



CHOOSING THE  
*Perfect* REMODELER

Congratulations on moving another step closer to realizing your remodeling dream. It's no mistake that our motto is "You Dream It, We'll Build It." It starts with your early thoughts and dreams about how to improve your home for your family and guests—and, yes, for yourself!



## Remodeling Process

With your dreams, you've entered Step 1 of the National Association of the Remodeling Industries (NARI) Remodeling Process:

1. Dreaming about your project.
2. Budgeting for your project.
3. Finding a professional.
4. Selecting a professional.
5. Working with a professional.
6. Completing a successful remodeling project.

## Defining Your Project

We're members of NARI and we've helped many, many people just like you navigate this process for over a decade. The purpose of this workbook is to provide insight into finding and selecting a professional remodeler. I hope to take any mystery out of the process and to provide the insight you need to launch your successful remodeling project.



Take some time early in this effort to better define your project. Of course, a professional remodeler will help you turn your dream into plans as well as provide cost and time estimates. But you need to be fairly clear on what you're trying to accomplish. This can be *photos from design websites and magazines, Pinterest ideas, or just your handwritten notes and drawings.*

This is an important step so that you have a common starting point as you discuss your project with several different remodelers.

## Finding a Professional Remodeler

The first place to go is to your friends and business associates. Who have they worked with? What, if any, problems did they encounter? Other reliable sources of recommendations include real estate agents, lumber yards, and suppliers for remodeling projects. I highly suggest that you use industry organizations such as NARI or Houzz, as well.

## Selecting a Professional Remodeler

This should result in a list of four to six potential remodelers that you want to call. You'll eventually want to narrow that list to no more than three face-to-face meetings. Otherwise, you'll get into quite a detailed and potentially confusing selection process across so many different remodelers.

### Phone Interviews.

I recommend getting on the phone with each remodeler on your list. Here are a few key questions to ask at this stage of the selection process:

- Does my project fit your experience and expertise?
- How many years of experience on my type of project?
- What licenses do you hold?
- Do you have a specialization or certification, like a Green Remodeler?
- Do you work on an estimate or fixed price?
- How much, if any, payment is required upfront?

Ask for references from early clients that can validate experience and quality.

Those are probably enough questions to ask at this stage of the selection process. Make sure you keep notes and keep them organized by remodeler. You can begin to gather quite a bit of information over just a few calls and you want to make sure you support your memory with organized notes.



One of my key takeaways from this type of phone interview isn't necessarily about the information that is being shared. *Instead it is about the communication itself.* It should be open, honest, and clear. If they can't accomplish that with your few questions, it will only compound the problems you'll encounter during the project. So, listen to the type of communication you're receiving as well as the specific answers.

Yet another important insight is that this should be a two-way interview. The potential remodeler should be asking you questions. First to make sure they understand your needs, and second to make sure that you and your project are a good fit for their skill set. In fact, with the best remodelers you'll actually learn more about your own project just based on answering their finely tuned questions.



### **Face-to-Face Meetings.**

By this time your short list should be at no more than three potential partners. At this point, it is essential that you meet face-to-face. *I recommend that it take place in your home,* so that you can not only share your insight into the project, but you can also see whether they arrive on time and how they present themselves. This gives you a great opportunity to describe your "dream remodel" in the context of your house and, hopefully, develop a common understanding of the vision between you and the contractor.

As for questions to ask, you may want to consider repeating some of the phone interview questions that I recommended earlier.

### **Then you should launch into some more detailed questions including :**

- Who do you work with? Your own team, subcontractors, or both?
- Who will be supervising the work on site?
- What building permits will be required? Make sure you include Homeowner's Association bylaws and requirements as well as local building codes.
- How will you protect my property during the construction?
- How will you take into consideration my family? What are your working hours? What about clean up during and after the project?
- How will you keep me posted on progress?
- How will change orders be handled in case something is encountered that requires additional work, cost, and time?

I also recommend that after you've discussed your project at length along with the remodeler's qualifications and approach, you ask yet another question: *What part of my project concerns you?*

There are not many projects that are simple and straightforward. There can be tricky issues or items that could arise that would cause serious problems. Asking this question can not only reveal those potential issues but, perhaps more importantly, provide you with insight into the experience level and quality of thinking displayed by each of your potential remodelers.

## Requesting Budgetary Proposals

You've already done a great deal of work. Now is the time to discuss if your budget is in line with what your potential remodelers think the project will cost. Discuss with them their estimating process and how this translates to the actual cost of the project.

Just as with the phone and face-to-face interviews, you will gain insight into each contractor's process just by the way they develop and describe their budgetary proposal.

- Are they professional and clear in their communication and documents?
- Do they cover items that you hadn't even thought about?



In essence, you're trying to determine which remodeler you'd trust with your home.

On a complex job, many companies may not provide a detailed estimate without a signed contract. This is because it requires a detailed design phase of which the end vision could strongly influence the overall cost of the project. Don't let this be a deterrent. Just continue to follow the steps we have outlined, working with the general estimate of cost and time.

## Financing Your Dream

Most remodelers will inquire how you'll be paying for the project. This can be check, credit card, home equity loans, bank home improvement loans, or cash. Home equity funding can be through lines of credit from your mortgage holder or even refinancing and using a portion of your equity for your home improvement project(s).

Many contractors have connections with a specialized banker who understands the remodeling industry and can provide multiple options for financing a project. This is one more element of your project to discuss with your remodeling finalists.

## Homework

Now is the time for budgetary proposal comparison. If you're like me, you've probably already made up your mind about the frontrunner, just based on their approach to your project, the quality of their work, and how they communicate. In reviewing the proposals, there are a few red flags to keep in mind.



### Red Flag #1

*Is one proposed budget considerably different than the others?* This could be a miscommunication of what the vision really is, or an incorrect assessment of the detailed aspects of the project. Don't be too eager to choose the lowest cost/time or discount the one with the highest cost/time. Sometimes this is a result of someone not understanding the details or realizing more of the details than the others.

### Red Flag #2

*Are they all off from your budget or after discussing your budget did some contractors remove themselves from further discussions?* This could be a sign that either your budget or scope of work may need to change. Discuss these details with the contractors to understand what potential alternatives they may offer. A good contractor should be able to advise you on many different options.

### Red Flag #3

This is also the time when you should consider what is most important to you. While we realize you likely don't have an infinite supply of funds, this is the time to ask *what it is worth to be able to trust the people coming in your home everyday*, to trust they will finish in the time they have allotted and the agreed upon budget, and who will do the job right the first time. You may save some money, but if the work leaves you wanting better, or, worse having to do it all over again, did you really save anything?

## Calling References

Now that you have all the pieces in hand, it is a great time to call their references and consider visits to view their work firsthand. Ideally, you'll talk to references where the work was completed a few years ago. Their experience will show not only the remodeler's approach to the work but it will also show the durability and lasting quality of the work over time.

*I also recommend visiting work that is currently underway.* This will reveal what you and your family will experience while the work is being accomplished.

- Do they seal off the rest of the home?
- Are they conscious of your family's living requirements during the project?
- Do they know how to handle indoor pets, or will other arrangements need to be made?



Finally, make sure you call the Better Business Bureau to validate that your frontrunner is who they appear to be.

## Get It In Writing

Next, get everything in writing. Ideally, that is already part of their proposal package. At a minimum you should see the following items in your agreement:

- Estimated project price and payment schedule.
- Detailed scope of work; what will be accomplished.
- Permits that will be secured.
- Schedule of work including start and end dates.
- Change orders and how they will be approved.
- Warranty details on the work and supplied items.
- Dispute resolution clause that addresses arbitration.
- Waiver of lien that prevents subcontractors and suppliers placing a lien on your house if your contractor doesn't pay their invoices.
- Discuss an agreed upon payment plan. Many projects require some upfront payment for materials cost, and then payments should be based upon progress.





## Making It Happen

I hope this information has proven valuable in helping you get closer to making your dream happen. We've been in this business for many years, right in your neighborhood. My own team of craftsmen, supported by tried and true contractors, can take your ideas and make them reality. Plus, we can ensure that all permitting and contractual matters are addressed, allowing you to focus on the implementation your dream for you, your family, and guests.

**Give us a call and let's get started!**

Use the contact form on our website,  
email [Botond@MarvelousHomeMakeovers.com](mailto:Botond@MarvelousHomeMakeovers.com), or call **214.458.1932**.