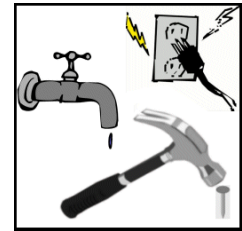


# How to Hire *ANY* Contractor

a.k.a. How to Avoid a Renovation Horror, Part I  
www.RenovationHorror.com

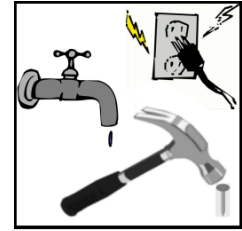


## Questions to Ask a Contractor

1. Are you registered or licensed?  
*Verify with Contractors Registration Board at [www.CRB.RI.gov](http://www.CRB.RI.gov) or 222-1268*  
*Check plumbers and electricians at Department of Labor [www.DLT.RI.gov/profregs](http://www.DLT.RI.gov/profregs) or 462-8000*
2. Does your company carry liability insurance and workers compensation?  
*Liability insurance is required for all contractors. Workers comp is obligatory if the company has direct employees. Verify with the insurance agent(s). If sole proprietor and no workers comp insurance, he must sign an RI DWC-11-IC form which does not protect you from lawsuits.*
3. Are you a licensed Lead Safe Remodeler?  
*This is required by federal and state law in RI for houses built before 1978 where you will be disturbing 6 square feet of paint or any windows. Verify with RI Dept. of Health at [www.health.RI.gov/lead/lists/leadlicense.php?type=LRM](http://www.health.RI.gov/lead/lists/leadlicense.php?type=LRM) or call 800-942-7434*
4. How long have you been in business?  
*Look for a company with an established record of happy customers in your community.*
5. Do you have employees or do you hire subcontractors?  
How long have you worked with your subcontractors?  
Will you give me copies of their registrations, workers compensation and liability insurance?  
Which parts of your project will be handled by staff, and which will be contracted out to independent contractors?  
If you do have direct employees, what are their job descriptions/responsibilities?
6. Do you use a project supervisor or lead carpenter to oversee the project?  
What role will *you* be playing? Will *you* be here each day? How many *hours* per day?  
How many jobs do you typically have going at one time?  
*Is this one of those uninvolved contractors who shows up once a week to collect a check?*
7. Who will be assigned as project supervisor for the job?  
And what if the supervisor is not available?
8. Do any of your company's employees or subcontractors have industry certifications?  
*Trade certifications are good indicators of dedication, professionalism and knowledge of the industry. A few designations are: Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS), Certified Green Professional (CGP), Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD)*
9. Do you typically put change orders into writing? With a fixed price or time & materials?
10. Do you have design services available?  
*Design services will allow you to see what the results will look like and if they will work well. If they do not have design-build capabilities, you should consider hiring an architect, designer or design-build firm. You will need plans for a permit, and drawings assist in communication.*

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## Questions to Ask a Contractor

11. What is your approach to a project of this scope?  
*(How does the contractor work and what can be expected during the project?)*
12. Will we need a permit for this project?  
*If you are opening any walls, building a new structure or changing the outside of your house, the answer to this question is probably yes (check with your town's building department). How a contractor responds to this question is very telling of his ethics. If he's willing to cheat the government and break laws, can you trust him? If he says that you should pull the permit, this is a red flag and you should report this to the Contractors Registration Board 222-1268.*
13. Will we have a scheduled weekly meeting?  
*Obviously this question is for longer projects. These are vital for good communication throughout the project.*
14. What is the time frame for starting the project? What is your time estimate for completion?  
What are your normal working hours?  
*Make stipulations in the contract if working hours are important to you, but realize that a constricted working schedule will cost extra.*

The contractor should be able to supply you with a **minimum of four references similar to your project**. The projects should have been completed in the last few years to be relevant. You should also ask for professional references from suppliers or subcontractors to verify sound business practices. If he has not been paying his insurance, he may have financial problems.

Did the contractor ask *you why* you want to do your project? If he does not know the reason for spending so much money, can he really understand what your needs are or what your needs may be in the near future? What questions *did* the contractor ask? Did he seem to be in a rush? If two-way communication is bad during the sales process...

The most important question is one you must ask yourself: "**Do I feel comfortable with and trust this person and his associates?**" Would you let this person borrow your *car*? You'll be handing over the keys to your home to this person. If your gut is uneasy with him, look for someone else.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sam Brusco is a registered general contractor in RI (#26655) and Massachusetts (#87472). He is an NAHB Certified Green Professional, a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist and a lecturer. Brusco is a member of the US Green Building Council – RI chapter, the Rhode Island Builders Association, and is a licensed Lead-Safe Remodeler (RI #LHS-0955). He can be reached at 401-632-0765 and Sam@BruscoDesign.com