



A Foolproof Guide for Working With a Contractor

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How do you go about finding a good contractor?

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Do your homework! Here in New York City, we think of the [Franklin Report](#) as a top resource for vetting GCs. It's actually in print, and contractors must be recommended to be considered—they're only included after a thorough vetting process that includes independent conversations with at least three clients. We also really love [Sweeten](#), which is available in New York and Philly.

If the Franklin Report isn't available, I don't actually recommend Angie's List or Houzz, because contractors can pay to be highly featured on those sites. Instead, call an architecture firm you like and ask for an educational meeting; most firms will do that for a reasonable hourly fee.

Once you've got a few recommendations, double check that the firms are licensed and insured (information that's available to the public online) before calling them. When you do get on the phone, ask to speak to four references: Two clients from projects they're currently working on and two clients from recently finished projects—they should be willing to walk you through the finished products. Taking steps to verify that recent work is good will eliminate about 80% of the riff-raff from the pool.

When you're vetting contractors, it's also a good idea to meet them in their office, on their turf, first; investing the time to come to them lets them know that you're serious. Like in any industry, you can tell a lot based on how they present themselves in their office and in the meeting: Is the office clean and presentable? Do they prepare an agenda for the meeting?