

Choosing a Builder

Finalizing Your Choice

When you think you've narrowed down your builder, ask about the things that are important to you. Ask to meet the person who would be in charge of building your home. Think of this meeting as interviewing the company. Look at floor plans and talk about the home you want. How well does this company listen? Are the builder's suggestions and comments helpful and relevant? Are your questions answered clearly and completely? Remember that your relationship with the builder will continue through the warranty period, so choose someone with whom you will be comfortable for the long term.

Ask For an Overview. Many builders today provide a home-owner manual that guides buyers through the process and serves as a reference after move-in. Does the company schedule a preconstruction conference to review everything before starting construction? Are you invited at routine points to tour your home and have the builder's undivided attention to discuss questions? What is the policy on change orders?

Read The Documents. Review the contract, warranty, and warranty standards. Note the amount of detail provided. This same attention to detail usually flows through the construction of the home. How does the company determine a delivery date? Many factors outside of the builder's control can cause delays. Builders who promise a firm date too early often disappoint their buyers; but every builder can have a system for keeping you informed of the targeted delivery date.

References. Learn about how the company treats its homeowners after closing by talking to the customers themselves. Call some of the builder's previous buyers or drive through an area where the builder has been working. Few builders will send you to the customer they failed to satisfy, but random conversations may identify one. A single negative incident may result from an honest misunderstanding or a personality conflict. However, if you hear again and again about quality that disappoints expectations and lack of follow-through on items or slow warranty service, your search for the right builder is not yet over.

Many factors must come together for you to be comfortable with your builder - design, quality, price, scheduling, and of course location. Throughout your exploration, comparing one detail after the next, you keep coming back to the same builder. Phone calls are



returned promptly, questions are answered completely, information is forthright and clear. Suggestions about the home you want make sense, and the price is in line with your budget. Your efforts have paid off; you have found your builder.



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To select a builder, begin by thinking about yourself. What kind of customer are you? If you purchased or built other homes, recall which aspects of those experiences you enjoyed most - and least. What would you repeat & avoid?

Production Builders

Production builders are organized for high-volume construction, usually in subdivisions where they own the lots. If you want one of their homes, you must select a site in the subdivision. Production builders offer a collection of floor plans, usually with a choice of exterior designs, or elevations. You can view the homes offered by touring models. Buyers can personalize the floor plans of their choice with selections of such items as floor coverings, countertops, and cabinets.

Adding features from a list of popular options can further personalize the home. Options might include air-conditioning, upgraded appliances, or a covered patio. Today most production builders also accept requests for minor custom plan changes, such as enlarging a closet or adding a window. Altering structural elements requires re-engineering and resubmission of plans to the local jurisdiction's building department. Consequently production builders usually permit few structural changes.

Through repetition, the builder has worked any "bugs" out of floor plans. The total time to build is usually shorter because construction personnel are familiar with the plans. Suppliers stock regularly used items, so material delays are less likely and high-volume work offers an advantage in scheduling trade contractors.

The builder's established floor plans and approved collection of colors and materials may not include the combination you had in mind. Other purchasers' homes will have your floor plan and elevation. Although production builders plan product mix and monitor exterior colors, two similar homes can end up near each other.



Custom Builders

Custom builders specialize in starting with a blank sheet of paper and creating a unique home. They tend to be small companies and design their operations around the customer's active involvement throughout the building process. Their systems and personnel are organized to build on isolated, scattered sites.

Expect a significant initial investment in time and dollars for design development. Meetings can take many hours, followed by more meetings that take more hours. Because alterations are possible throughout the process and choices are virtually unlimited, costs can rise dramatically unless the buyer has the self-discipline to stick to the intended budget. Pricing economies are lost and custom-built homes typically take the longest to complete.

Semi-Custom Builders

Semi-custom builders combine the characteristics of both production and custom builders. They work with preexisting plans and are flexible regarding changes, including those that require engineering and building department approval. Revising existing plans is normally faster and less costly than creating a new set of blueprints, yet this option still provides an opportunity for extensive changes.

You lose the economies of large-volume work and the resulting prices. Semi-custom builders are more open to plan changes than production builders before construction begins but less willing than custom builders to accept changes once construction is under way.

Who's Available?

Your search begins by discovering who is building in the area where you want to live. Start with a preliminary list of candidates from a variety of sources.

- The Brown County Home Builders Association (BCHBA) can provide names of companies who are members.
- Scan advertising in newspapers, including regional publications. You may hear ads on radio or television. Increasing numbers of builders advertise on the Internet also. The BCHBA has a web site that you can access at www.bchba.org.
- Some of the best builders rely on referrals and do not advertise. Talk to friends, relatives, and the folks at work who have recently built homes, about their

builders.

- Area real estate agents, familiar with new home construction, can offer builders' names and insights into quality and customer satisfaction.
- Drive around. Directional and entry signs will call your attention to communities in which construction is active.

Checking Out Potential Builders

Now comes the important task of narrowing your list of potential builders. Look closely at each builder's finished work and work in progress. Your home will receive the same attention to detail.

Think about quality. Your definition of quality is unlikely to match anyone else's exactly. Identify the specific characteristics you equate with quality. Consider aesthetics, function, maintenance needs, and environmental impact.

Licensing. The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services requires builder licensing (specific requirements vary). To learn the requirements to become and stay licensed, visit <http://dps.wi.gov/Home>

Consumer Protection. State and local consumer protection agencies and the Better Business Bureau can report only what's on record. If you hear that numerous complaints are on file, exercise caution.

Models. Look carefully, then return to those you like and look again. Sit in each room, stand in every corner. Sit on the floor and look up. Listen to sounds that carry through the home. Notice how doors and windows fit. Notice wood trim installation, and paint and stain coverage. Examine the exterior. The quality you are looking at is the quality the builder will deliver.

Occupied Homes. Custom builders are less likely to have model homes. They can often arrange appointments for you to view an occupied home their company built.

Homes Under Construction. Even builders who have model homes seldom offer a sample of each floor plan, but you may be able to tour homes under construction to experience a life-size example. Seeing homes at the frame, mechanical, insulation, and drywall stages offers an opportunity to see the quality inside the walls.