

Working with Contractors

BY NOELLE LORD CASTLE

SELECTING A CONTRACTOR involves two major considerations. You need to find someone with the professional experience to complete the work, and you want someone that you feel you can communicate effectively with. Pay careful attention during discussions for cues that you are being listened to, and that your questions are being answered thoroughly. A contractor's answers and suggestions should reflect your specific description of what you want done, and you should not feel rushed or pushed into any particular decision.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In order to find the right people, you need to take some time to carefully plan out your project. You should prepare sketches or gather pictures, outline the project, create to-do and checklists, and other essentials that document your objectives. This information is your basis for determining what skills and expertise you require— who “fits” you and your project—and serves as the roadmap for completion. You can not expect someone to accurately quotes costs for you if they do not have clear information from you.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

A qualified contractor should be able to clearly describe examples of past projects reflective of yours and how they would complete your project. Look for options regarding choices of materials, traditional versus modern techniques, or fix versus replace alternatives. Ask for clear descriptions of how the options differ, and the pros and cons of each.

CREDENTIALS

Ask for proof of their experience in projects that compare to yours. Portfolios might include an outline of projects completed, customer testimonials, and pictures and samples of their work. If you are unfamiliar with a contractor ask for several customer references, and *take the time to make these calls*. You want to know if the project was completed on time and on budget, did they do what they said they were going to do, and would they hire them again.

INSURANCE

Contractors should carry appropriate insurances such as liability and workers' compensation, protecting their workers and your family. You do not want to be held responsible for any mishaps. Those who present necessary business documentation obviously take their work seriously.

GUARANTEES AND WARRANTIES

Be sure you are clear on what work guarantees and product warranties are provided and if there are any restrictions. State contract law dictates guarantees on work to some degree, but there are always exceptions. Some contractors are committed to certain product lines, and this may or may not fit your project. ■

Noelle Lord Castle operates Old House C.P.R., and shares her passion for helping owners of older buildings discover how to take good care of them through consulting, teaching and writing. She can be reached by visiting www.oldhousecpr.com.

