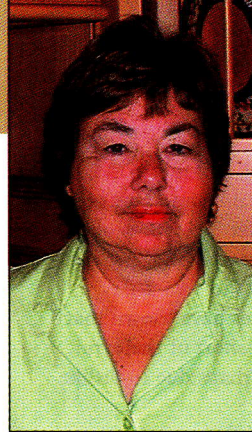


Professional Portfolio

Home Remodeling: Sue Clark

Remodeling? Tips for Working with a Contractor



Clark Construction Co. is a family business, owned by Ron and Sue Clark, renovating South Hills homes for 37 years. Visit our showroom at 3180 Industrial Blvd. Bethel Park, 412 833-7222. Website address: www.clarkremodeling.com.

Remodeling is an ordeal. There are strangers in your home as well as disorder, dust, and confusion.. The water and electricity could be shut off. It seems everything is torn apart, but remember that it will all go back, better and more beautiful than before. It will be the home of your dreams! That is, if you pick the right contractor.

Where do you find a reliable contractor? Ask around. Is a neighbor or friend able to refer someone they've used and would use again? Look for a company that is local. Companies care about their reputation in their own neighborhood. Does he have a website? Check it out! Does he have a showroom or place of business? Stop in. Take a good look at a remodeler's truck and equipment. If he cares for his own equipment, there is a good chance he will care for your possessions also. Do you trust him? If not, look for someone else. Call the local building inspector to check on your final selection. What better source than an enforcement officer who inspects the work? Call the Better Business Bureau for a report.

Avoid phone or door solicitation. What they want to sell you might not be what you need. Avoid someone who offers a big discount if you sign immediately. NEVER, NEVER pay all the money up front. It is reasonable to pay a 30-40% deposit for the contractor to order materials and get on their schedule with progress payments as the work continues. Hold out approximately 10% until you thoroughly inspect the job. It is feasible to withhold a dollar amount equivalent to what needs attention.

Check if your contractor carries insurance? In order to get a permit, contractors must prove they carry workman's compensation insurance on their employees. If he is self-employed with no employees, he cannot get workman's comp insurance. However, make sure he has general liability insurance. You want his insurance company to pay if someone gets injured on your job or breaks something, not yours.

There will probably be problems along the way. Every house is different, remodeling is full of surprises. We don't have crystal balls to see what is behind those walls. Old plumbing and wiring may be too fragile to survive. Galvanized or lead pipes may need replacing and dangerous frayed and obsolete wiring eliminated. Usually pricing is negotiated before the contractor gets a peek inside the walls. But there may be additional charges for these concealed problems and they might even tax the budget.

Choose value over price. Statistics prove that only 28 percent

of people hire the lowest bidder. If one bid is much lower than others, somewhere during the job he will discover that error and either charge more, provide less or quit entirely. Don't buy cheap and blame the remodeler if the results are disappointing. You want the best materials (not always the most frills) within your budget and top quality installation.

Make certain you have detailed, written contracts with the cost, payment schedule and scope of work included. Ask the contractor to get the permit so he is responsible for all the work and inspections.

Different communities require permits for different projects. They can shut down a job if the proper paperwork has not been procured. Contractors are also required to use registered plumbers and electricians. Frequently they must file plans with the borough or county. Their work is behind finished walls, which means you don't want problems at a later date. This is not an area where you want to avoid the rules and codes. Speaking of codes, there is a fairly new statewide construction code that protects you. Make sure the contractor you are using is aware of all the regulations regarding your work. Does he guarantee his work and the products used? Does he provide daily clean up? Does he provide drop cloths and dust barriers to other parts of the house? What is a realistic time frame for your project? When will it begin? How do you get an answer to an immediate problem? How do you get service after the job is done?

Once you hire someone, there are a few things you can do to help. Designate a bathroom for their use. Designate a tablet and place for messages, etc. if you're gone from the worksite most of the time. Do be patient during the installation of, for example, square cabinets into out-of-square walls. Do specify if you want something saved. Be patient during the time consuming finish works. It takes time to do quality work. Don't expect a job to be finished on schedule if you've added more work or changed selections. Don't ask the electrician to do more work "while he is there" and not expect to pay for it. Do communicate.

Improving your home and surroundings is a very rewarding experience (though sometimes messy), something you should be proud of, projects that will make your largest investment more valuable and make life more comfortable and pleasing. If you have chosen a reliable contractor, after all that banging stops and the intruders leave, you will have the room of your dreams! Good Luck! ●