



TRADE secrets

TO GET THE BEST RESULT WHEN FIXING UP YOUR PROPERTY, YOU NEED TO FIND THE RIGHT TRADESPEOPLE, HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT YOU WANT AND A PLAN IF THINGS GO WRONG, WRITES **AMANDA FALCONER.**

Television's next Jamie Durie is taller and blonder, but just as down to earth. Rushing back to the site of one of his company's building jobs from a shoot for DO IT, professional builder Luke Van Dyck pauses to share a few secrets about dealing with "tradies".

"Be firm and don't be vague," he says. "When people have clear plans and know exactly what they want, then it makes it easier for everyone. That way tradespeople won't come in and say to themselves: 'They're airy-fairy. We should add on a couple of grand to make sure we're covered because we know they're going to change their minds.'"

The other important thing to remember, says Van Dyck, is that cheapest is not always best. "Some guys might come in undercutting then hit you up with variations. So always make sure that quotes are fully itemised and the contractor or builder is fully licensed and insured."

While it's certainly important to check your contractor or builder is licensed, you need to find them first. Word of mouth is one of the best ways to track down the right builder or contractor for the job. As it seems rare that people complete

● **TRICKS OF THE TRADE**

Luke Van Dyck says cheapest is not always the best option.



a renovation and still love their builder, positive recommendations from your friends can be a good place to start.

Another way is to walk around your local area and see which builders are working regularly nearby. Of course, other options are to let your fingers do the walking, and not just with the Yellow Pages! The Housing Industry Association (HIA) has recently launched the online directory Tradebuild to help you search for specific contractors among HIA members by postcode. You can even request an e-Quote, an HIA-facilitated service that allows you to enter your project details and have tradespeople quote directly to you. »

THE CHECKLIST

After you've found a builder or contractor, make sure you visit the relevant body in your state to make sure licences are current. However, a clean history may not necessarily mean there have been no problems. Check with past clients first.

QLD: Building Services Authority
<http://www.bsa.qld.gov.au/Home/OnlineLicenceSearch/>

NSW: The Office of Fair Trading
http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/About_us/Online_services/Home_building_licence_check.html

VIC: The Building Commission
<http://www.buildingcommission.com.au/www/html/256-finding-a-registered-building-practitioner.asp?intLocationID=256>

WA: Builders' Registration Board
<http://www.builders.wa.gov.au/default.aspx?MenuID=31>

SA: Office of Consumer and Business Affairs
http://pubreg.ocba.sa.gov.au/pubreg/pubreg_jsp/index.html

TAS: Workplace Standards Tasmania
http://www.wst.tas.gov.au/industries/building/bpa/abp_register

NT: Building Practitioner's Board
<http://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/building-practitioners/>

ACT: Planning and Land Authority
http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/topics/hiring_licensing

The membership-based HomeSource service also has a directory of endorsed tradespeople (as well as access to legal help if you need it). Other online directories, with varying amounts of additional information, include the Home Improvement Pages and truelocal.

Wherever you end up finding your tradespeople, it's a good idea to check on their work with past clients and get more than one quote. (And make sure you're sitting down when you read them!) Depending on the size of the job, some quotes can come in at more than double the next one.

When you've settled on the contractor or builder, it's best to agree on the price of the works to be done in the form of a contract. Even for small jobs, a contract can be useful because it sets out the rules of engagement. It will specify items such as payment terms and how variations and extensions of time will be handled.

There are a number of template contracts available from industry associations. For example, The Australian Institute of Architects has a simple lump-sum contract intended for relatively small or simple projects between you and a contractor, particularly where an architect may have prepared the contract documents but won't administer the contract on your behalf.

The Master Builders Association's Plain English Minor Works Contract is also a short contract designed for simple

LEGALLY BINDING

Standard contracts are on offer from all the major industry associations:

- www.architecture.com.au
- www.hia.com.au
- www.masterbuilders.com.au

TOOL BOX

Search for contractors and builders on these online directories:

- www.tradebuild.com.au
- www.homesource.com.au
- www.homeimprovementpages.com.au
- www.truelocal.com.au

works with a deposit and no more than two payments required. This contract especially suits jobs under \$12,000, which in NSW don't require home warranty insurance. (Check with the government agencies in the tool box above for the applicable regulations around warranty insurance.)

The phrase "only as good as the paper it's written on" doesn't really apply to building contracts. What really counts is that you and your builder or contractor stick to the rules set out in the contract. This is particularly important if things begin to go wrong.

Things probably *have* gone wrong when you disagree with the builder about a payment for something you think is in the scope of works, or when you believe the builder has in some way breached the contract. They've definitely gone wrong if the works are incomplete or defective.

If this is the situation, try handling it yourself first – carefully. Consumer Affairs Victoria says in its consumer guide to renovating that you should act immediately and show the builder what you believe the problem to be. You should follow up with a letter to the builder confirming the details of your conversation and the agreed actions.

If things are serious, you may ask for help through one of the government agencies. For example, in Victoria, it's the Building Advice and Conciliation Victoria (BACV), a joint service run by Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Building Commission. In NSW, it's the Office of Fair Trading.

However, with the right preparation, things needn't get this far! When all the fixing up is over, you might even still love your builder. ■