

A FREE GUIDE FOR HOMEOWNERS — FROM MYREMODELQUOTE

Questions to Ask Before You Hire a Remodel or Custom Home Builder

Eight questions—plus what to know about permits, licenses, and mechanics liens—that protect your budget, your timeline, and your project before you ever sign a contract.

Why This Matters

A remodel or custom build is one of the biggest financial decisions most homeowners make. The difference between a smooth project and a stressful one usually isn't luck—it's what got asked and answered before the contract was signed.

Use the seven questions in this guide during your first real conversation with any builder. A good one will have clear, specific answers. A vague answer to any of these is worth paying attention to.

A blank worksheet is included at the end of this guide so you can compare answers side by side across multiple builders—the same way you'd compare any major quote.

The Eight Questions

1 Are you licensed, bonded, and insured—and can I see proof?

Don't just ask to see a number—look it up yourself. Search the Arizona Registrar of Contractors (azroc.gov) and confirm the license is Active (not expired, suspended, or revoked), the classification matches your project, and there's no history of complaints. A builder who hesitates or gets defensive here is a red flag, not an inconvenience.

2 Will you obtain all required permits, and are you responsible if an inspection fails?

Almost any project that changes occupancy, structure, electrical, plumbing, or mechanical systems requires a permit. Unpermitted work can mean fines, forced removal of the work, denied insurance claims, and major problems when you sell or refinance. Confirm in writing that pulling permits and passing inspections is the builder's responsibility, not yours.

3 Who will actually be on my project day to day?

Some builders sell the job, then hand it to a project manager or subcontractors you've never met. You want a name, not a title.

4 Can I see 2–3 completed projects similar to mine—and talk to those homeowners?

Photos are easy to curate. A confident builder will connect you directly with past clients, not just show you a portfolio.

5 How do you handle changes once the project starts?

Almost every project changes something along the way. What matters is the process—how change orders get priced, approved, and documented in writing before work proceeds.

6 What's your payment schedule, and what triggers each payment?

Payments should be tied to completed milestones, not just time passing. Be cautious of any builder asking for a large percentage upfront before real work has started. It's also wise to budget a 10–20% contingency beyond the quoted price for the unknowns that come up once work begins.

7 What's a realistic timeline—and what could push it back?

The better question isn't the best-case number—it's what typically causes delays on projects like yours, and how they communicate when something shifts.

8 What happens if something goes wrong after the project is finished?

Ask directly about warranty coverage—what's covered, for how long, and how issues get reported and resolved.

The One Question Behind All of These

Every question above is really asking the same thing: does this builder run their business with real process, or are they figuring it out as they go? The best way to find out isn't what they tell you—it's how clearly and specifically they answer.

A Note on Mechanics Liens

Sometime in the first few weeks of your project, don't be alarmed if you receive one or more "Preliminary 20-Day Notices" in the mail—often before any work you can see has even started. This is standard, required paperwork in Arizona, not a warning sign about your builder.

What It Is

Under Arizona law (A.R.S. § 33-992.01), nearly everyone who supplies labor, materials, or services to your project—your general contractor, subcontractors, and material suppliers—is required to send this notice within 20 days of starting work, in order to preserve their legal right to file a mechanics lien later if they aren't paid. The notice itself is required by law to state plainly:

"This is not a lien. This is not a reflection on the integrity of any contractor or subcontractor."

It's simply how each party protects their own right to payment—expect to receive several of these from people you've never met, simply because they're on your project.

What a Mechanics Lien Actually Is

If a contractor, subcontractor, or supplier does work or delivers materials and isn't paid, they can file a legal claim directly against your property—even if you already paid your general contractor in full. A recorded lien clouds your property's title and can complicate refinancing or selling until it's resolved.

How to Protect Yourself

These are the exact protections Arizona's own statute points homeowners toward:

- Ask your builder for a full list of subcontractors and suppliers before work begins.
- Require a signed lien waiver and release from each party tied to each payment—this document confirms they've been paid and waives their lien right for that portion of work.
- For larger projects, consider having a real estate attorney or title company review your contract's lien protections before you sign.

This section is general information, not legal advice. Arizona lien law is specific and deadline-driven—consult a licensed Arizona real estate attorney or title company for guidance on your particular project.

Red Flags Worth Slowing Down For

- Pressure for a large cash payment upfront, before any real work has started.
- A vague scope of work—terms like “standard finishes” instead of specific materials, brands, and grades.
- Reluctance to put pricing, timelines, or changes in writing.
- Inability or unwillingness to provide a license number, proof of insurance, or past-client references.
- A bid that's dramatically lower than every other bid you received, with no clear explanation why.

None of these automatically mean a builder is dishonest—but each one is worth a direct conversation before you sign anything. A builder with real process won't be thrown off by the question.

Builder Comparison Worksheet

Use this page while interviewing builders. Jot a quick note or rating (✓ / ✗ / ?) for each question, for each builder you're considering.

Question	Builder A	Builder B	Builder C
1. Licensed, bonded, insured?			
2. Pulls permits & handles inspections?			
3. Who's on-site day to day?			
4. Referenceable past clients?			
5. Change-order process?			
6. Payment schedule tied to milestones?			
7. Realistic timeline & risks?			
8. Warranty coverage?			
9. Provides lien waivers per payment?			
Overall gut check (1–5)			

Notes

This guide is provided free by MyRemodelQuote as a resource for homeowners planning a remodel or custom build in the Phoenix metro area.

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