

Happy renovations start here.



15 questions
**you need answered before settling
on a renovation contractor**





Part 1

Before getting in touch with a contractor



Advice

Making these quick verifications before inviting a contractor will ensure that you're not inviting an illegal or unregistered contractor into your home or business. By filtering out some contractors from the start, you'll save time in the next steps.

1

Does the contractor have the required governing license?



To know

In the Toronto Metropolitan Area, contractors are required to have a Metro License. Some other cities within Ontario also have their own governing licenses.

As for the province of Quebec, every contractor must have an RBQ license with the right categories and subcategories. It's required by law.

Ensuring your contractor has the required governing license will ensure that you're covered by the amount of their bond if ever they run with your deposit or desert the worksite. However, it's important to take note that their bond is limited as it's shared among all clients that have been cheated.



CAUTION

Some contractors won't shy away from providing you with another contractor's license number where the business name is similar to theirs.... So, be vigilant and make sure to check the validity of their license and make sure the legal name and address match. A license number can easily be printed on a quote or a business card.



To do

- Make sure the license is valid and in the contractor's legal name and address.
- Double check, during the renovations, that their license is still valid. If the license expires or is revoked, any protection provided by the bond will be void.

2

Was the contractor subject to formal complaints?



To know

In Ontario, complaints can be verified at the Better Business Bureau (BBB).

In Quebec, however, it's a little more complex. L'*Office de la protection du consommateur* takes care of most complaints, but *La Régie du bâtiment du Québec* is responsible for major frauds - RBQ unfortunately doesn't share complaints with the general public.

Check for reviews on the contractor online but beware that some buy fake reviews to better their image.



To do

- Check with the appropriate governing body whether complaints were filed.
- Look for client reviews and comments online.



CAUTION

Note that some reviews and comments can also be fake complaints written up by competitors attempting to harm a contractor's reputation. Hence the importance of taking the time to properly assess comments and their writers.

3

Is the company registered?



To know

A contractor operating with a business name such as ABC Contractor must be properly registered. Otherwise, signing a contract with an unregistered contractor could mean signing nothing at all...



To do

- Double check the contractor's information by checking their business registration. For Ontario businesses, you'll need to do so on the Integrated Business Service Application, whereas Quebec businesses can be found on *Le registre des entreprises*.



Advice

If the contractor tells you that they've been in business for over 20 years, but the governing registry indicates that the company has been in business for less than a year... ask questions or refrain from hiring them. It could mean they change name every year to avoid honouring warranties or walking away from projects from time to time.

4

Has the contractor been sued by previous clients or suppliers?



To know

Governmental databases like CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario) and SOQUIJ (*Société québécoise d'information juridique*) are gold mines.



To do

- Take a look at court records to find out if he/she is speaking the truth.





Part 2

Finding a striking contractor with a flash interview



Advice

Now that you're done vetting contractors, it's time to ask some agreement-specific questions. Take note of their answers to be better prepared for the renovation process.

5

Is it possible to see similar renovations you've completed?



To do

- If possible, take a look at their portfolio.
- Pick some of the completed projects and ask for their past client's contact information.
- Go visit past client's completed renovations to ensure they're real projects.



CAUTION

Some contractors won't hesitate to show "stock" images or steal pictures from other contractors to build their portfolio...



Advice

By speaking with real clients, you'll know how everything went during the renovation process. Was the contractor late? Were there any conflicts? You'll also be able to note the quality of the work completed.

6

What would your past clients say about your work?



To know

You can ask the contractor to provide you with client references so you can contact them yourself.



To do

- Ask the contractors if he has completed similar projects to yours in the past. Ask him to see actual pictures of the projects and ask for client references. Call past clients and ask about the contractor's strengths and weaknesses.



CAUTION

Be attentive to the way the contractor speaks about past similar projects. If you don't feel the contractor has a lot of experience, he probably doesn't. Be careful not to confuse enthusiasm with experience.



7

Do you have a liability insurance for your contracting service?



To know

Contractor's liability insurance protects you in case someone gets injured, there is water damage, a fire occurs because of an electrical short circuit, etc. Your insurance might not cover some of the damages that can be caused by the contractor.



To do

- Ask to see their insurance certificate. Make sure that the name of the insured entity is the same than on the contract. If the contractor is insured as a person but you sign with the company, the insurance will not be applicable.
- Feel free to get in touch with the insuring company to make sure their insurance is still valid and hasn't been revoked.



Advice

As risk increases during renovations, insurance companies could refuse your claim in the event that something happens. Hence the importance of calling your insurance company to let them know you plan on having a contractor renovating your home.

8

Who are your main suppliers?



To know

Suppliers know the purchase habits of contractors which can give you insights on what kind of projects they usually work on. They can also hint you about how reliable a contractor is.



To do

- Ask the contractor where they get their supplies and since when they've been doing so.
- Contact suppliers and ask them questions about the contractor. They can be used as references or even provide you with information on how the contractor does business.



Advice

If the contractor has been getting supplies from the same suppliers for quite a while, he's most likely in good financial standing with them.

9

Can you estimate how long the work will take?



To do

- It's important to put together a detailed calendar of the work being done. If a task is running behind schedule, you'll be able to work with the contractor to resolve issues quickly.
- Negotiate any late fees ahead of time. If the work isn't going according to plan and it's the contractor's fault, you'll need to be protected.



10

Can the cost vary throughout the project?



To do

- Ask your contractor under which circumstances your project's cost can go up.
- Make sure the quote/contract is as detailed as possible. It should specify materials that will be used, whether or not debris disposal is included or not etc.
- "Complete kitchen renovation" as a description on a quote is not enough.



CAUTION

Some untrustworthy contractors will attract clients by low-balling prices and then invoicing them a ton of extras.



CAUTION

If you're a Quebec resident, they can even use a "Legal Hypothec" against you which allows them to use your house as collateral. When comes time to sell your house, they'll get paid before you.

11

Who will be my main contact during the renovations?



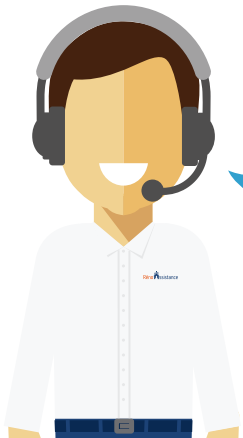
To know

If the person taking care of the agreement isn't the only one that will be your main contact during the renovation process, you'll need to know.



To do

- Make sure you meet with the person who will be running your project on a daily basis to ensure you get along. Feeling intimidated by the people who will be on-site can create unwanted stress throughout the renovation.



Advice

It's best to deal with only one person throughout the entire renovation process. This way, information won't get lost on its way to the intended recipient.

12

Will my project be partially or completely subcontracted?



To know

A contractor can hire subcontractors to get the job done. At times, this can be a good thing, while at other times, not so much.



To do

- Make sure that the use of subcontractors is written in your agreement.
- Although the contractor you are signing with will be responsible for subcontractors' work, make sure you look them up if they are to execute an important part of your project.



CAUTION

Contractors can easily take your signed agreement and pass it on to a lower priced contractor, and never show up to your house again. In such a case, you'd be thinking you're doing business with contractor X, but it's actually contractor Y doing all the work...



13

How will the work wrap up?



To know

Not all contractors will consider the project “done” the same way. Some will add all the finishing touches whereas others will consider the project delivered when the basics are in place.



To do

- Define with the contractor what is considered “done” and make sure it is stated in your agreement.
- Make sure your agreement states that you will make the final payment (10-15% of the project’s cost) when the project is completed and are happy with the results.



Advice

Note that if you plan on executing your penalty clause, it’s possible that your relationship with your contractor might not be as pleasant. That’s why it’s important to pick the right contractor from the get-go.

14

How will payment work?



To do

- Opt for an agreement that will allow you to pay in installments, according to the value of the work completed when payment is due.
- If you make your first payment over 2 months before your renovation project starts, make sure your contractor has a trust account. Your cheque will then be to «[business name] in trust». This way, if ever the contractor's financial situation changes, you'll be compensated.



CAUTION

If you choose to pay in cash, be sure to get a receipt and keep it in a safe place. Also, be sure to pay taxes. A “no tax” agreement has no legal value in court - jurisprudence exists regarding this matter.



Advice

Beware of contractors that ask for a significant down payment before even beginning the work. If possible, only provide a symbolic down payment. Then plan to give a larger sum when the work actually begins.

15

What will I find in our agreement?



To know

A written agreement is essential. It must contain the following elements:

- The contractor's name and address.
- Their valid licenses and their numbers (if applicable).
- The beginning and end dates of the work being done.
- A statement declaring that the contractor agrees to respect municipal regulations and building code standards.
- The contractor's liability insurance number as well as the insuring company's name.
- A detailed description of the work to be done, as well as the type of materials to be used and the quantities/measurements.
- A clause indicating who is responsible for debris disposal.
- A clause stating that the contractor must have your written approval before doing any work that isn't included in the agreement.
- The total cost and the payment installments and/or conditions.



To do

- If the work's time frame is important to you, get a clause in the agreement that states «The work must begin at the latest (date). Otherwise the contractor must return the deposit».
- Be sure to negotiate a penalty clause if ever work is delayed an unreasonable amount of time.



CAUTION

If the contractor has chosen not to provide renovation details in the agreement and wrote something along the lines of "Full bathroom renovation - \$15,000", don't pick him. This information is not enough. The more details you find in an agreement, the better protected parties will be in case of conflict.

Want to mitigate risk and save time?

Reno-Assistance has already vetted hundreds of contractors for you. This means you're sure to be referred only 360° Verified Contractors. Their legal existence, solvency, governing license(s), relationship with suppliers and past clients, judicial records, etc. has been thoroughly checked. You'll even receive a full verification report so you can see for yourself.

Furthermore, an experienced renovation advisor will assist you every step of the way. Our Renovation Advisors know just what questions to ask to help you plan your renovation project.

They also know how to match the right project and client to the best suited contractors. Up to 3 of these contractors will then compete to win you over and bring your project to life.



Happy renovations start here!



You can reach our renovation advisors by telephone from Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 8:00pm.

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