



Choosing a builder is the moment when a dream project becomes either a disciplined process or a very expensive lesson. Most people spend weeks comparing floor plans, finishes, and inspiration photos, then spend only an hour or two reviewing the actual contract relationship. That is backwards. The right questions, asked before you sign, tell you far more than a polished portfolio ever will.

I have seen homeowners get swept up by beautiful renderings, friendly sales meetings, and an attractive price, only to discover later that allowances were unrealistic, supervision was thin, and change orders became the builder's profit center. I have also seen projects run smoothly because the owner asked direct, practical questions early, while everyone was still optimistic and on their best behavior. That is the time to get clarity.

If you are hiring custom home builders, or even evaluating a general contractor for a large-scale renovation, the contract stage is where expectations become enforceable. That matters whether you are building from the ground up or planning major home remodeling. It matters even more in high-demand neighborhoods, where timelines slip easily and subcontractor availability can change fast. In markets such as home remodeling Sherman Oaks, the difference between a careful contract and a vague one can affect cost, schedule, and resale value for years.

Start with the builder's actual role

The first question is simple, but homeowners often skip it because they think they already know the answer: what exactly are you being hired to do?

Not every builder provides the same scope. Some custom home builders manage everything from pre-construction budgeting to permit coordination, engineering input, jobsite supervision, and final punch. Others expect the architect, designer, or owner to handle parts of the process. The title alone does not tell you much. A firm may market itself as a full-service builder and still outsource project management. Another may operate as a leaner general contractor with excellent site control and transparent communication.

Ask who will prepare the budget, who will pull permits, who will order long-lead materials, who will coordinate inspections, and who will manage day-to-day trade sequencing. Then ask who your point of contact will be once

the contract is signed. Many problems begin when the person who sold the job disappears and the homeowner suddenly deals with a superintendent they have never met.

A useful follow-up is to ask how many projects that project manager or superintendent is handling at the same time. If the answer is six or eight active jobs, you should ask what “active” means. A builder may reasonably manage several projects in different phases. But if your superintendent is expected to be everywhere, every day, you may not get the attention your project needs during critical moments such as framing layout, waterproofing, or finish carpentry.

Ask how the price was built

The most dangerous phrase in residential construction is “we’ll figure it out later.” You want to know whether the proposed contract sum is based on completed plans, partial plans, conceptual pricing, or rough assumptions.

If the plans are incomplete, the builder should say that plainly. There is nothing inherently wrong with entering into an early pre-construction or cost-plus arrangement, but it changes your risk. A fixed-price contract based on immature drawings is not really fixed. It just means the missing decisions will return as change orders.

Ask what is included, what is excluded, and what is still an allowance. The allowance issue deserves special attention. An allowance is not evil, but it can be abused. For example, a kitchen appliance allowance of \$12,000 may sound reasonable until you realize the owner expects a 48-inch range, built-in refrigeration, and panel-ready dishwashers. In that case, the number is fantasy, not budgeting.

The better builders explain where they used allowances and why. They will also tell you what quality level those numbers reflect. If they cannot, or if they dismiss the concern by saying “we can keep it within budget,” press harder. Contracts do not honor good intentions. They honor written scope and written numbers.

Find out how change orders are handled before emotions are involved

Every custom build changes. Every serious renovation changes too. That is not a sign of failure. It is part of the work. The problem is not that change orders happen. The problem is when no one has a disciplined process for them.

Ask when a change order is required, how it is priced, and whether you must approve it in writing before work proceeds. That last point matters. Owners are often shocked to receive a large bill for items they discussed casually on site. A conversation in a dusty hallway is not a budgeting system.

You should also ask whether change orders include both direct cost and time extension. A small design revision can have a large schedule impact if it affects a long-lead item, inspection sequence, or already-completed work. For instance, moving plumbing fixtures after rough-in may not seem dramatic on paper, but if it delays tile layout or custom stone fabrication, the ripple effect grows fast.

Good custom home builders do not pretend changes are painless. They explain the mechanism clearly. They tell you who prepares the pricing, how markup is applied, and how revised [general contractor](#) schedules are tracked. That is professionalism. A vague answer here usually turns into conflict later.

Pin down the payment structure

Many contract disputes are not really about quality. They are about money arriving earlier than progress. Ask whether payments are tied to time, milestones, percentage completion, or a schedule of values. Then ask how completion is measured.

A milestone payment system can work well if milestones are objective. “Foundation complete” is better than “substantial progress on concrete.” “Drywall installed and taped” is better than “interior walls underway.” Precision reduces friction.

If the builder requests a large upfront deposit, ask what it covers. In custom construction, some advance funding may be legitimate, especially for permits, engineering deposits, mobilization, or special-order materials. But a contractor should be able to explain the cash flow logic without becoming defensive. If a large deposit is needed just to keep the company operating, that is a business risk you do not want to underwrite.

Retainage is another point worth discussing. Some contracts hold back a percentage until substantial completion or final punch. In residential work this is handled differently than in commercial projects, but the principle still matters. You want enough leverage to ensure completion, while also paying fairly for real progress.

Get specific about timeline, and ask what could realistically derail it

Every builder can give you an optimistic schedule. The better question is how they build schedules and what assumptions sit behind them. Ask whether the timeline includes permit review, utility coordination, plan check revisions, fabrication lead times, weather contingencies, and owner selection deadlines.

This is where experience shows. A seasoned general contractor will tell you that a schedule is only as strong as the decision-making around it. If tile, plumbing fixtures, windows, cabinets, and electrical trim are not selected in time, the field team cannot maintain momentum. That is not a builder excuse. It is simple sequencing.

Still, you should ask where the builder believes the biggest schedule risks are on your specific project. For a hillside custom home, the answer may involve soils work, caissons, or retaining walls. For a major home remodeling job in an older neighborhood, the answer may be hidden conditions behind walls, outdated service panels, or permit corrections. In home remodeling Sherman Oaks, for example, older homes can produce surprises once demolition begins, especially around plumbing, framing, and previous unpermitted work.

Ask how delays are documented, who updates the schedule, and how often you will receive progress reports. A contractor who says “we’ll keep you posted” is giving you a promise, not a system.

Ask about supervision and subcontractors

Many homeowners assume the company they hire performs most of the work itself. In reality, even excellent builders rely heavily on subcontractors. That is normal. The important question is how those subs are selected, scheduled, and supervised.

Ask whether the builder uses long-term trade partners or bids each phase to whoever is cheapest that month. There is a practical difference. Stable trade relationships often mean better accountability, cleaner punch work, and fewer coordination problems. A drywall crew that knows the framer and electrician usually solves problems faster than a set of strangers meeting for the first time on your project.

You should also ask who checks the work before the next trade begins. A lot of costly errors happen because no one verifies rough conditions. If framing is out of plumb, cabinets suffer. If waterproofing is rushed, tile becomes the messenger for a hidden failure. If HVAC and lighting are not coordinated, you end up with compromised ceiling layouts and awkward register placement.

A capable general contractor in Sherman Oaks or anywhere else should be able to explain the supervision process in concrete terms, not generalities. Ask how often the superintendent is on site, whether there are formal walk-throughs at key phases, and how deficiencies are tracked to completion.

Do not skip the insurance and licensing conversation

This part is less glamorous than finishes and budgets, but it matters just as much. Ask for license information, proof of general liability coverage, and workers' compensation coverage. Then verify them. Not because you expect dishonesty, but because paperwork lapses happen and you should know where you stand.

Also ask whether key subcontractors are independently insured and licensed where required. If there is an accident, a property damage claim, or defective work, you want a clean chain of responsibility. A builder who treats these questions as routine is usually easier to work with than one who acts insulted.

If your project includes structural work, excavation, roofing, pool construction, or major systems upgrades, ask whether the builder carries adequate coverage for the project scale. A small policy that might be fine for modest interior work may not align with a multi-million-dollar custom build.

Understand the warranty, and ask what happens after move-in

Most builders speak confidently about quality before the job starts. Ask what support looks like after the final payment. Is there a written warranty period? What is covered, what is excluded, and how are warranty requests submitted?

This is where details matter. Cosmetic drywall cracks can be normal during settling. A leaking shower is not. Wood movement may happen. Persistent moisture intrusion should not. You want to know whether the builder distinguishes between normal maintenance items, manufacturer warranty items, and construction defects.

Ask who handles warranty calls. Some companies have a service manager and a documented process. Others fade after the final draw. A good contract should define closeout expectations, including manuals, finish information, appliance documentation, and lien releases. If you are building with custom home builders Sherman Oaks homeowners often encounter, this question is especially important because many firms stay busy with new work and can be slow to return for minor service items unless the process is clearly established.

Ask about communication style, not just frequency

Poor communication causes more stress than many actual construction problems. People can tolerate a delay they understand better than a silence they do not. Ask how often you will receive updates, in what format, and who participates in site meetings.

Some builders use project management software for selections, daily logs, and photos. Others rely on weekly email summaries and scheduled calls. The method matters less than consistency. What you want to avoid is a builder who communicates brilliantly during sales and casually during execution.

Ask how urgent field questions are handled when a decision is needed fast. During active construction, waiting three days to answer a tile edge detail or window stool question can create real cost. There should be a path for timely decisions without turning every text message into a contractual event.

One of the most practical questions you can ask is this: what kind of decisions from me have historically caused delays on projects like mine? Good builders answer honestly. They will mention plumbing fixture lead times, cabinet sign-offs, electrical plan revisions, and finish indecision. That answer tells you they have seen the process enough times to guide you through it.

Clarify who owns the relationship with the architect and designer

On custom projects, the owner, architect, interior designer, and builder all carry part of the outcome. Trouble starts when responsibility gets fuzzy. Ask who coordinates RFIs, drawing clarifications, finish approvals, and field conflicts between design intent and buildability.

For example, a beautiful stair detail may be difficult to execute within code constraints or within the framing tolerance available on site. A lighting plan may work on paper but clash with HVAC routes in a low ceiling area. These are not unusual problems. The question is whether your builder surfaces them early and collaborates, or keeps building until the conflict becomes expensive.

If you are doing home remodeling rather than a ground-up house, coordination may matter even more because existing conditions rarely match drawings perfectly. A strong builder knows when to stop, document, and solve, rather than guessing and invoicing later.

A short list of documents worth reviewing before you sign

- The full contract, including exhibits and any referenced general conditions
- The detailed scope of work, not just the cover price
- The allowances schedule and any assumptions behind those numbers
- The proposed payment schedule tied to defined milestones
- Proof of license, insurance, and a sample change order form

These documents reveal how the builder thinks. A neat, thorough contract package usually reflects a more disciplined operation in the field. Not always, but often enough that it is worth taking seriously.

Ask for references, then ask better reference questions

Most builders can provide three happy clients. The value is not in getting references. It is in how you use them. Instead of asking "Were you satisfied?" ask where the builder was strong and where the process became difficult. Ask whether the final cost tracked the original expectations. Ask how the builder handled bad news. Ask whether the site stayed organized. Ask whether the builder returned after completion to resolve lingering items.

If possible, speak with one client whose project is ongoing and one whose project finished at least a year ago. Ongoing clients can tell you about communication, scheduling, and how the builder behaves under pressure. Past clients can tell you what happened after the celebratory photos were taken.

A homeowner once told me, very plainly, "They were wonderful until they got busy." That sentence said more than ten glowing testimonials. Capacity matters. Follow-through matters more.

Watch how the builder answers hard questions

The content of the answer matters, but the manner matters too. You are about to enter a long relationship with regular stress, unavoidable ambiguity, and expensive decisions. A builder who responds to direct questions with patience and specificity is easier to trust than one who treats every concern as a challenge to authority.

You do not need perfection. You need honesty. A contractor who admits, "The drawings are still too preliminary for a reliable fixed price," is more valuable than one who confidently underbids uncertainty. A builder who says, "This allowance may be low if you want premium appliances," is helping you, even if the number is less attractive. Straight answers save projects.

Red flags that deserve a second look

- The contract price is much lower than competing bids, but the scope is thinner and allowances are vague
- The person selling the job cannot clearly identify who will supervise construction
- Questions about insurance, licensing, or references are met with irritation or delay
- The builder pressures you to sign quickly before details are settled
- Verbal promises are generous, but the written contract stays broad and noncommittal

Any one of these issues may have an innocent explanation. Several together usually point to a problem.

The contract should match the relationship you expect

Homeowners often hope trust will fill the gaps in a weak agreement. It rarely does. Trust grows when both sides understand the work, the money, the schedule, and the decision-making process. The contract is not there because you expect a fight. It is there so you can avoid one.

That is true whether you are hiring custom home builders for a ground-up residence, interviewing a general contractor for a major addition, or planning home remodeling with significant structural and systems work. In competitive local markets, including projects involving custom home builders Sherman Oaks residents may be considering, the strongest firms are not always the cheapest or the fastest to promise. They are the ones willing to define the job clearly before the first hammer swings.

A good signing meeting should leave you with fewer open questions, not more. You should know who is in charge, what you are paying for, what could change, how those changes are approved, and what support looks like after completion. If you do, you are not just hiring a builder. You are setting the terms for a project that has a much better chance of staying on budget, on schedule, and on good footing from the start.

Quality First Builders

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Website: <https://quality-first-builders.com/>

Quality First Builders

Build your dream project with one of Los Angeles' leading remodeling and construction firms. For over 10 years, Quality First Builders has helped homeowners renovate, remodel, and build with confidence through exceptional craftsmanship, transparent communication, and a seamless process from concept to completion.

<https://quality-first-builders.com/>

[View on Google Maps](#)

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US

Business Hours

Monday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Tuesday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Wednesday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Thursday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Friday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Saturday Closed
Sunday Closed

Our Services

- Home Renovations
- Kitchen Renovations
- Bathroom Renovations
- Garage Conversions
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
- Custom Homes
- Home Additions
- Architectural Design Services
- Construction Services

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Quality First Builders is a construction company.

Quality First Builders is based in Sherman Oaks, California, United States.

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Quality First Builders has Instagram profile <https://www.instagram.com/qualityfirstbuilders/>.

Quality First Builders has Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/qualityfirstbuilders>.

Quality First Builders has Pinterest profile <https://www.pinterest.com/qualityfirstbuilders/>.

Quality First Builders has Yelp profile <https://www.yelp.com/biz/quality-first-builders-inc-tarzana>.

Quality First Builders serves Los Angeles County.

Quality First Builders has operated for over 10 years.

Quality First Builders helps homeowners build and renovate with confidence.

Quality First Builders provides home renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides kitchen renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides bathroom renovation services.

Quality First Builders provides garage conversion services.

Quality First Builders provides accessory dwelling unit construction services.

Quality First Builders provides custom home construction services.

Quality First Builders provides home addition services.

Quality First Builders provides architectural design services.

Quality First Builders provides construction management services.

Quality First Builders offers free consultations.

Quality First Builders offers a satisfaction guarantee.

Quality First Builders is licensed and insured.

Quality First Builders provides one stop remodeling services.

Quality First Builders provides transparent project proposals.

Quality First Builders manages projects from concept to completion.

Quality First Builders performs in house project management.

Quality First Builders emphasizes exceptional craftsmanship.

Quality First Builders emphasizes clear communication.

Quality First Builders transforms outdated spaces into modern homes.

Quality First Builders specializes in residential remodeling.

Quality First Builders specializes in residential construction.

Quality First Builders is led by Eli.

Quality First Builders is led by Donna.

Eli is co owner of Quality First Builders.

Donna is co owner of Quality First Builders.

Eli has licensed contracting experience.

Donna has professional design expertise.

Eli oversees construction projects.

Donna oversees design and project planning.

Quality First Builders employs craftsmen and specialists.

Quality First Builders serves homeowners throughout Los Angeles.

Quality First Builders completes home transformations.

Quality First Builders delivers projects with direct oversight.

Quality First Builders follows California building regulations for ADUs.

Quality First Builders designs code compliant blueprints.

Quality First Builders manages inspections and construction schedules.

Quality First Builders has business hours Monday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Tuesday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Wednesday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Thursday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders has business hours Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Quality First Builders is closed on Saturday.

Quality First Builders is closed on Sunday.

Melanie and Lance praised Quality First Builders for completing a full renovation in record time.

Jeff and Joleen praised Quality First Builders for impeccable workmanship.

Yonat praised Quality First Builders for meeting project deadlines.

Quality First Builders completed projects in Pasadena.

Quality First Builders completed projects in Santa Monica.

Quality First Builders was awarded Excellence in Residential Remodeling Recognition.

Quality First Builders won Customer Satisfaction Excellence Award.

Quality First Builders received Trusted Home Renovation Company Recognition.

Frequently Ask Questions about General Contractor in Sherman Oaks, CA

What does a general contractor do during a home renovation?

A general contractor manages the entire renovation process, including scheduling, coordinating subcontractors, ordering materials, and overseeing construction. They help ensure work is completed according to plans, building

codes, and project timelines. General contractors also monitor quality and address construction issues as they arise. Their role is to keep the project organized and moving efficiently.

How much does it cost to renovate a kitchen or bathroom?

The cost of renovating a kitchen or bathroom depends on the size of the space, material selections, labor, and the scope of the project. Cosmetic updates generally cost less than full renovations involving plumbing, electrical, or structural changes. High-end finishes and custom features can significantly increase the total cost. Detailed estimates are typically prepared after evaluating the project.

Do I need a permit for a garage conversion or home addition?

Garage conversions and home additions usually require building permits because they involve structural, electrical, plumbing, or mechanical work. Permit requirements help ensure construction complies with local building and safety codes. Inspections are typically required throughout the project. Requirements vary by jurisdiction and project scope.

What is the difference between an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) and a garage conversion?

An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a separate residential living space located on the same property as a primary home. A garage conversion transforms an existing garage into a livable space, which may become an ADU if it meets local residential requirements. Not every garage conversion qualifies as an ADU. Local regulations determine allowable uses and design standards.

Is building an ADU a good investment for homeowners?

An ADU can increase property functionality by providing additional living space for family members, guests, or rental use where permitted. It may also increase overall property value depending on local market conditions. Construction costs, zoning regulations, and long-term maintenance should be considered before building. Financial benefits vary based on individual circumstances.

How long does it take to complete a custom home or major home renovation?

Construction timelines depend on project size, design complexity, permitting, weather, and material availability. Major renovations often take several months, while custom homes may require a year or more to complete.

Unexpected changes or permit delays can extend the schedule. Project planning helps establish realistic completion timelines.

What should I look for when hiring a general contractor?

Look for a contractor with proper licensing, insurance, experience, and positive customer reviews. Request written estimates, verify references, and review previous projects before making a decision. Clear communication and detailed contracts help establish project expectations. Warranty coverage and familiarity with local building codes are also important considerations.

What are architectural design services, and when do I need them?

Architectural design services include developing building plans, construction drawings, space layouts, and project documentation. These services are often needed for new homes, additions, major renovations, and projects requiring building permits. Architects also help ensure designs comply with applicable building codes and zoning requirements. Design services support both functionality and structural planning.

Is a home addition more affordable than building a new custom home?

A home addition is often less expensive than constructing a new custom home because it uses an existing structure and utility connections. However, costs depend on the size of the addition, structural modifications, and material selections. Extensive renovations may increase overall expenses. A detailed project evaluation is needed for an accurate comparison.

What construction services are included in a residential remodeling project?

Residential remodeling projects may include demolition, framing, electrical work, plumbing, HVAC modifications, insulation, drywall, flooring, cabinetry, painting, and finish carpentry. Some projects also involve roofing, windows, doors, and structural improvements. The exact services depend on the scope of the renovation. Project requirements vary based on the design and existing structure.

Looking for a General Contractor in [Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Recreation Center](#)? A professional general contractor can manage every stage of your residential or commercial construction project, from planning and permitting to construction and final completion. Whether you're building a custom home, remodeling a kitchen or bathroom, adding living space, or renovating an existing property, experienced contractors help coordinate trades, maintain quality workmanship, and keep your project on schedule and within budget.