

## Select a Professional Guidelines

Some designers also furnish installation and some contractors (installers) also furnish design. You can elect to use a designer and installer who are independent of each other, or a combo who regularly work together.

Professionals who 'do the complete job', from design through installation are called 'turnkey' contractors in some parts of the country. This type of company may also fabricate and install countertops, furnish electrical and plumbing service, install appliances and provide other related services such as floor covering and paint and wallpaper.

**Many times these are companies who specialize in kitchens and baths. Others offering complete service may be a department in a larger operation such as a lumber yard, plumbing contractor, or home center.** (A variation might be a designer who has a team of sub-contractors he or she regularly hires for installation services but who are not employees.)

The advantages of using a single firm for the entire project are considerable.

A team of experts works together to complete the project. Team members tend to understand the position and timing each trade must work within to bring the project to a timely and successful conclusion and cooperate to that end.

All scheduling is handled by the central office, coordinating with you, the consumer. Scheduling unrelated contractors for the various components of a complete kitchen remodel can be a very time consuming and challenging job. Each individual has other job priorities and schedules which you must compete.

Individuals within a team may assist one another to complete the job satisfactorily. Unrelated tradespeople are sometimes tempted to play the 'blame game' when something goes wrong, leaving the consumer to try to sort out the truth and go forward.

As the consumer, you hold the purse strings. The professional team must satisfy your requirements in order to both make a profit on the completed job and be assured that you will give them a good referral for future business. In the individual contractor's world, yours may be only a small job, not a major priority.

When hiring ANY company or individual contractor, consider these things:

**Reputation.** There is no better recommendation than a satisfied customer. A friend or neighbor who has 'been there and done that' may be your best source for good advice on a firm to select or avoid.

**Ask any firm you are considering to provide several names of customers for whom they have completed kitchens in the past year. Call them! Ask specific questions like "Was the overall quality of the products and service satisfactory?" "Did the firm begin and complete the job when promised?" "Did the firm stand by the contracted price and notify you whenever unexpected details needed attention?" "Would you recommend this firm to a friend?"**

**Licensing and professional achievement.** In some parts of the country, a license is both essential and your assurance of professional service. The importance of licensing varies from locality to locality. Unfortunately, some areas are so lax in inspection and licensing procedures that a license does not indicate competency or reliability. As a general rule, however, it is best to request a license number from installation contractors, then make an inquiry regarding the contractor's reliability and reputation with the board which issued the license.

**Designers may have a professional accreditation** such as CKD (Certified Kitchen Designer) which is given to individuals who complete a rigorous set of tests and must demonstrate several years experience in kitchen design. The National Kitchen and Bath Association administers this program. However, not every good, experienced designer chooses to spend the time and effort to acquire this designation. Interior designers may have other professional associations to which they belong and may have other types of accreditation. An architect must have a university degree. However, some interior designers and architects may not have extensive experience in the highly specialized area of kitchen design. Here, too, your best bet is a good recommendation.

**Contract specifications** are a good clue. The contract you sign should clearly indicate exactly what responsibilities the firm will take and what the total cost will be. It should also be clear the amount of payment required before work begins and when following payments will be considered 'due'. (Be sure you are not required to pay in full until the entire job is completed to your satisfaction.) Some firms will present a contract that indicates the work to be completed 'as specified on the plan dated 00/00/00. Be sure this kind of arrangement requires both a signature representing the firm and your own. If the contract seems vague, ask for clarification in writing. Remember that, particularly in remodeling, some 'unexpected' circumstances are the rule. The contract should indicate how such events will be handled.

**Insurance** should be provided by the firm with which the contract is made or by each contractor who will be performing work in your home. Be sure all workers have this coverage.