

homefinder

ASK A REMODELER

Ask tough questions to get the right contractor for your job

Question: What's the best way to choose a contractor for my renovation project?

Answer: The typical process for choosing a home remodeling partner is to ask friends for references and then get at least three bids from contractors.

Your house is one of your most important assets. To bring someone in to undertake a renovation means creating a relationship of trust — you're giving someone the keys to your home.

When you interview contractors, no question is a bad question. The more information shared upfront, the more likely you'll create a solid relationship with your contractor during and after the home renovation.



Gray

I urge homeowners to ask these questions:

Does the work meet the standard you're looking for?

Ask for examples of past projects, including photographs and videos.

What's the process the general contractor uses from start to finish? Get the details in writing.

Does the contractor work on a fixed price?

Who are the subcontractors? Ask for a list then call them to learn more about the contractor. Even ask if the

company pays the subcontractors' invoices and is current.

Who pays the subcontractors and how often?

What are the standards for subcontractors on the job site? Subcontractor expectations include various standards, from not parking on the client's driveway to end-of-day cleanup requirements and dress code.

Are all contractors and subcontractors bonded and insured? If not, and they're injured on the job, there are potential repercussions regarding your homeowners insurance.

Is the remodeling company lead-paint certified? This is required for any project built before 1978.

What does the work contract look like? Ask for an example.

How often does the contractor experience cost overruns — and why do they happen? Sometimes homeowners ask for changes that affect the price, and sometimes contractors experience budget changes.

How would budget changes be managed on your project? Properly managed, a home renovation budget should have no surprises.

Are past clients satisfied with the final job? Ask for references. Call them to ask whether they'd hire the company again.

Is a warranty offered? What is it?

★ Steve Gray, of Steve Gray Renovations, is a member of the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis. If you have a remodeling question, e-mail it to indypubswriter@indystar.com, or mail it to: Ask a Remodeler, The Indianapolis Star, P.O. Box 145, Indianapolis, IN 46206-0145.

On a budget, laminate is a good alternative to hardwood

By Nancee Reeves

For Custom Publications

Hardwood is a beautiful and long-lasting flooring surface, but it also can be expensive, delicate and hard to keep clean.

A popular alternative is laminate flooring, which looks like hardwood but actually is a composite of fused materials. The material is engineered to avoid the problems that come with real hardwood.

"Laminate flooring is perfect for anyone who wants the look and feel of real wood but is not willing to make the monetary and time commitment wood floors demand," said Rob Smith, sales manager for Big Bob's Flooring Outlet.

A lot to love

One primary advantage of laminate flooring is its cost, which typically is half as much as wood flooring and comparable to vinyl and other options. Laminate flooring is fairly easy and cost-effective to install, too.

"Laminate flooring tends to click together — no glue and no nails,"

Smith said. "Very little skill is needed for laminate floor installation, making it a popular do-it-yourself project."

Routine maintenance is handled with a dry dust mop or vacuum cleaner, and spills come up quickly with a damp towel.

"Laminate flooring is covered with a hard clear coating made from resin-coated cellulose," Smith said. "This keeps the floor from absorbing any type of moisture, so it doesn't stain, resulting in easy cleanup."

Laminate flooring usually resists scratches and fading, so it has a long life and rarely needs to be repaired.

Environmentally sound

Laminate is constructed with minimal amounts of real hardwood and uses wood fibers efficiently, so it generally is considered an environmentally friendly option. Lower-end laminates tend to last no more than 15 years before they need to be replaced, so homeowners might want to invest in a higher-quality brand. It still costs less than real wood and should stand up to heavy traffic for years.



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