

## Tales from the Crawlspace

By: Scott Harris

Propertyexam

### FINDING & CHOOSING A CONTRACTOR TO WORK ON YOUR HOME

You've bought a home recently and want to put your "stamp" on it, improve it, maintain it or change it your way. Either that or you've been there a while and face the same kinds of issues; repair, maintenance, renovation. The bottom line is maintenance or repair never really goes away and most of us just can't do it all ourselves. For whatever reason most homeowners will need to hire a contractor or contractors at some time. I'm pretty sure some of this won't all be popular but will be useful...

There is a general impression by many that contractors are like "used car salesman" or "carnies" they will take advantage of anyone they can. That all they really care about is making money and will do all kinds of slipshod work if not watched like a hawk. The truth is quite different. Most builder types are generally hard working, creative people who came to this through experience and satisfaction found in creating something better. Few are getting rich, most work long, hard, hours doing things most people would rather not. They need to make a living but the successful builder still gets a huge kick from completing a job well done. There are few things that can fill you with pride as much as knowing you've created something wonderful and lasting. Some of the biggest problems come from builders who handle the construction part really well but fall short on the business/planning aspect of their job. This part is equally important to you, and this leads me to my 1<sup>st</sup> or general recommendations.

PICK a contractor you LIKE. This sounds a little silly but really, you need someone you can communicate with and seems is genuinely pleasant to communicate with. If you have trouble communicating with them during the "bidding" process, it will get only worse later on. Always use someone established, licensed, bonded

insured. There are complications with anything and everyone has miss steps. You need someone who will be around later and responsive to your concerns if or when they come up. IF you have a new roof installed in September and it leaks at the 1<sup>st</sup> heavy rain, or the gutter at the back doesn't drain correctly, you want to be able to make a phone call and have them come out and correct it. "Gypsy" contractors will be long gone... The bottom line here is really cheap builders, are really, really expensive. They do slipshod work and they can't be found later. There are literally some types of contractors who travel around so they don't have to answer for their poor workmanship. Historically the worst are Asphalt and roofing contractors (never believe an asphalt guy who "happens to be around with an extra load" it's a scam, they will probably lay the material down too thin and it won't last. Some roofers will work an area for about 3 years, then move or "reorganize" so they don't have to answer for their shoddy work. This kind of nonsense happens in any trade, these are just the most notorious.

Recommendations are the best source of an introduction for a contractor. Seek a recommendation from someone you know or a contractor you've already used and trust. It's not "everything" but it's really the best source. The other thing you should do, regardless of the recommendation source, is look the respective contractor up on the Oregon CCB website. See if they've had complaints against them, if their license has ever been suspended, how long they've been in business and that sort of thing. One or 2 complaints may not mean anything. Anyone can get a bad client who expects the highest level of service but wants to pay bargain basement prices. With that in mind, don't be a bad client. Try to remember this stuff they do, costs. It all costs; the tools cost a lot, the materials cost a lot, the time to organize, plan and execute repairs and renovations all costs. You should insist on a solid bid for the work you are having done and you have every right to expect the builder to deliver at that price. However, every time you ask them to do something else, or change something, it costs. Expect to pay for changes and ask what they will cost up front. We all want the best deal and its ok to negotiate yourself a good deal on your project. However, if you get a builder to agree to something that's significantly less than their original bid, it will probably not work out well for you. The pressure of trying

to deliver more for less often makes otherwise honest builders do crappy work or use poor materials. Have a serious conversation with your builder if they've agreed to significantly less than they originally say. Make sure you both are clear on what is expected and what will be delivered.

The internet is a great place to find information and to search for a builder or service company. However, you must keep in mind, everything you will find there is advertising. Craigslist is a great place to find a used couch for your basement or a used car. It's not the best place to find a solid builder or sub contractor. You can find one time use, minor labor type things there. However, if it's something substantial for your home, you really need to find a recommendation from someone you can trust. If you can't find that, ask for references, and check them out. Here comes the "unpopular" part. "Referral" websites are all advertising. Angie's list, merchant circle, contractor 360, service magic, yelp local, Google local, all these things are advertising platforms. Yes ALL OF THEM, paid advertising, manipulated results. Some of the best builders don't advertise at all, ever. They have more work than they can handle, from referrals and work from referrals is easier, better, less hassle. I know it seems like some of these things provide referrals from other people who have used the services but they don't really. The information is manipulated. You are seeing what they want you to, the websites charge a lot of money to the contractors listed. They manage to put them up in front of you, over the contractors who only have referrals from users. The bottom line is all these things are advertising, they are not the same as a referral from someone you know or can look in the eye. Sorry if that bursts anyone's bubble.

For what it's worth, I offer an ongoing referral type service. If I inspect a property for you, I will serve as an indefinite resource for information. I'll tell you how to fix things yourself, or refer you to a contractor whose work I am familiar with. That's for as long as you own any property I have inspected for you. As a 20# K consultant, I oversee 60+ major renovations a year. I see lots of contractors, some average, some really terrific and budget conscious, and a few never-to-be-spoken of.

Keep in mind, your house starts to need maintenance the day the building department signs off on the certificate of occupancy. Small things only get worse and become big things. Take care of everything now. Treat for moss when there is no moss, repair roofing before it leaks, and caulk seal service, before there is damage, stay ahead of things, well ahead...