



## Outlaw Design Company

Ruth Ellen Outlaw

1186 Old Lynchburg Road  
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903  
434 971 9914 w/h 434 996 7849 c

[reoutlaw@earthlink.net](mailto:reoutlaw@earthlink.net) [outlawdesigncompany.com](http://outlawdesigncompany.com)

## Choosing a Contractor

The right contractor can make your project enjoyable, keep it within budget, and build you a solid and well-crafted structure. The wrong contractor can make your project a miserable endeavor, let costs get out of control, and result in a structure that requires repair from day one.

Finding a good contractor in our area isn't difficult because there are many good ones. Among those, though, some will suit you and your project more than others, and discovering the strengths and weaknesses of prospective contractors will make finding a good fit more likely.

In rare cases, a contractor will want to build a project without a building permit. Be sure your contractor plans to apply for one. A contractor desperate for work is a disaster waiting to happen, so hire someone who is eager but not beseeching. A spec home builder who has turned to custom building to get through economic hard times may not have the communication skills and attention to detail that you're looking for. Find someone who has experience building your type of project specifically.

One of my favorite construction adages is, "You can get it cheap but not fast, you can get it fast but not good, or you can get it good but not cheap." This has proven to be true in my experience.

To begin the selection process, schedule an introductory meeting with each contractor you're considering using, preferably at your project site. Contractors like to have drawings to look at at this meeting, even in sketch form.

First, ask the contractor to provide you a list of references. When you call the names on the list, ask the following:

Was the project completed according to schedule?

Was the contractor responsive when there was a problem?

Was the project completed within budget? If the cost was higher than expected, what were the reasons?

During your introductory meeting, ask the contractor the following questions (some may not be relevant to your job):

Can you tell me about your estimating process?

Will the estimate be itemized according to the CSI MasterFormat divisions?

Do you charge for pre-construction services after a certain number of hours are spent? Are you willing to spend time on value engineering the project if the initial estimate is too high? How many hours on project development would you spend before you begin charging?

Are you willing to get alternative, competitive prices from sub-contractors?

How is your project management structured?

Can you describe for me a typical day for a job supervisor working for your company, i.e., what is he/ she spending his/ her time doing? What are his/ her duties and responsibilities?

Will you personally be on the jobsite on a regular basis? If not, is there a project manager who will be? Is your project manager able to have regular meetings with me and/ or the designer on site?

Who will be my job supervisor? Could I meet him/ her before we commit to using your company? Is your job supervisor able to check in with me daily?

How familiar are you with sustainable building practices?

Are you willing to run a smoke-free jobsite and recycle or reuse building materials and components?

How would you phase this project so that my family life is least disrupted (if your project involves renovations, especially of a kitchen)?

How much time do you think this job will take from start to finish?

Are you able to provide me with a construction schedule showing the phases of the job from beginning to end?

When would you have time in your schedule for my job?

Do you require a deposit before starting the job?

How often do you submit requests for payment, and in what format?

Would you feel comfortable if I separated out a portion of the scope of work that I plan to do myself?

How do you handle changes to the scope of work?

What types of contract do you prefer and which would you recommend for my job?

What portions of the work do you have your own crew do and what do you subcontract out?

Which HVAC, electrical, and plumbing subcontractors do you prefer to work with?

Are you willing to work with subcontractors that you may not have worked with previously that I know or have done good work for people I know?

Can you tell me about a job in which a client was unhappy, tell me how you worked through the problems, and describe the end result?