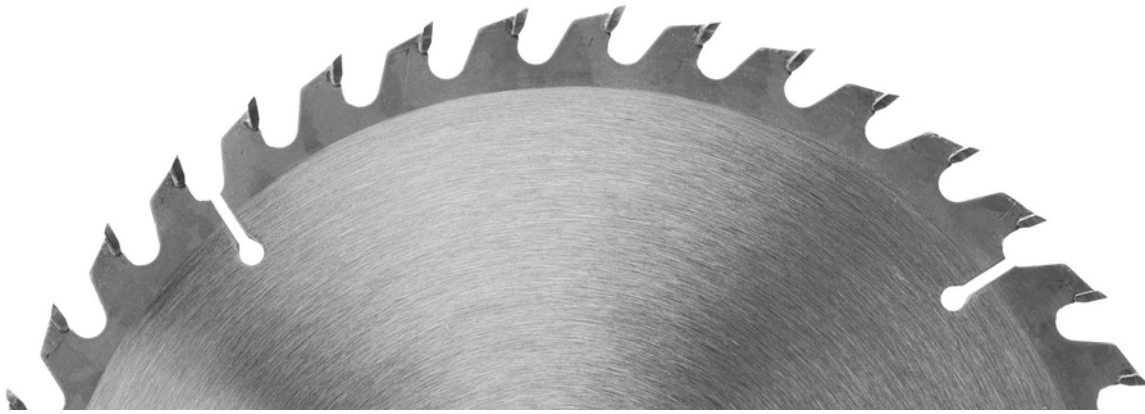
Foreword

What impresses me about Mark Cooke, the owner of Cooke Carpentry and Construction, is that he is one of those people who is *called* to his carpentry occupation. Although educated in business management and marketing, he prefers to get sawdust in his hair and to meet face to face with each person he does business with. The education could not squelch his desire to do carpentry. To me, that symbolizes the kind of pride in his work that I look for when choosing any kind of service provider.

In my 50 years of life experience, I have learned a few things. One of those is that there is a reason skilled professionals make such a difference. When they have a passion for their work, they study to know more and be better than the average. They typically don't charge anywhere near the real value of their work because they love doing it. They should charge ten times the average, because it would still be worth it, but they don't.

Although I have drawn from Mark's experience to produce this guide, the perspective is from my experience and what I care about as a homeowner. I am what you would call a discerning buyer, very analytical, and very selective in my choices. I am not one to be taken in by a cheap price disguised as a value; but like you, I've made my share of buying mistakes. This is intended to help you avoid buyers remorse on your biggest investment—your home.





Your Remodeler Must Be Licensed and Insured

Yes, you will find this point on any guide to choosing a contractor, so it wouldn't be right for us not to have it included because it is very important. It's also important to point out that this is not enough, so just because a contractor meets this qualification is not an ending point...only one you want to be sure they meet before further consideration.

There are many reasons for this, but we'll just mention the more important ones. Remodeling requires the use of tools and many other potentially dangerous and hazardous working conditions. Should a worker be injured on your property, you want to be sure they are legal and covered. The only winner with an unlicensed and/or uninsured contractor is the contractor. Being licensed and insured is not to *their* benefit, it is to *yours*. Other than their physical pain if they are injured, they are not taking the risk, you are.

It's sad that we live in a lawsuit happy society, but it is a reality. Your homeowners insurance would greatly frown on an injury to someone performing unlicensed work on your property. In addition to fighting with your insurance company, you would have legal battles because you are violating the law by having an unlicensed and uninsured contractor. Since medical staff are required to scrutinize the cases they treat, that adds another layer to the potential problems you could face.

It may border on "scare tactics" to tell you all this, but rest assured, an unlicensed contractor is certainly not going to bring it up. They would rather you focus on price. We are doing you a favor to tell you the risk.

Even without injuries involved, and frankly, that's not your biggest risk factor, there is one nearly guaranteed situation you will face with an unlicensed contractor. Most remodeling projects require a permit. As part of the process, there will be an inspection when the work is complete. You need to ask yourself, if the contractor is not licensed, what assurance do you have that they know enough to pass the inspection?

Rework is expensive. There have been far too many cases in home remodeling where saving a few dollars has ended up costing more than having it done right in the first place. Whether it is fixing a code violation or repairing shoddy work, the risk is too great. Having your contractor both licensed and insured is the minimal precaution you should take.



Evaluate Your Contractor's Product Knowledge

This principle reminds me of a lesson I learned more than 25 years ago. Being newlyweds, my wife and I had the money saving opportunity to purchase a “distressed vehicle” through a friend that worked for a body shop. That’s *code* on the title for a vehicle that’s been in an accident. In this case, the car was rolled over when it had less than 2000 miles on it.

Don’t worry, my point is not about getting ripped off, the car actually served us very well and was a genuinely good deal. However, one quirk I had with it did not make sense until several years later.

We drove that car for about 5 years or so before selling it. During that 5 year period, I replaced one of the headlight bulbs at least three or four times, while the other bulb was never replaced at all. A few years after selling it, I took a short term job in a place that *shed light* on why I had that quirky problem (pun intended).

One of the products being made at this place I worked at was headlights. They had an inspection process that required testing the bulbs at frequent intervals. The testing process would reveal the quality of the bulb. If it was full quality, it went to the factory and dealerships. If not, it went to discount retailers.

All of a sudden, *the lights came on* (pun again intended). I bought all the bulbs for that car from a discount retailer. Apparently, so did the body shop. The other bulb had to have been the one installed at the factory which had survived the rollover, so it never failed the entire time I had that car. From that point on, I have always bought bulbs, and most other parts, from the dealership. It was a valuable lesson. The little extra I pay means 4, 5, or even 10 times the life span. That’s value!

I know for a fact that home improvement products are the same way. You might think you are getting exactly the same thing from a discount retailer, but a savvy contractor knows better. We’re living in an

age where it's worse than just whether it passes inspection or not to determine where it gets sold. Because of the volume of discount products needed for major retailers, many of these are deliberately made to lower specs to meet price requirements.

An experienced contractor makes it their business to know which products perform and which ones are made with the illusion of value. They may cost more up front, but they'll save you a lot of pain down the road. When it's for your home, it's the same principle as your car. If a part inside your engine fails, you have to tear the whole engine apart to replace it.

There's no value in a home remodeling job that has defective parts. You either have to become the expert to specify the materials that get used for your remodeling, or you have to trust that your remodeler is an expert that takes time to know what is best. The ones who willingly agree to use cheap materials probably don't plan on being in business when those fail.



Only Hire Experienced Remodelers

Everyone deserves a chance and has to start somewhere, but when it comes to remodeling, there's no substitute for being an apprentice before you work independently. We're not saying that a new company is automatically bad. In fact, every remodeling business is new when they start out. But previous experience and training under another professional is paramount.

This principle would apply to many types of services, but is especially important in remodeling. There are variables that just can't be learned in a textbook or class. They have to be experienced. If for no other reason, an experienced contractor quite often gets to "fix" what was done by an experienced one. Many homeowners learn their lessons the hard way and call reputable contractors only after being burned. Trainees get to see these mistakes and learn from them.



Choose Community Rooted Contractors

One of the classic strategies used by unscrupulous contractors, aside from low prices, is they're here one day and gone the next so they don't have to face the chaos they leave behind. This is much less likely when your contractor is part of the community. Bad news tends to travel fast, so a reputable contractor who is well established in the community will be very concerned about building and keeping their reputation.

Someone community oriented knows they will see you at the grocery store, restaurant, and elsewhere around the area. These contractors become known because the homeowners who choose them become their friends in the process.

You may have also noticed that these same contractors are the ones you see supporting local sports teams, community organizations, and various other causes that help the community. Choosing such contractors not only provides a greater chance of quality remodeling on your home, you are indirectly supporting the efforts to improve your community.



Get and Give Referrals

In the previous section, I mentioned that contractors often become friends with the people they serve. The best business transactions are the ones where both sides win. You as a homeowner win because the contractor cares enough to do the best job they can, and, it's one less job that goes to someone of questionable reputation. The contractor wins because they get the work they need to stay in business, and, win another friend.

Legitimate remodeling thrives on referrals. Just as you should check the credentials and reputation of any service provider, you should seek to share your good experiences to help others with their decisions. I also mentioned the fact above that bad news travels fast. When you've had a great experience, it helps everyone to let others know.

I know you'll want to do this anyway. I just mention the importance of giving referrals because it's helping you when you're looking to establish the credibility of a contractor before you hire one.



Do Your Research

Thanks to the age of the Internet, the information is easily available for almost anything, and definitely, is available for remodeling. That doesn't mean you need to become an expert, you depend on your remodeler for that, but you need to become informed enough to be confident in your choice.

With that said, this step may not be needed if a friend, relative, or neighbor had some remodeling done a few years ago and they are still as pleased with it as the day the contractor left. In a case like that, whoever did their work is probably all the research you need. If it was completed just last week, then it may serve you well to research in addition to the referral.

Besides, a little research will help you evaluate contractors against the other principles outlined in this guide. It's worth your time too. After all, it's your home, so there's too much at stake to be uncertain with your choices.

If You're Still Unsure, Get Competitive Bids

I put this one last because it is often optional. Many guides will set this as a rule, but there are too many variables to call this a rule. Whenever you're comparing the proverbial apples to apples, there won't typically be any significant price differences from one contractor to another. When there is a significant difference, it's rare that there is not also a big difference in the materials quoted and/or the scope of work proposed.

A good contractor works hard for their money just like you do. With enough experience, they become very skilled at matching your needs, goals, and priorities with the best solutions. If cost is an issue, they should be able to explain your options, informing you of how cost cutting will affect the project so you can determine the best balance between budget restraints and your long term satisfaction.

If a contractor has come to you highly recommended from trustworthy sources, and/or you have applied the principles in this guide and are confident in a contractor without getting competitive bids, doing so could just add unnecessary complications to your decision making process. This principle is simply an added precaution for when you're not yet sure.



Epilogue

If the construction and remodeling industry has one flaw, it would be that they categorically don't think like homeowners. I've read a lot site content and materials produced by contractors and it doesn't really connect with our needs as their customers. I trust this guide has been different for you.

The thing I do appreciate about working with people who do remodeling is the old fashioned pride in their work. Many of them may not have the perspective to write a guide like this, but they'll meet the criteria outlined in it. You don't have to be in Mark's service area to benefit from this guide. In fact, if you're in another market and manage to get a copy of this, Mark and I both agree that another skilled contractor getting work is a good thing.

As I mentioned earlier in this guide, when you hire the right contractor, both sides win. You win because you don't fall victim to the wholesale mentality that treats you and your home like a piece of meat so they can quickly move on to the next sale. You get to experience long term satisfaction and the pride you envisioned when you decided to remodel. The contractor wins because they and their family need to eat too.

Please be sure to sign up on www.cookecandc.com for more resources via email. Since other guides dedicated to specific types of remodeling projects will also be made available in the future, we'll let you know when that happens. The emails you receive from us will be designed to benefit you in some way. We're no more interested in sending you useless email than you are in receiving it. Because of that respect, your email address will never be shared either.