

How to Choose Your Pool Builder

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Does your prospective pool builder build quality pools? This question is even more important if your state that has no licensing or other certification requirements for swimming pool contractors. We recommend that you choose carefully.

Ask Questions !

- 1. How long has your builder been “building pools” and how many pools has he or she built?** Some builders have been in the “pool business” for years (retail or service) but have little construction experience. Some have been “in business” (other businesses) for years, but only recently decided to build pools. Ask specific questions. Demand specific answers. Ask the builder if they have ever owned a pool company under another name or if they have ever owned a pool company in another city.
- 2. Does your builder provide service and repairs?** Builders that provide service will (generally speaking) enter into pool construction with a different attitude than those that don't. Service-oriented builders will think of your pool as one phase of a long-term relationship.
- 3. How accessible is the construction team?** It is likely your yard will be torn up and in disarray for at least five weeks, maybe longer. If your builder does not have a store or office, you must be content with leaving messages on voice mail, or communicating with the job superintendent via cell phone. Are you comfortable with that arrangement?
- 4. Does the builder have a ready list of references?** Ask for names of both recent and older customers. Compare this list with the information from question number one, above. If a builder claims to have built 200 pools a year over the past ten years, you should expect a relative number of references. If not, ask why. Once you have the references, call a random sample and ask about the client's overall experience. “What about unexpected problems, or other issues, that came up during construction?” “Were the issues resolved quickly and without hassle?” Finally, ask, “Would use this builder again without hesitation?”
- 5. Drowning Prevention: Does your builder have options?** Is your builder comfortable with, and knowledgeable about, safety options? Does he or she want to incorporate your concern into the pool planning process, or do they encourage you to postpone safety decisions until after construction? If you wait, you might find your safety options precluded by the pool design and the financing won't apply.

6. Is your builder a member of professional organizations? The Association of Pool & Spa Professionals (APSP) is the primary, international organization for the swimming pool industry. APSP Certified Pool Builders (CPB) received a comprehensive pool construction education. They are tested, certified and they maintain their status with continuing education. The National Plasterer's Council (NPC) and the National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF) are also devoted to the pool industry. In addition, there are local groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Better Business Bureau.

Membership tells a story. Some businesses build success on one-time sales and do not see the relevance of trade association and certification. However, those who base success on long-term relationships often have a different mind-set. They are more likely to support organizations that seek to improve the whole industry and protect the pool owner. Their success is built not just on their own reputation, but upon the industry reputation as well.

7. Will the builder provide a sample written contract for you to take to an attorney for review?

8. Does your builder have a good record with the Better Business Bureau? We recommend that you check the local BBB. If the builder has a pending issue, this alone should not disqualify them. Customers occasionally mistreat their contractors. This can find its way into a BBB report. But, if there is an issue, read the report and ask your builder what happened. The report can yield more tips on how to deal with pool builders. Be cautious of builders with a history of complaints, even resolved complaints. Filing a complaint with the Better Business Bureau is not a simple process and is often the last straw for a homeowner.

9. Will the construction supervisor build the same pool you planned? Though hard to believe, it does happen: the pool built is significantly different than the one designed. To avoid this, after you sign the contract, ask for a meeting with both the designer and the construction supervisor. Make sure all three of you are on the same page. "Get down to the details."

10. Will you take the lowest bid? With all factors are equal, it makes sense to take the lowest bid. Rarely, however, are all factors equal when comparing pool builders. Don't allow price be the dominant factor in your decision. It is rare that the lowest bidder in the area builds a high quality pool. Many homeowners, having chosen the lowest bid, are later disappointed. Poor quality materials and inadequate construction techniques are often the path to the lowest price. The resulting structural problems are especially difficult and expensive to resolve.

11. Stay away from builders who: insist on cash payments; demand large up front payments; don't understand soil characteristics and how they affect concrete structures; won't answer questions on drowning prevention; won't provide a contract that specifies materials and equipment brand names and models; won't provide written warranties for pool structure and equipment and cannot provide proof of insurance (liability and worker's comp). Stay away from any who bad-mouth the competition, their own customers or others.