



Will You Get What You Pay For?

“You get what you pay for.” What nonsense—and how really nonsensical when you are paying for something you don’t understand very well. So, let’s get real. We all have visited doctors and left wondering what we paid for. Certainly we have all paid for legal services and received no satisfaction. Most of us have paid good money for automobiles which didn’t run quite right. Basically, if we are not well educated about our bodies or about the legal system or about the intricacies of automobile engineering, the results of our purchases usually depend as much on luck as on how much we spend.

But if we understand a product, if we are comfortable in our knowledge—if we are a chef buying vegetables or a tradesman buying tools or a realtor buying a house in the neighborhood where he has worked for 20 years—we get value for money; and sometimes we even get a bargain. And there is not the agony of asking over and over if we made the right choice. I would like you to feel that comfortable about building a house or doing a major remodeling.

Beyond knowing that he draws building plans, what do you know about the architect’s services? (What can that man do for you? What should he do for you?) What specifically should you expect from your general contractor? (And why do you want one, anyway?) If you have a general contractor, an architect, and a designer, who is in charge of what, and what if there’s a conflict? Can you save money by buying your own faucets and doorknobs and tile? Should you? These are important questions.

Until you know what you want and who can reasonably provide it, and until you have given a good deal of thought to common construction pitfalls and how to avoid them, I don’t think you are ready to build a house. In my experience, if you have not given thought to these basic things, you will get what you did not pay for: cost overruns, time overruns, and a good deal of stress.

So, I’m coming out of retirement and starting up a little consulting business to make you a smarter construction consumer. Together we can find a few answers. More important, I can provide you with the questions you need to ask your architect and your general contractor—both broad questions about their services and questions specific to your individual project.

The more you know, the more likely you are to get what you paid for. You’re certainly going to be less stressed, and you might even have fun.