

# How to Choose a High-Quality Contractor

By Melissa Morton

Choosing a contractor is about trust. But who should you trust? Will the guy with the lowest bid actually perform? Will he do what he says he is going to do? Will he even finish the job?

One of Renovation Design Group's clients had a practically fool proof way to weed out contractors. This particular client had a plan. He knew exactly what he wanted and the kind of remodel project he wanted to avoid. Working with Renovation Design's architects, he set a tight but realistic schedule for the contractors and subcontractors. He even developed an incentive plan giving bonuses if the contractors stayed on schedule.

With a background in professional logistics, this client was so thorough that he blocked out two months to interview and research the contractors recommended by Renovation Design.

He already had the detailed plan so he could easily compare each bid on the project. It was no surprise that this detail-driven client who demanded high quality chose John Farrell with Alta Restoration & Remodeling in Riverton, Utah.

"He must have picked me because of my gray whiskers," Farrell says. But with all joking aside Farrell has maturity, experience, and a portfolio full of successful jobs—11 years worth to be exact.

Farrell actually fell into the construction industry by default. A career opportunity for his wife led them to Utah in 1988, where an abrupt lay off from his job gave him the time he needed to build his own home. "I had always wanted to build a house so I thought I would give it a try, seeing how we already bought the land," he says.

He successfully built his own home and loved every minute



of it. He enjoyed it so much that he decided to make a career in construction. That is when he went to work for a local contractor that later became his mentor. "He taught me not only the work but also the business of construction," he says.

In those first years, he learned the importance of listening to customers and understanding their wants and needs. Because he wanted to always be in tune to his customers Farrell has kept his company small. With only two full-time employees, himself and his son Daniel Farrell, Alta Restoration can offer something that not every contractor can: hands on individual attention. "I am the one with my



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hands in the project,” says Farrell. “We focus on the project in front of us instead of trying to juggle multiple projects.”

He relies on a network of specialty subcontractors for electrical, plumbing, sheet rock, tile, roofing, etc. “We let the experts go in and do the work efficiently,” he says. “The subcontractors we work with have proven themselves. They do quality work and they have an allegiance to us because we bring them a stream of work.”

People wanting the high quality and personal attention have booked Alta out for months. For example, if you were to sign a contract in August then he would start your project in December. But that kind of time before a project begins is not a bad thing. It gives the customer time to prepare. It gives them time to organize and to arrange for alternative living areas. “We’ve got people signed that are willing to wait for us,” he says. “It’s worth waiting for.”

Quality doesn’t come without a price. Alta Restoration



isn’t going to be the lowest bidder but Farrell doesn’t want to be. “It is like buying an automobile,” he explains. “You get what you pay for. But we will be reasonably priced for good quality work.”

Many clients focus mainly on price. But this is not always the best way to judge a contractor. Farrell says sometimes he knows he will not fit into a client’s price range but he still gives him a bid. Those bargain shoppers disregard Alta but some regret it in the end. “Some of those people come back and say that they have really messed up,” Farrell says.



Alta has finished four Renovation Design projects but his most memorable was the rambling ranch with that detail-oriented, down the line client we described; the man with the schedule to the wire. “His schedule was very tight and demanding but he had realistic expectations,” Farrell says. “He was tough but easy to work with at the same time. It was almost intimidating but as we developed a rapport, we listened to each other. He pushed me to push my subcontractors and I learned a lot from him.”

We can all learn from this client’s drive to choose the right contractor that he could trust to get the job done right. Let’s review his tips to choosing a high-quality contractor.

**First off, get a detailed design.** The contractor’s bids will actually be more accurate when they bid on a professionally detailed design. Renovation Design Group details the materials for the project so that your granite countertop is priced in the initial bid. Plus having specific

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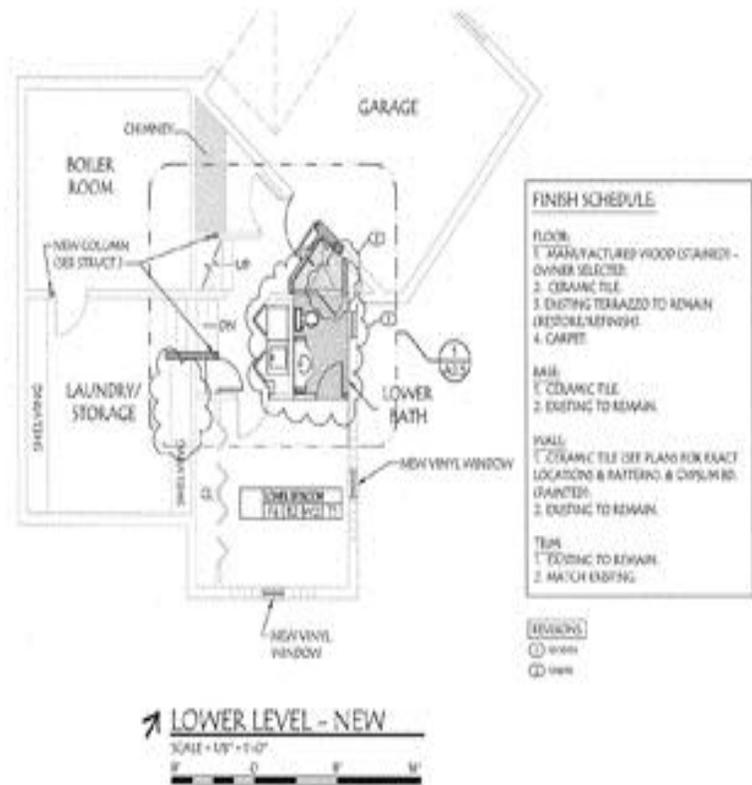
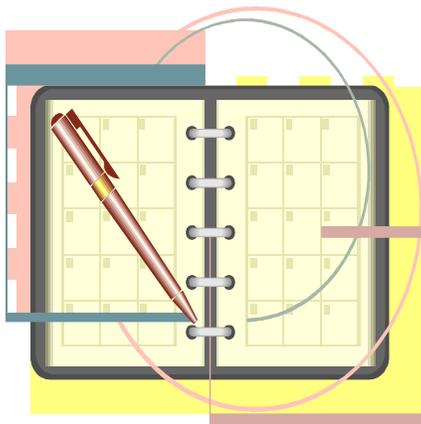
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professional plans makes comparing the bids easier. Remember the lowest bidder doesn't mean he is the best contractor. It only means he is the cheapest and sometimes compromises quality to get there.

## Do your homework.

Interview the contractors before you choose one for your job. Find out if they have the right insurance and bonding in case something goes wrong with the project. Also, review the contractor's past jobs. Not only in his portfolio but also ask for references and call them. Talking to past clients can clue you into his true work ethic.

**Test the contractor.** In the example, this client weeded contractors out by demanding they stay on his schedule. Farrell passed



the test when he agreed to work following the tight schedule.

**Take your time.** This client took two months to choose a contractor. That was plenty of time for the bidding process as well as interviewing and researching the contractor's background. It won't matter if you hold up the project finding the right contractor because if you choose the wrong one then your project may be held up anyway.

After you follow these tips to choosing a contractor then you can trust that you have picked the right one for your project—one you can trust.

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