

BEWARE OF THESE SNEAKY TRICKS FROM PAINTERS, PLUMBERS, CARPENTERS.....



Having a new home built or doing some renovation? Odds are, you're not getting everything you have paid for. On many home construction projects, a contractor or subcontractor is cutting corners at your expense.



There are honest building professionals, but many will play every angle to increase their profits. They might use low-end building supplies instead of quality components...instruct workers to use one nail where two would be better...or inflate the charges on invoices.

Strategy: To get the home materials and workmanship you've paid for, include specific details in the contract. Spell out specific brands, model numbers and dimensions of each component. (Some large home-building companies include such details in their contracts as a matter of course, but most contractors don't.)

Examples: Instead of "kitchen faucet," write "Kohler Vinnata kitchen sink faucet in brushed nickel, model number K-690-BN." Instead of "14 double-hung windows," you might write "14 Andersen Windows 400-Series Woodwright Double-Hung Windows with oak finish, 3' 1 5/8" x 4' 8 7/8."

Make sure the contractor agrees to these details *before* he quotes you a price. Otherwise, he might inflate his quote to account for your "upgrades."

Visit the building site (or nose around the project if you're still living in the home) at least every few days during construction to make sure the contract is being followed. If you spot a potential problem, mention it to the contractor as soon as possible. Areas that deserve your attention...

LAMINATE FLOORING

Low-quality woodlike flooring that sells for about 80 cents a square foot can look just like high-end, \$4-a-square-foot laminate flooring when new—but it will wear out much sooner.

Strategy: To be sure that you get high-end, long lasting laminate flooring, specify a particular product in your contract. Pergo (888-393-5667, www.pergo.com) and Mohawk (800-266-4295, www.mohawk-flooring.com) are among the most reliable brands today. Before the flooring is installed, check the packaging. If the label doesn't say Pergo, it isn't Pergo. (If you're not at the site when the flooring goes in, check the dumpster for the packaging.)

CARPETING

Since the padding can't be seen once a carpet is installed, some contractors may use a sub par product.

Strategy: Specify in the contract a rebond carpet padding of six pounds or higher (or felt padding for Berber carpets). For information on padding, check the Carpet and Rug Institute's Web site (www.carpet-rug.org).

PAINT

Painting subcontractors frequently pour cheap paint into high-end paint buckets, reducing their material costs by as much as \$20 per gallon. This ruse is difficult to prevent.

Strategy: Specify an inexpensive paint in the contract, and adjust your price downward. There isn't much difference between high-end and low-end paint. Or simply buy the paint yourself.



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TRIM

A subcontractor might substitute less expensive plastic or medium-density fiberboard trim for solid-wood trim. While this is fine in most spots, solid wood is better for exterior trim and high-moisture areas, and it is more attractive for staining. Once trim has been painted, it is hard to tell the difference between wood and medium-density fiberboard.

Strategy: Check the end of a cut piece of trim that has been discarded. The end of a piece of real wood is easy to tell from a man-made product.

ROOF SHINGLES

A roofing contractor can save from \$500 to \$1,500 by substituting low-end shingles for higher-quality brands.

Strategy: Your contract should require a 25 or 30 year algae-resistant architectural shingle from a leading manufacturer, such as Owens-Corning (800-438-7465, www.owenscorning.com), Certain Teed Corporation (800-782-8777, www.centainteed.com), GAF Materials Corporation (973-628-3000, www.gaf.com) or Tamko Building Products (800-641-4691, www.tamko.com). Package labels will tell you if the shingles are the ones requested. Spell out in the contract that four nails should be used per shingle (specify six or eight nails for an especially steep roof). Visit the site when the roofers are at work. Watch for a few minutes to see that they're using the specified number of nails.

Helpful: If you live in an area that gets lots of snow and ice in winter, make sure your contract calls for "ice and water shield". (It's required by building codes in some, but not all, cold-weather regions.) You should see the roofers apply a dark material, most likely pulled from a cellophane backing, over the plywood at the eaves and "valleys," where two rooflines meet, before they start nailing down shingles.

SUBCONTRACTORS

Independent subcontractors do most of the work on construction sites. Some contractors pick subcontractors who are willing to work for the lowest wage – even if they're not qualified.

Strategy: Before you sign a contract, ask your contractor for the names of subcontractors he will use for various tasks—electric...plumbing...roofing...framing...windows...masonry...siding, etc. Contact your town's building department to ask about these subcontractors' work. Building inspectors often are willing to issue off-the-record warnings when appropriate.

If your town's building inspector won't help, call the building inspectors in neighboring towns.

Helpful: If you're not satisfied with the subcontractors, find another contractor or insist that the contractor pick better subs. Have the name of the subcontractors you agree to written into your contract.

DUMPSTERS

Renting a standard 15 to 20 cubic-yard dumpster should cost your contractor about \$300 to \$500. (You usually can keep dumpsters until they are filled.) Yet, contractors often charge their clients more than \$500 for trash removal.

Strategy: If your invoice lists more than \$500 for dumpster rental and there's one dumpster on the site, ask your contractor why you're being billed more than the dumpster costs.

MUNICIPAL FEES

Your contractor might charge you more for permits and other municipal fees than he pays the town.

Best: Call the town offices, and ask the building permits department about building fees. If they're lower than the amounts you've been charged, ask your contractor to adjust your invoice.