

How will your builder build?

When looking to build your new dream home, one of the most important decisions you can make is determining just who will build it. The task of choosing a builder can be daunting, but there are several things you can do to make your decision easier.

Checking a builder's credit history, references and credentials are all great ways to assure that your project is in capable hands, but there is more you can do. Visiting homes that the builder has built is a hands-on way to see the quality and workmanship of your builder.

Many builders keep model homes open for viewing, but you can also ask to see homes that are not models but projects completed for ordinary clients. While viewing these homes take the opportunity to ask the homeowners questions about the builder.

"That's always a good way to find out how a builder reacts to a customer's change order or customer service after the sale," says Rick Herman of the Rochester Home Builders Association. "Buyers can get a feel for what they can expect in their home when it is built."

In addition to viewing completed projects and project under construction, Herman notes that the most important thing in a home buyer's satisfaction is communication. "There has to be good communication between the home owner and the builder throughout the process," Herman says.

If you do choose to visit a job site or completed home, keep these tips in mind:

In Homes under Construction:

- Study the builder's foundation techniques. A poured concrete foundation makes a better basement than concrete blocks and is less likely to leak or let in cold air. There should also be some type of waterproofing system.
- A good framer will make clean, uniform cuts. Examine the rafters to see that they're joined tightly and that all the cuts are at uniform angles.
- Rochester winters are tough. Walls framed with 2x6 beams as opposed to 2x4s create a larger cavity for insulation.
- Look for wall studs that are badly warped and for misaligned studs and joists.
- Check to see if the drywall is being fastened with nails or screws. Nails are more likely to pull away from the studs and pop through the surface later on.
- Cement backer board should be used behind tiles in wet areas such as bathrooms.
- Openings around doors, windows, pipes, and ducts are where air infiltration is most likely. Check to see that these areas are caulked or insulated.

In Finished Homes:

- All exterior wood trim should be caulked, primed and painted.
- Interior and exterior walls should be straight and flat with no waves.
- Check basement and attic for dampness and leaks. Inspect all exposed components such as joists, insulation, and wiring.
- In foundation look for any cracks larger than ¼ inch.

- Roof shingles should be flat and tight. Gutters and downspouts should be secure.
- Look at interior trim and moldings. There should be no gaps between walls and moldings, and a gap large enough to require caulk wasn't done properly to begin with.
- Painted surfaces should be even and smooth.
- Examine flooring. Carpet seams should be nearly invisible and vinyl flooring should not have ridges or gaps in seams. Hardwood floors should have no more than a 1/8 inch gap between floorboards.
- Open and close doors and windows to be sure they are working correctly and seal tightly. Check cabinet door alignment.