

Building Your New Home? Who are you going to TRUST?

8 things you absolutely must know - before you choose your Builder.

With so many Building Industry problems lately, people are naturally quite concerned about choosing someone they can trust to build their new home.

So how do you go about choosing a builder to work with? What are some of the things you should look for? And more importantly - what are some of the things for you to avoid?

To ensure this guide is as up-to-date and informative as possible, we've based much of this information on a major article published recently by North & South Magazine, on problems within the New Zealand building industry.

Quote: North & South Magazine, April '08

North & South magazine has spoken to builders, inspectors, consumer groups, architects and house owners who say there is still much that is rotten about house building in New Zealand.

Their concerns include:

*The use of potentially risky building materials and systems.
Designs that seem to ignore lessons learned from Leaky Homes.
Under-skilled building workforce.
Volume-Build companies that over-promise and under-deliver.*

Another source of information was "Build" Magazine that also had some pretty tough things to say about Consumer Satisfaction with their new homes.

Quote: 'Build' Magazine January 2008'

"A significant proportion of home owners are dissatisfied with the comfort levels in their new homes, with poor layout and heating/energy efficiency performance being the most common complaints. This included rooms being too small and/or the wrong shape, house orientation being wrong, more storage space needed, entrance way and transition to garage and outdoors poorly done."

**So read on to find out exactly what steps you need to take
when choosing a builder to trust your new home to.**

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Top Eight Tips to Building your Dream Home

1. Work with a Master Builder

“The days are long gone when Builders needed to go through a 4 year apprenticeship, consisting of 8000 hours of both Practical and Written work”

The first thing to consider when choosing your builder is that they must be a member of the Master Builders Association.

After all, a builder can only be accepted for membership after undergoing a rigorous checking process, and their projects are continually monitored for the quality of workmanship, both during and after construction.

It also means that your home will be covered by the Master Builders Association’s Guarantee of Quality, which will protect you for a full 7 years.

This is still the best guarantee that you can get and is also backed by the independent ‘Masterbuild Services Ltd’, so you have absolute security over the quality and reliability of your new home.

2. Ask the Tough questions

When every company seems to be saying the same thing, such as “we listen”, or “we look after you”, how do you separate one from the other?

Asking some **tough** questions is always a good place to start.

Try asking some of the following questions and if you feel that the answers you get are evasive, you can probably draw your own conclusions.

For Instance:

- “How much help can you offer us with the design process?”
- “How will you advise us on choosing the best materials?”
- “How much consultation is there with us before the project begins?”
- “When construction begins, at what intervals will you contact us?”
- “Will we be invited to the site on a regular basis?”

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3. Know who will be working on your site

Obviously the quality of your home will depend on the quality of people working on site, so it's absolutely vital to employ the best people possible.

After all, no matter how much time and effort you go to with the design, it's the skills of the tradespeople working on site that determines the final result.

"Now you have 30 people on site, with one guy doing the foundation, another one doing prefabricated truss framing. And so on.

A lot of these guys fail to understand what they're doing. You drive to any new subdivision and watch guys at work for an hour. It's bloody shocking. They're not builders, they're hammer-hands."

Source - North & South Magazine, April '08

Do ensure that:

- You ask about the experience and skill of the Tradespeople the company will be using - and again, beware of any evasive answers.
- You visit one of their building sites and talk to the Tradespeople yourself. You'll soon be fully aware of any limitations.

4. Insist on being "Part of the Process"

There's absolutely no reason at all why you shouldn't be closely involved in every single stage of the building project if you want to.

After all, things can change quite quickly during the construction and you need to be consulted regularly so you feel a part of the process - and not just made to feel a nuisance for asking your builder awkward questions.

**Don't just be a helpless bystander.
Make sure that you're fully involved at all times**

Most experienced builders expect and welcome this level of communication with their clients.

But this can be much more difficult with larger "group builders" because of the vast number of people involved with your project, including Salespeople, Designers, Administrators, Builders and of course numerous tradespeople on the site as time goes on.

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5. Ask if the designer can actually “Design”

It's well known in building circles that about 90% of the problems people have with their finished homes could quite easily have been avoided at the “Planning” stage - and not later on at the “Building” stage.

“The principles of building have been lost this last ten or fifteen years. What would have been considered as “ridiculous practice” then is prevalent today.

People don't do what is expected, - only what is “inspected.”

Source - North & South Magazine, April '08

You'll often hear stories of someone giving an “outline” of what they had in mind to a Salesperson - who came back with a “Completed Design” a few weeks later - with no opportunity for further input from the client.

However, with a little more time and effort - and by talking directly with the Designer yourself, you'll uncover endless opportunities to really personalise your new home and to improve the overall flow and design.

Do ensure that:

- A good “Design Brief” is prepared first, followed by a thorough questioning process that allows you to go through all the options and alternatives that might be available to you.
- You ask whether or not there are any “restrictions” on the time spent working on your Design or any alterations you might request later etc.
- Open space around the home is properly utilised and sensibly proportioned to ensure maximum value for money for the building cost.
- Things like orientation of the house to the sun is correct for maximum heating, as well as for the enjoyment of outside recreational areas etc.
- Rooms are correctly designed to cater for your current as well as future family use as regards furniture layout etc.
- The “ventilation-heating-insulation triangle” is fully explained to you.
- The overall “Style” of your home is chosen before a floor plan is finally produced, to ensure your plan is going to be workable.

Do not under any circumstances: commit yourself to a free “sketch plan” or a low cost “off-the-shelf” plan which could affect the future resale value of your home because of poor design or layout.

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6. Make sure that “PC Sums” are realistic

One of the oldest tricks in quoting building costs to prospective home owners is to load the price with fairly low PC figures or “Prime Cost Sums”.

While the initial price might look really good, it’s only by asking lots of good questions and getting detailed (and probably written) explanations that you are ever going to be sure that you have the complete picture.

For instance, it’s not unusual to see PC sums being quoted for Kitchens at around \$8,000 and Tiling at about \$30 per sq. m. say for 100m² tiles

However a more realistic amount for a smart modern Kitchen right now might be nearer to \$18,000 - **a difference of \$10,000 in your budget.**

And with Tiling quoted of \$30 per sq. m. you’ll probably find they’ll be fairly low-quality tiles that scratch easily or will be damaged quite quickly.

So choosing much better quality porcelain tiles at \$110.00 per sq. m. you’ll be faced with - **another \$8,000 over your original budget.**

Then there are things like the Electrical fit-out. A low PC Sum usually means inadequate numbers of fittings, obscure brands, etc. Nowhere to plug that appliance in, inadequate light and lots of ‘add on sales’ later.

So before you know it, you could easily find your cost per sq. m. figures going up way above your original budget.

Do ensure that:

- There are as few PC Sums as possible included in your quote
- If there are PC Sums included, make sure there is substantive documentation to show they are realistic

7. Know who checks the quality of work being done

Apart from your Builder and of course yourself, there are a limited number of inspections carried out at certain times by the local Building Inspectors.

“The average house takes around 2000 hours to build but a building official will only be there for 4 or 5 hours tops.”

Source - North & South Magazine, April ‘08

Smaller companies usually have a team of tradespeople who have been with them for years and who can be relied on for the quality of their work.

But again, by working with a Master Builder you have the added security that their workmanship is always under scrutiny by the Master Builder’s Association itself, who have your best interests at heart..

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8. Getting Value for Money

“People tend to go to housing companies because they feel they are taking the safe option. But to be competitive they have to cut costs somewhere and usually it’s the builders who suffer.

People see the flash kitchens and bathrooms and forget how it’s constructed and what’s behind the walls.”

Source - North & South Magazine, April ‘08

It never occurs to many people to ask whether or not their Builder or Building Company representative is actually a Trade Qualified or Licensed person. And while this might sound like a silly question to ask, many times you’ll find the answer is actually “NO”.

If that’s the case, you’ll need to ask yourself how they can possibly interpret your ideas or hope to understand the best way for you to get a top quality Tradesman-like job - and therefore value for money?

I don’t see rigid processes around the qualifications of the Building Company Franchisee, or the ongoing checking of performance and standards.

Source - North & South Magazine, April ‘08

Do ensure that:

- There is a checking system, and that you understand how it works
- There is a system for checking the time schedule. Simply driving around looking at the home from time to time is not good enough.
- There is a hand-over checking system.
- Someone is responsible for final quality control and that it’s not left for you to check yourself after you move in.
- You ask lots of questions & talk to previous clients
- You talk to sub-contractors on their sites. You may be surprised by the response you get, or their lack of interest.

Finally, don’t under any circumstances be fooled by a per square meter rate that’s “too good to be true” - no matter how tempting it might be.

After all, there’s only two ways someone’s price can be much lower than everyone else’s: **By leaving something out or by using inferior materials.**

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So how do Paul Reed Homes take care of our clients?

1. Yes - we are Master Builders

Paul Reed Homes have been members since 1995.

2. Yes - we expect you to ask Tough Questions

Everything we do is designed to be completely transparent with our relationship with clients. This means you can be completely confident that there will be no “hidden extras” or traps in the contract - and of course we’ll welcome any questions you may have for us.

3. Yes - you’ll know who will be working on your site

Paul Reed Homes only employs a select team of Trade Qualified people, and we are currently seeking “Builder Licences” long before the mandatory date.

4. Yes - you’ll definitely be “Part of the Process”

Paul Reed Homes will always keep you fully informed of the various stages of construction, so you feel you are part of the process - **and not a helpless bystander**. We treat you with ‘The Human touch’.

5. Yes - we can help you with the “Design”

The **best results** are always achieved when the Client, the Designer and the Builder all work together. We are always happy to add our “Builders Perspective” to the design process, to make sure you don’t finish up with a mass-produced house that looks just like every other house in the street.

6. Yes - our “PC Sums” will be realistic

At Paul Reed Homes, clients are always given **realistic** “PC Sums” to work with and not misled by silly, un-realistic figures for things like Kitchens, Floor Coverings and Bathroom Fittings etc.

7. Yes - we check the quality of work being done

Before signing off your new home, Paul Reed personally goes through a rigorous “176 Point Inspection Process” as well as more than 46 “quality checks” every single week during the construction process.

8. Yes - you’ll definitely get “Value for Money”

Everything we do has been carefully tested, refined and developed in the best interests of our clients. In other words, we go to great lengths to make sure that you’ve considered every possibility before we finally present you with a genuine “Fixed Price” contract you can rely on throughout the entire project.

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Working with Paul Reed Homes - Three Great Options

1. Using our Design Service

Firstly, you have the option of letting us design something that will really suit your Budget - and of course the lifestyle you want to enjoy.

You just tell us the kind of things that are important to you, then relax and leave the rest to us. However, you'll also be able to work closely with us on the design to include as much of your own style and character as you want.

2. Architecturally-Designed Plans

Another option for you is to choose from a great selection of modern Architecturally-Designed Plans that we've had prepared exclusively for our clients. There are around 15 exclusive Designs to choose from, all of them featuring clean modern lines with exceptionally good flow and functionality for today's modern family living styles.

And remember these Designs are exclusive to Paul Reed Homes, so there is very little chance your home will look like any others being built in your area.

3. Architect's Services

We also have a special arrangement with one of Christchurch's leading firm of Architects, which allows us some very affordable rates for "One-Off Design" Projects.

This means you could save anything up to \$5000 on the usual cost of creating something just that little bit more "unique" in the design of a home that that really reflects your character and personality.

So what do you do next?

If you feel you'd like to trust the Planning and Construction of your new home to a small team of experienced and dedicated Builders, rather than a large "Group Housing Company", we'd love to talk to you about your ideas.

And if you do decide to engage us, we promise we'll always have your best interests at heart, and that you'll always have complete control of the "Financial" decisions around Building your Dream Home.

Why not call us now to arrange a complimentary Two-Hour Design and Planning session to tell us about your ideas for building your new home.

Paul Reed **homes**
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