



CHICAGO'S MONTHLY SOCIAL MAGAZINE

CLIP

### THE BUZZ (books)

## HOME PAGES

If your work is other people's homes, you'd better hope you made *The Franklin Report*. And if your home is someone else's work, you'd better run out and get it.

BY KATHERINE COLE ILLUSTRATION BY TIM SOUERS

**You've finally bought your dream home. Problem is, it needs a lot of work (what home doesn't?). But to whom can you entrust your baby? "Just think about it: You're inviting strangers, bearing large power tools and big personalities, not only into your home but also into your life," points out Elizabeth Franklin, design doyenne and former Wall Street titan. "Taking the time to find an excellent service provider is clearly worth the investment." That's where *The Franklin Report* comes in.**

A kind of *Zagat Survey* for remodelers, this discreet volume is organized into 24 chapters of home-service providers, from electricians to swimming-pool designers. Each business is rated according to criteria of quality, cost, value and overall performance, as with *Zagat*, quotes from former customers back up the ratings.

Not just any exterminator or faux-finish painter earns a listing in *The Franklin Report*: "We consider it to be a badge of honor to be in the book," explains Franklin. To be considered, businesses must be recommended by clients and praised by peers and industry experts. Franklin and her team of editors also make personal due-diligence inspections.

The New York edition, published earlier this year, has already created a sensation, attracting the attention of *The New York Times*, *House & Garden*, *Financial Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. With the *Franklin Report Chicago Guide to Home Services* now on the shelves, we called Franklin for the lowdown on her motives and her findings, before she starts work on the Hamptons and L.A. editions.

**What made you decide to do these books?** Doing my own apartment. I attached three floors within a Park Avenue apartment building—it's like having a townhouse inside a doorman building—a massive undertaking. At the same time, I was cohead of staffing for the mergers and acquisitions department at Lehman Brothers, which meant it was my responsibility to assess people's job performances. I would come home to find that the contractors had shown up and left whenever they wanted to. I thought, "Why aren't these people accountable for their actions?"

**How did you get to be ASID (American Society of Interior Designers)-certified while working on Wall Street?** I was an investment banker by day, decorator by night. On the weekends, I would go out to the Hamptons to redecorate my friends' houses. It was my passion. At one point, a friend of mine wanted to buy a Waterford crystal chandelier, but I had to be ASID to purchase it at a trade discount. I was so frustrated by the process that I went out and took the test. But I'm only an allied member, to be clear.

**We've heard that you had a nightmarish experience during your renovation project, with a decorator who walked off with \$50,000.** It was an unfortunate situation. One thing people should be wary about is decorators who claim they have architectural capabilities. He claimed he could design extensive millwork in my dining room, but he just couldn't figure out the geometry. He walked off halfway through the job because he couldn't solve the problem. So I brought in an architect to finish it.

**Can I turn to *The Franklin Report* if my toilet explodes?** We would encourage you strongly not to wait until you have a crisis situation to call a plumber. On the whole, less than half the plumbers in our book will make emergency calls unless you're already a client. But if you have a plumber come over and take a look at your systems and do some maintenance work, he can prevent those situations. What's interesting about the plumbing and the electrician businesses is the good ones are no more expensive than the crummy ones, but it takes having a long-standing relationship with one for him to come to your house at a moment's notice.

**If a business isn't listed in the book, does that mean that it has been blacklisted?** We may just not have had enough information about them. For economic reasons, we couldn't have a book that was a thousand pages long. If we hear truly bad things about people, they end up on the Web site, but only if this is the consensus view.

**Why are some entries so long while others are minimal?** We attempt to reach every vendor. If they do not return our calls, they get a smaller writeup based solely on word of mouth. I guarantee, however, they'll return our calls next year.

To find out more about *The Franklin Report* or to order a book, visit [www.franklinreport.com](http://www.franklinreport.com). Books are also for sale through Amazon.com, direct from the *Franklin Report* offices (866.990.9100), or at Prairie Avenue Bookshop, 57th Street Books, Gypsy, Borders Books & Music, and Barnes & Noble.

