

## ASK AN EXPERT

# Renovation begins with choosing remodeler wisely

**Question:** We're considering a major home renovation. There are several companies in the Indianapolis area that appear to do great work. What's the best way to choose a home remodeler to turn our dream into reality?

**Answer:** A house often is a family's most important financial asset. Inviting a professional inside to manage a renovation means, above everything else, you should trust them. After all, you're giving the person (and their subcontractors) the keys and complete access to your home and personal possessions.

We recommend interviewing remodelers and hiring one company to work with from start to finish. When I say start, I mean at the beginning with conceptual drawings and architectural plans. The finish is when the project checklist has had the last box checked.

### Open for bids

The traditional process is to interview three remodeling companies. When they bid on the project, their estimates often range greatly. These bids are based on homeowners walking remodelers through their initial ideas. After that preliminary discussion, the remodelers put bids and perhaps line drawings on paper based on their own work style and what they think the homeowner wants.

These bids usually don't outline the grade and quantity of selections for flooring, lighting, cabinets, plumbing and so on. At this stage, homeowners don't want that much detail, which can obscure what makes one bid higher than another.

In addition, some companies will put allowances into the bid. The



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problem with that: How can anyone know a homeowner's taste after just one or two meetings? For example, a bathroom renovation might require a vessel sink, which costs about \$100 at a big-box store. Yet, a

homeowner might envision something from a high-end store that costs more than \$1,000. That's a huge price difference on just one selection. Plus, the remodeler can't know how much of what to order without a detailed plan.

### Start with a trusted referral

After more than 20 years in the remodeling business, I find it can be better to interview just one company — selected based on strong referrals and track record. If you feel comfortable and the estimate is right, hire that remodeler.

With this process, I find that the homeowner and remodeler do more planning up front, and that helps ensure everyone envisions the same remodeling project. The remodeler knows the budget, and the homeowner makes product selections before a project starts, which means the price doesn't get out of line.

In an upcoming Ask the Expert column, I'll explain types of questions to ask a remodeler during the screening interview.

★ Steve Gray, owner of Steve Gray Renovations, is a member of the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis.

If you have a remodeling question, email it to [leigh.hedger@indystar.com](mailto:leigh.hedger@indystar.com), or mail it to: Ask a Remodeler, The Indianapolis Star, P.O. Box 145, Indianapolis, IN 46206-0145.