

When and how to hire a contractor

An important decision on any renovation project is whether to do the work yourself or to hire a contractor. In the euphoria of planning some exciting improvements to your home, there may be a tendency to underestimate the complexity of the job and to overestimate your expertise. While savings and satisfaction can result from doing it yourself, perhaps some jobs should be left to professionals. Consider the following points when making your decision.

- Check with your local building authorities. Jobs involving plumbing, wiring or heating systems must at least be inspected and some jurisdictions require that these tasks be done by certified tradespeople.

- Can you realistically fit the renovation into your existing schedule? If the house is topsy-turvy for an extended period, you may not win the Family Peace Prize.

- Have you had recent experience exercising the skills you will need for the task at hand? If previous appearances in the role of Home Handyperson netted you more cat-calls than curtain calls, perhaps you should consider hiring some expert assistance.

- Do you have access to all the tools you will need? If you have to rent or buy specialized equipment, take this into account when costing the job.

- Will you really save money? Get accurate information on the potential savings of a do-it-yourself project. Add up the price of materials and possible expenditures for tools, then compare this to written quotes from contractors. In some cases, the savings may not be sufficient to compensate for your own time and hammer damage to your thumbs. Maybe a combination of undertaking the work you are familiar with and contracting out more specialized tasks would be the best route to a quality job that is also affordable.

If you have made the decision to hire a contractor, the real work still lies ahead. Finding the right contractor and ensuring that the work is completed to your satisfaction requires time, care and close attention to details.

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Many thanks to Mark Rowe, President of the Esquesing Historical Society

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