



# REAL SIMPLE

life/home/body/soul



## Hire Power

How to find tradespeople—locksmiths, plumbers, house cleaners—who'll fix problems, not be problems themselves

“Since you hired Mary Poppins, the most extraordinary things seem to have come over our household.”

Glynis Johns as Mrs. Winifred Banks in *Mary Poppins*

THE YELLOW PAGES has its uses: giving your toddler a boost at the table, yes; finding a plumber to renovate your Bicentennial-era bathroom, no. Whether you're scrounging around for a cleaning service or plunking down \$20,000 to build a porch, hiring someone means making a decision that you'll have to live with—literally. After you debrief trusted friends and neighbors for their suggestions, you can try some helpful umbrella organizations and online communities (see following pages). It also helps to know a clever question or two that will make even a smooth operator think twice about pulling a fast one. (Always meet several bidders, of course, before committing to a hire.) Armed with the crucial information in the chart that follows—and a detailed contract, signed in advance—you'll be protected against many potential horrors. And you'll know you've made a decision you can live with.



### TASKS AND FEES

### HOW TO FIND ONE

### BEFORE YOU HIRE ONE

### COMMON PITFALLS

### THEY'LL KNOW YOU MEAN BUSINESS WHEN YOU SAY...

#### Contractor



Home additions or renovations that may require the work of a number of different tradespeople. The cost is usually done by the square footage of the project. Typical fees range from \$150 to \$500 a square foot.

Log on to a community site like [www.angieslist.com](http://www.angieslist.com) or a membership site like The Franklin Report ([www.franklinreport.com](http://www.franklinreport.com)).

Visit homes where you can see the contractor's previous work. Ask references tough questions about quality and promptness. And when considering bids, make sure everyone includes taxes so all bids are comparable. You'll save yourself from invoice shock.

Slipshod work. A disregard for scheduling. Unforeseen cost hikes. Picking the least expensive contractor and paying more in the long run when that person doesn't get the job done.

I'm looking for a built-in penalty clause or a liquidated-damages clause. With one of these, if the contractor misses a deadline, you won't have to pay in full until the work is finished, or you'll get a per-day reduction in costs.