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Top 25 Things Contractors Wished Homeowner's Knew

1. Hire a contractor you trust. And then trust them. If you don't trust them, don't hire them.

Don't go into the project with the preconceived notion that a contractor is going to screw you over. Take your time interviewing contractors and asking the right questions so you can find someone you trust, and then TRUST THEM. Don't try to micromanage them and question everything they do – it will ruin the relationship. It's ok to ask questions if you don't understand something (that is encouraged!), but to constantly go on attack mode won't get you anywhere. Also, Craigslist is NOT a reputable source to find contractors. Ever. I can't even begin to tell you the horror stories we've heard. I've yet to hear one success story. If you have one, please send it my way.

2. Just because something appears cheaper online doesn't mean it actually is cheaper.

So often, clients want to purchase light fixtures, plumbing fixtures, you name it, online. While those prices may seem lower, they often don't factor in all of the components, shipping, tax, etc. Half the time items arrive broken, pieces are missing, and then there is no one to go back to or you have to deal with long lead times.

3. You can't get the "same" fixture at Home Depot, Lowes or Menards for cheaper.

Sure, it may appear to be the same because the model number is the same, and the price is a couple hundred dollars less, but they aren't the same. Fixtures available at retail locations (HD, Lowes, Menards), all have plastic fittings inside, whereas the same model number from a plumbing warehouse like Ferguson is going to have brass fittings inside. It is far superior quality and will outlast the retail counterparts all day long. Most plumbers will not warrant anything from HD, Lowes, etc.

4. Labor costs money

It's so easy with the world of DIY being as prevalent as it is to forget about the cost of labor. Crown molding is a classic example – you can DIY it for all of \$57, a half used can of paint, and a few hours of sweat equity. However, if you're going to hire a contractor to install crown molding, it's a completely different story.

A bedroom is going to cost you probably close to \$1000. How is that? Well first you have to pay for the material, and the delivery of the material. Then you have to pay a trimmer to install it. And don't forget about the painter who has to caulk and dap all the seams and holes, prep the space AND enamel (spray) that woodwork. On top of all of that, you have your contractor, who is managing the project, and they're going to get paid for their time too. Cha-ching, cha-ching! It all adds up. ☺

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5. Everyone working on your house is doing this for a living

This goes along with the previous point. While we do love what we do, we don't do it for just for fun or for practice. We do this for a living to support our families, so we are going to make money. What does that mean for you? Don't look at us like a bad guy trying to rake you over the coals. And trying to negotiate all our margin is just plain tacky. You don't go to the doctor and try to negotiate the bill do you? If you don't want to pay a contractor's fee, then build your home yourself.

6. Things that are inexpensive to DIY are usually very expensive to hire someone else to do.

The key reason it's cheap to DIY is because you are doing all the labor yourself, and there is usually a lot of labor involved. The minute you hire someone else to do it, you're paying for all that labor.

7. Your money will only go so far. Everything has a price.

A lot of what you see on Pinterest and Houzz are photos of luxury multi-million dollar homes. Everything has a price and it adds up very quickly. Prioritize what is most important and be ready to be flexible. It's kind of like when you buy your first house and you are slapped with a harsh reality check that you can't have the 5 bedroom/5 bath 4000 SF house with granite tops and marble bathrooms. Even if your budget is \$1 million, that doesn't mean you can all of a sudden have everything you want (literally have had a client throw a temper tantrum before because she was "building a million dollar house and couldn't believe she would have to design on a budget.")

8. Pricing varies throughout the country

There is a huge swing in pricing throughout different states. For example, Texas in general is very inexpensive to build in. New York, however, is astronomical. Also, different materials will vary too. In Arizona, there is a lot of stucco used, which makes it competitively priced, while doing an LP or Hardie siding is going to be very expensive (because there isn't the labor force to support it). In Minnesota, it's flip flopped. All you see is lap siding, and stucco is far more expensive.

9. You are going to have to take time off work

Building and/or remodeling a home is a HUGE time commitment, and it is VERY unrealistic to think that you can do everything on nights and weekends. There will be walk throughs you need to attend, planning meetings, selection meetings, etc. A lot of these people work traditional 9-5 hours and you will need to accommodate this. Also try to put yourself in their shoes – while this is a fun thing for you, we do this for many

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people at once. And everyone always wants all the meetings to occur on nights and weekends. It just isn't feasible, especially when we all have families too.

10. Manufacturer's installation methods need to be followed regardless of how you may have "seen it done" before.

If a manufacturer has a required installation method, it needs to be followed. If you don't, you run the risk of voiding the product's warranty, and you may not pass inspections required to complete the project.

11. Make sure your selections will actually fit in the house. Like, literally fit through the front door.

I once had a client who did their own light fixtures, and they only had a 3' wide front door. Sure enough, their huge orb Restoration Hardware chandelier didn't fit through the front door and they ended up SAWING IT IN HALF! Same holds true if you live in a condo – you may not be able to get continuous slabs without seams because you may be limited by the size of your elevator.

12. Along those lines, make sure the sink you select will fit in the cabinet

This has happened way too many times. Wayyy too many.

13. A lot of what you see on Pinterest won't meet local codes.

Prime example: chandeliers over bathtubs and chandeliers in closets. Just because you've seen it done somewhere else does not mean we can necessarily do it. There are state and local codes that can be very restrictive. Also, in some states, codes can vary greatly from city to city.

14. Completely understand your home before you start.

I can't tell you how many times someone walks through a home when it's done and say "why is there a window here" even though it's been on the plan since day 1. Spend time studying and understanding your plan. If you don't understand, ASK QUESTIONS. There are no dumb questions. A good contractor wants you to know your house inside and out before you even break ground.

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15. We can't read your mind.

If you have a specific picture in your head, try to find an image for us to look at. Or have someone draw it so it is clearly articulated. The last thing we want is for your expectations not to be met.

16. If you finalize everything (plans, selections, scope) before you begin, your project will go WAY faster and cost WAY less.

We do all of our planning on the front end. We may spend an extra month or two hashing through all the details and selections, but that allows us to complete a new build in as little as 3 to 5 months. This creates a process that is much more fun and enjoyable for our homeowners (because they aren't stressing about which tile to pick as it's being installed, and then being limited to what's in stock), and they also have locked and loaded pricing, that they know upfront, before their project started. And we aren't talking about tract homes – we're talking full blown, 7,000 SF custom homes. Planning on the front end saves SO much time in the field.

17. If you don't have a strong design sense (or even if you do!) hire a designer.

There are SO many decisions that have to be made when building a house, and a good designer can help alleviate a ton of your stress. Even if you have a great eye for design, a designer can be a great source to confirm your ideas, make sure things are scaled appropriately, and they can often provide cost saving alternatives to what you may be looking at. Plus they take care of all the organizational issues in getting all of your selections to your contractor and making sure they're executed properly.

18. HGTV is not real life. You just can't do a full kitchen remodel for \$5,000.

If you are hiring a contractor, you can expect to spend at a MINIMUM, at least \$25k on a kitchen. And that's for a very small kitchen with entry level finishes. Most of the kitchens we do are anywhere from \$50k-\$100k if we're talking about remodeling.

19. We have no control over the city and other government agencies.

Permitting can take up to a few months in certain cities where there is a lot of new construction happening. It's unlikely that it will take that long, but sometimes it does. Especially if variances are involved. There are also often watershed districts and other agencies, so there are a lot of hoops to jump through that all take time.

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20. Your house may look complete, but there is still work going on.

At the end of a project, your house may look clean and done and ready for you to move in, but it isn't. That's when the punch list work starts and when the quality control process occurs, which can take anywhere from 3-4 weeks. It may be tempting to start moving your furniture in, but don't do it. Your contractor can't be liable for your belongings while there is still work going on, and there's a high likelihood something could get damaged.

21. Your house is going to look different throughout the process – but in ways you may not realize.

For example, when they first dig the hole, you are going to be absolutely certain it was dug wrong and it is way too small. Don't worry, it isn't. Then they're going to frame the house, put the sheathing and the roof on, and you're going to be like, holy cow that's a whole lotta roof! Don't worry, it won't look so obtrusive once siding is on. And inside, the rooms won't fully feel to scale until sheetrock goes on.

22. Trust your gut.

Always go with your first selection. It happens a lot – the primer goes on the walls and all you know what breaks loose. “My paint color looks too gray/purple/blue/pink/dark/light” you name it. You become hypersensitive as different elements get installed in your home. But don't freak out, because you are looking at it next to subfloor, which is pulling out weird undertones in the PRIMER. You aren't looking at it next to your cabinets or hardwood or backsplash – you selected all of those items together for a reason – so trust that. Just about every time I've had a client change something midway through, they've always regretted it at the end, because in the heat of changing it, they didn't understand how changing that one item had a ripple effect and it ended up clashing with something else.

23. Pinterest isn't real life.

I can't express how true this is. Sometimes, things in photos are simply staged. Just because there is a shelf floating on the wall, it may have fallen off 10 minutes later if it wasn't anchored correctly. Also, there's a chance that things in the photo could actually have been photoshopped.

24. Your contractor should be your friend.

This goes back to hiring a contractor you trust. We are very selective about the clients we take because it is such a close relationship (that lasts for a long time), so you want it to

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be a positive one. Internally, we have a policy that if we can't see ourselves inviting them over to dinner at our house, it isn't the right fit for us. So definitely think about that as you hire someone. It is a much more enjoyable process when you trust the person running your project and know they have your back.

25. HAVE FUN!! It is a blessing to be able to build a house, not a burden.

This is my number one thing I wish people could understand and have some perspective on. We are building a house, not doing brain surgery. If you have to move into your house a few days later, or you have to reselect a tile, the world will not end, and no one will die. It is easy to become hyper sensitive to things as you go through the build process – but once you move in, you likely will never notice whatever was bothering you. We do fully understand this is super exciting for you and you want to everything to be perfect, but in the end, it's what's inside the house (your family and the memories you make in it) that is most important, not what the house looks like.