

Shopping for a Builder: Find Your Perfect Match

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 home building professional.

Make a List of Possible Builders

Once you have thought about the type of house you want, you will need to find a builder.

- Visit AHBA's member directory at www.ahbaonline.com/findbuilders to obtain a list of builders who construct homes in Acadiana. 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 this newspaper for builders and projects. Flipping through the ads and reading the articles can help you to learn which builders are active the 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. 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 if the builder is licensed to build in the state of Louisiana. This is required by law, and you could be legally exposed if you hire someone who is not. Before signing a contract, be sure to ask for a copy of the license.
- Make sure the builders have a permanent business location and a good reputation with local banks and suppliers.
- Find out how long they have been in the building business. It usually takes three to five years to establish a financially sound business. You want to make sure they will be around after the construction is complete to service any warranties.
- Check out the company's rating and if there have been any complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau: www.bbb.org.
- Make sure the builder/remodeler has sufficient workers compensation and general liability insurance. If not, you may be liable for any construction-related accidents on your premises.
- 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 working with 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. Open houses sponsored by builders are good opportunities to look at homes. Model homes 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.
- Do you feel you can easily communicate with the builder? Remember you will be in close contact with them throughout the construction process and afterward as you live in your new home.

Find more helpful advice on home building at www.nahb.org/forconsumers.