



CONTRACTOR STANDARDS GUIDE

Code of Ethics & Competency

How To Choose The RIGHT Contractor - The FIRST Time.

Compliments of Thomas Custom Builders, Inc.

Steps to Take Before Starting a HOME REMODELING PROJECT

When done properly, a remodeling project makes your home more enjoyable and can prove to be a valuable investment. It's also a relatively expensive undertaking that can turn out to be one of the worst experiences of your life if you choose the wrong company. But how can you tell if one company is any better, any worse, or any different from another?

This guide outlines standards to help you judge **BEFOREHAND** whether or not a company is likely to do your job right. Before you hire any company to work on your home, make sure you consult this guide and **INSIST** they comply with **EVERY SINGLE STANDARD**. If you do, chances are you'll have a great experience and get exactly what you want out of your project.

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STABILITY

You need to make sure that any contractor you do business with has proven themselves in the past, and will be there if you need them in the future. Don't just ask the contractor if they are stable; look for tangible proof of longevity and financial stability by asking for the items listed on the next few pages.

Business Licenses

Make sure they've been operating under the same name for at least 5 years. Many contractors change names multiple times to avoid past customer complaints and problems. Contractors who haven't been trading as the same name for at least five years had better have a good reason why. (Naturally, some businesses will be legitimately new. If so, get a 10 year work history of the owner and ask questions!)



Supplier/Vendor Reference Letters

Letters from suppliers and vendors confirm the company is actually installing the products they claim to be (rather than cheaper stuff from home centers) and that they're financially responsible with their accounts. These letters are easy for your contractor to get – if you're told otherwise, they're most likely trying to hide something.

Bank Letter

This signed document from the contractor's bank will show you the financial stability and the bank's judgment of character of the company you're working with. Insist on seeing this letter so you know that you're dealing with a company that is stable and financially sound.

Proof of Insurance

You need to know if your contractor carries General Liability insurance. A responsible contractor will carry no less than \$1,000,000 of coverage. If their insurance policy can't cover potential damages, then the contractor would be personally liable. If he can't cover the damages himself, you'll have no legal recourse and will end up paying for any damages or injuries yourself.

[illegible]

CONTRACTOR STANDARD REPUTATION

One way to judge a home improvement or design-build company is to find out what others have to say. A good reputation is earned through years of giving good service, treating people right, doing what you say you'll do, going the extra mile, respecting your customers and standing behind your warranties.

Awards from Well-Known, Respected Websites

More people are leaving online reviews than ever before. Businesses that have been awarded prestige status on popular, respected contractor and services websites have typically been voted by customers and field experts to be reliable - offering both excellent customer service and true value.



Reviews from the web

Houzz
5/5
26 reviews

Angie's List
A
78 reviews

HomeAdvisor
4.8/5
16 reviews

Facebook
4.9/5
9 votes

Testimonials & Accolades

Satisfied customers are the greatest testament to the capabilities, performance and character of any reputable contractor. Take the time to research the company's website for recent testimonials and accolades.

Working with Thomas Custom Builders was an exceptional experience. You hear horror stories of contractors taking forever to complete work or not finishing the project or not delivering what you expected. I had absolutely none of these issues and the contractor was always available to answer my questions. When I pointed out minor details that weren't quite what I wanted, they fixed them right away.

~ Elizabeth, Herndon



CONTRACTOR STANDARD PROFESSIONALISM

A good home improvement company doesn't just do good work – they understand that, when dealing with customers, it's often the little things that make big differences. You should find a contractor that shows you respect by the way they treat you, the way they look, the way they treat your property, and how they pay attention to details. Check any contractor you're considering using against these standards of professionalism:

No Sales Pressure Agreement

Unethical contractors will resort to high-pressure sales tactics to get you to buy before you've had an opportunity to do proper due diligence on them. If you know nothing about the contractor prior to the sales call (from literature, references, online information), and they give you a low-ball price "but only if you buy right this minute," you should be wary. Reputable companies will have a no-tricks, no-pressure sales pledge signed by the owner.

Customer References

Contractors who can rightfully claim that at least half of their new business comes from repeat clients - and referrals from existing clients - are well on their way to offering proof that their customer service and the quality of their work speaks for itself. All reputable contractors will be able to supply you with a list of references. The list should include customers from at least 5 years ago to some in the recent past.

Thomas Custom Builders
Rick Thomas
Dave Holmes

Rick and Dave:

Other than the purchase of our home, the addition to our house was the largest expenditure we have ever made. Because of this large investment, we were very critical of the contractor that we chose to complete the project. The decision of which contract to choose was not something we took lightly. After meeting with several contractors and seeking numerous recommendations, we chose Thomas Custom Builders. The experience of completing this project and the final product far exceeded our expectations.

From the first meeting we had to discuss our ideas for the project, you were both very honest and accommodating to our needs and desires. It was evident throughout the project that you both have many years of experience and are true craftsmen. We have heard many horror stories about contractors and problems homeowners have had with them during their project. We never had those experiences. You always talked with us about the progress of the project, next steps/phases, and projected timeframes for completing those steps/phases. You always stressed how important it was to complete the project within budget while still maintaining a high level of craftsmanship and you performed as promised. Again, honesty was always paramount for you both and that was very much appreciated.

We could not write a letter such as this without talking about the amazing crew you have who actually performed a majority of the work on the project. Kenny Holmes and the other guys are very skilled craftsmen who were extremely thorough, hard-working, courteous, and on-time. We always got the impression from the crew that they treated our project as if they were working on their own house and not a corner was cut or a detail was missed.

Rick and Dave, we can't thank you enough for the amazing work performed by Thomas Custom Builders on our project. We would without hesitation highly recommend your company to anyone considering any type of addition/remodeling project.

Sincerely,

Tom and Jill

July 25, 2011

To: Thomas Custom Builders

Dear Rick:

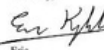
I would like to thank you for the outstanding work that you did in raising our garage ceiling and then adding an additional bedroom and bathroom this Spring. I am a perfectionist and pretty skilled at home improvements, so honestly I was doubtful that I would find a contractor who could really make me happy. But as the project progressed, I discovered that I had found the perfect contractor. I was always impressed at Dave's attention to detail and willingness to come back and make small corrections. The quality and service was first class.

I was also pleased with the specialty crews with whom Thomas Custom Builders has long-standing relationships. For example, your framing crew has worked together as a team for many years – they worked like clockwork to demo my old garage and then to erect 2 stories of framing, floors and a roof in three days total. I might add that this framing was straight and true – I took a careful look around all of the angles and they were dead-on; as a result, our drywall walls and ceiling look terrific. Not to mention that the new floor in the addition is absolutely level with the existing flooring – check out other new additions and you will see this can be hard to do.

I was also happy that you were willing to work with me in multiple ways to keep the price down. You worked with us to put together a pleasing design that came together just as it looked on paper and right at the estimated price. You shifted schedules around so that I could pull an electrical permit and do all the wiring myself, to save the cost of bringing in an electrician. When you discovered that additional foam-board insulation was needed to match the existing structure, you absorbed the cost without raising the price. And most importantly, there were no overruns – I chose to add a few options as the project progressed, and those too, were price competitive.

I'm sure our daughter will thank you for her beautiful new room when she is a little older! We are looking forward to using Thomas Custom Builders again for our next project.

Sincerely,


Eric

WORKMANSHIP

Most importantly, a contractor has to be competent to do the job right the first time. Competence comes from training, experience, and good old-fashioned hard work. As you evaluate a contractor, look for signs that they can do the job right the first time.

100% Satisfaction Guarantee

The bottom line is, a company will stand behind the work they do or they won't. Only the most trustworthy and competent contractors put their warranty right up front to you. No fine print, no paragraphs of endless exceptions, no pro-rating for time that has passed.

Naturally, you'll want to check the stability and reputation of the contractor to make sure they'll actually be around to fulfill on the warranty if necessary, and to find out if they've taken the time and effort to fulfill for others who have needed it.

Photos of Completed Projects

Contractors who serves his customers well should be proud to present pictures of their work. Ask to see photos for multiple projects they've done. If none can be produced, that should be a major warning sign. You can find additional photos on the [ICB website](#) and [Houzz.com](#)



Jobsite Cleanup Standards



Your property, home and yard should be picked up of debris and dangerous material daily. When the job is completed, a total clean-up should take place, including nail/screw detection and removal of any hazardous materials in your house or yards. Make sure your contractor has a cleanup routine and commits to being responsible for the task.

Ask for Progress Photos

Most good contractors are happy to show you their progress photos. Better yet, they welcome your visit to a current operating project so you may see first-hand how they treat their client's home.

CONTRACTOR STANDARD EXPERIENCE

Ultimately, you want to find a contractor that's done many jobs like yours. If they have, chances are they know what they're doing.

Think about it, what contractor is going to tell you they don't have experience with your kind of project? So, since you're not a home improvement expert, how can you tell if they know what they're doing? Here are 2 questions most contractors' hope you'll never ask. The answers will give you a very good feel for their level of experience.

Question #1

How many projects like mine has this company done?

Question #2

What kind of training or certification do they have?

Reputable contractors will have some kind of formal training and, most likely, certification in one or more area.



Red flags to watch for

- Main phone numbers ring to cell phones
- No company logo on work clothes/uniform
- Few references available
- Prices that are unusually low
- No business cards
- No website or very poor website
- Ability to start immediately—no backlog
- Withholds information

We think our Standards of Ethics and Competency for Contractors is pretty thorough, but if you're interested in reading all the warnings, information and tips regarding finding a competent contractor, visit the [Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftc.gov/) website.

CONCLUSION

When you're hiring someone to do any type of work in your home, remember it's your money and your home. Be sure you get everything in writing, ask all the questions on your mind and clearly understand the answers you receive.

Besides what we've mentioned here, there are several other ways to gather information on a company before giving anyone a dime. Check with consumer-to-consumer reporting groups like Bad Business Bureau and Angi or simply search the company name (in all possible forms), along with the word "complaint." If all this makes sense, and you are curious about our approach to remodeling, please give us a call. We'll be happy to answer all of your questions.



As part of our commitment to our previous and potential customers, at your request, we will set up a time to come to your home to determine if we can meet your remodeling needs. We provide this as a Free, NO OBLIGATION, service for you and your family.


Hopefully, we can show you, as we have scores of others, how to make your home absolutely gorgeous, something you can be really proud of!

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

When the stakes are high—your home and your wallet—that saying is even more true. We hope that by reading this guide you feel more prepared to evaluate home improvement contractors and make the best decision for your family. If there is anything we can do to help, please don't hesitate to call.

CONTRACTOR EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Hiring a professional to handle your home remodeling project is a wise choice. The right contractor will ensure that you receive a high quality, long-lasting job. When you are meeting with different companies and comparing estimates, cost should not be your only consideration. Use the checklist below to help in selecting the right contractor for your project and to ensure you get the most out of your remodeling professional!

What To Look For	 THOMAS CUSTOM BUILDERS	CONTRACTOR B	CONTRACTOR C
Proof of business license	✓		
Supplier reference letters	✓		
Bank letter & insurance certificates	✓		
Awards & reviews	✓		
Testimonials & accolades	✓		
Customer references	✓		
Jobsite photos	✓		
No sales pressure agreement	✓		
100% satisfaction guarantee	✓		
Warranties	✓		
Experience/professional image	✓		

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