

How to Choose a Builder

If you're in the market for a new home, you should shop for your builder as carefully as you shop for your home. Whether you are buying a condo, a townhouse, a house in a subdivision, or a custom built house, you want to know that you are buying a good quality home from a reputable builder. Here are a couple of tips to help you choose a builder.

Make A List of Possible Builders

- Once you have thought about the type of house you want, you will need to find a builder.
- Contact your local home builders' association to obtain a list of builders who construct homes in your area. You can also look on Move.com, the National Association of Home Builder's official new homes listing Web site.
- Look in the real estate section of your local newspaper for builders and projects. Looking through the ads and reading the articles can help you to learn which builders are active in your area, the types of homes they are building, and the prices you can expect to pay. Make a list of builders who build the type of home you're looking for in your price range.
- Local real estate agents may also be able to help you in your search. Ask friends and relatives for recommendations. Ask about builders they have dealt with directly, or ask them for names of acquaintances who have recently had a good experience with a builder.

Do Your Homework

Once you have a list of builders, how can you find out about their reputations and the quality of their work? The best way to learn about builders is to visit homes they have built and talk with the owners.

- Ask builders on your list for the addresses of their recently built homes and subdivisions. Builders may even be able to provide names of some home owners who would be willing to talk with you.
- Drive by on a Saturday morning when home owners may be outside doing chores or errands. Introduce yourself and say you are considering buying a home from the builder who built their home. Talk to several owners, and try to get a random sample of opinions. The more people you talk with, the more accurate impression of a builder you are likely to get. At the very least, drive by and see if the homes are visually appealing.
- When you talk to builders and home owners, take along a notebook to record the information you find and your personal impressions about specific builders and homes. Doing so will help you to make comparisons later. Some questions you can ask people include: Are you happy with your home? If you had any problems, were they fixed promptly and properly? Would you buy another home from this builder?
- Usually, people tell you if they are pleased with their homes. And if they are not, they'll probably want to tell you why.

Shop For Quality and Value

- Look at new homes whenever you can. Home shows and open houses sponsored by builders are good opportunities to look at homes. Model homes and houses displayed in home shows are often furnished to give you ideas for using the space. You may also ask a builder to see unfurnished homes.

- When examining a home, look at the quality of the construction features. Inspect the quality of the cabinetry, carpeting, trim work, and paint. Ask the builder or the builder's representative a lot of questions. Get as many specifics as possible. If you receive the answers verbally rather than in writing, take notes. Never hesitate to ask a question. What seems like an insignificant question might yield an important answer.