

What do I want done?

How to work with a contractor

By Casey Caldwell
Caldwell-Trouette General
Contractors

As I sat watching a recent contractor sting Primetime Live episode — you know, the one where the hidden camera reveals what a crook and all around terrible person the contractor is — I realized that I had sat through at least three similar contractor sting operations on TV in the last couple of years.

I began to wonder what the general attitude toward contractors and people in the home services industries is.

Notwithstanding the small percentage of shady characters that make up any profession, I believe most remodel contractors are honest, hard-working crafts people who put in upwards of 50-70 hours a week to keep

their businesses running smoothly and, most importantly, their clients happy.

The above stated, it is also true that a remodeling project can turn quickly into a nightmare. We've all heard stories of the jobs that ran six months over schedule and \$50,000 over budget, the mess that never got cleaned up, the

trauma of going without a bathroom or kitchen for a long period of time, and so on.

There is a certain amount of preliminary project planning that can greatly reduce the potential problems of any job. The first question homeowners need to ask themselves is: "What do I

want done?"

Whether it is a small job, (replacing a vanity) or a \$150,000 addition, a set of carefully prepared plans will reduce the number of questions that arise, therefore eliminating much miscommunication. A detailed set of plans will help you confirm your budget and get uniform detailed estimates from contractors. If you want something that is not on the plans, you most likely will not get it.

There are two categories for hiring a contractor. The first I call the legal category: The person you are thinking about hiring needs to have a current valid contractors license in good standing. Is his/her performance bond current? Workman's compensation policy up to date? (if they have employees) liability insurance? These are simple questions that your contractor can answer by supplying you individual certifications.

The second category is not so cut and dried. It is what I call the human factor. The most important aspect of deciding who to hire is asking for and calling references. Personal and professional references are critical.

See REMODEL on Page 17



BEFORE AND AFTER — The Healdsburg home of Peter Dygert was transformed with a major remodel about four years ago. Caldwell Trouette General Contractors added a 16-by-32-foot wing at the back of the home. A new front entrance and windows, enclosed carport, new roof and stucco exterior made dramatic differences to the appearance of the entire house.

Renovations
Remodelings
Additions

REMODEL

Continued from Page 3

As a homeowner, I recommend receiving and calling at least 7 - 10 references for a large project. Cost is always a factor, and I recommend getting at least three bids.

The proposal your contractor gives you is really the first job he/she does for you. If a proposal is precise, detailed, thorough, and well laid out, it is at least a good indication that kind of quality will continue through the job. Likewise, if the proposal is unclear, sloppy, vague ... well, you get the idea.

Over the years, I've heard three complaints more than any others about a client's past job or their friends' job. They are:

1) "He showed up the first day, and I didn't see him again for two weeks."

Make sure you get a commitment that once the job starts, your contractor will have a crew start to finish on a continuing basis.

2) "They did a great job, but the place was always a mess! They never cleaned up!"

Tell your contractor that it is a priority that he clean up daily, keep living areas tarped off from the construction zone, and haul debris on a regular basis. This one small effort will go along way to keeping job stress down.

3) "They did a great job, but at the completion, I got a bill for \$8,000 for change orders that I didn't expect."

Easy solution - All change orders need to be written out, priced, and signed by both parties before the change order is effected.

As with any relations, communication is a key or for a successful project. The size of the project is in direct proportion to the amount of communication needed.

Before signing the contract, make sure both parties are clear on scheduling, payment schedules, warranties, sub-contractors, materials, plans and permits.

Basically, when you hire a contractor for a residential project, you're inviting this person into your home for a varying length of time. The questions you need to know the answers to are: Does your contractor do quality work? Will you be able to communicate smoothly with him/her concerning any and all aspects of the job? Will this person respect your home and belongings? Is your contractor in good standing with the State Contractor's License Board? Will he/she keep accurate and detailed job-related paperwork current for billing and plan specification purposes?

Californians spend more than \$10 billion on construction and home remodeling each year. You can find volumes and volumes on this subject in your local bookstore and library. From this contractor's point of view, it is very rewarding to work with a client who is involved, prepared, informed and ready to work with the contractor to achieve the goal of a successful remodel job.

