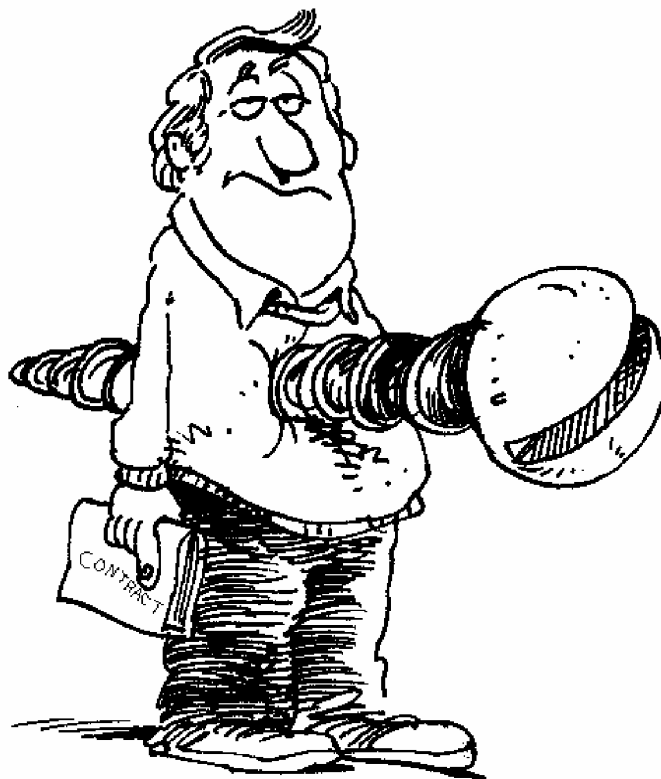


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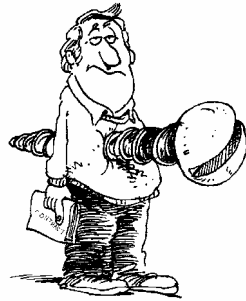
Remodeling

**Dream Doesn't Become A
Nightmare!**



Rob Cook

How to Guarantee That Your Remodeling Dream Doesn't Become A



Nightmare!

Why I Wrote This Booklet

I wrote this booklet because I love the remodeling business! There is no more satisfying an experience than working with an excited homeowner, "shoulder to shoulder," in bringing their dream to its realization. Everyone wins and friendships often develop and last for a lifetime.

There are however, too many sad homeowner experiences with remodeling, most of which could have been easily avoided. This booklet will help ensure that you have a *happy* remodeling experience!

This is my opportunity to "give back" something valuable to the community of homeowners that has, over the years, provided me with so much pleasure and a nice living. Secondly, it is my latest effort to help maintain professionalism in the remodeling industry. Informed consumers will avoid the incompetent members of our industry that give remodeling a "bad name."

This is also, in a roundabout way, a marketing opportunity for our firm, **COOK BROS. Design/Build**, which has for years practiced every single principle discussed herein, and welcomes the opportunity to design and construct your project as well! Call us for a free, no obligation remodeling consultation anytime at (703) 536-0900.



If you walk away with only 20% of the information contained in this booklet you will probably save yourself a fortune in money and emotional distress on your remodeling project! It is a quick, easy read, but do not underestimate the value and experience “boiled down” into these few pages.

Understanding The Remodeling Hazards

Because you are reading this, it is probable that you are contemplating remodeling your home. It is equally likely that you are concerned about *not* ending up like our pitiful cartoon homeowner on the front cover. You do not have to become a victim of the remodeling “game.”

Like golfing, navigation, or any challenging endeavor, the key to remodeling success is knowing the game and avoiding the hazards. While there are many books, articles and authorities that offer you advice on the standard legal and business aspects of hiring a home improvement contractor, most completely overlook the primary source of the majority of remodeling disasters: Homeowners’ loss of control over the project.

The single most important aspect of a remodeling project is ensuring that the finished product fulfills the homeowner’s wants and needs. Only by doing so can the project be considered a success. What is even *more elusive* is the fact that this success is primarily determined *before* the contractor ever breaks ground.

That’s right, it is actually the *pre-construction* work that usually makes or breaks the project. We call this the Design Process.

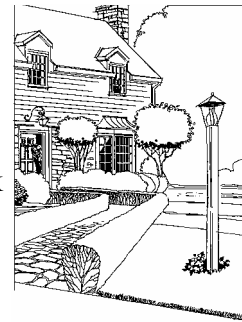
My goal is to show you how to easily ensure that your remodeling project will be a success. You will learn the simple “secrets” that most do not know. In minutes you will understand the *Design Process* and how to get the most from it.

So let us now move on directly into the key to remodeling success -- the *Design Process*. As it should be, the *Design Process* and the entire remodeling project’s success begins with you.

It Is *Your* Home And *Your* Dream

Problems arise when homeowners and/or contractors/or designers lose sight of the fact that it is the *homeowner’s home*! Sounds simple enough but do not underestimate this hazard as it is often the root cause of failure of many a remodeling project.

Doesn’t it make sense to demand that *your* money spent remodeling *your* home satisfies *your* goals? Well then, how do we accomplish this? You already know the answer: The Design Process. Now let’s back up a bit and gain some understanding of the notion behind the *Design Process*.



Why Are You Remodeling?

This is your first and foremost task: To define why you are considering remodeling. What are you trying to accomplish? Be as specific as you can. You may need more bedrooms, more baths or a family room. You may desire to update your old kitchen or bathrooms.

Perhaps, you wish to convert an unneeded bedroom into a home office or a master bedroom/bathroom suite. The list goes on and on. You must already have some wants and needs in mind, right?

Have you considered moving? Maybe changing houses is the most feasible alternative for you to achieve your needs and wants. However, be mindful that while remodeling can seem troublesome and expensive, so can selling, buying and moving. As you ponder these questions, avoid getting hung up on details such as where or how you would add a bathroom. Considering *solutions* is a different part of this process. At this stage, just try to remain free-thinking, mentally unhindered by budgetary or physical constraints. This thought process is actually the beginning of the design process, and *only you* can know what *you* want or need. Then the professionals can best show you *how to get* what *you* want or need.



The Design Process

The remodeling *Design Process* is nothing more than an organized and systematic approach to identifying your needs and wants and developing a path and methodology of best achieving your goals. It is a collaborative effort wherein the homeowner and contractor work together as a team pursuing a common goal: *A Successful Remodeling Project*. A Successful Remodeling Project is defined as: *a completed project, performed well, that satisfies the homeowner's needs*.

That is why we must start with a clear understanding and identification of the homeowner's needs. The designer must become *involved* with the homeowner in assisting them in identifying their needs. Otherwise the proposed design may not be relevant or acceptable.

The Design Program

A successful remodeling project cannot be achieved without having a plan and effectively carrying out that plan. This "plan" is what we will call the Design Program. It is your *guide* to a successful remodeling project. The *Design Program* is a collection of all of your ideas, wants and needs including an analysis of your home that identifies its shortcomings and potential for change.



Preparation of the *Design Program* will result in a “wish list.” These wish list items must then be prioritized to permit the homeowner and designer to mesh needs with the existing home’s shortcomings and potentials and with the stated budget.

A *skilled designer* (or whole team of designers as at **COOK BROS**), in collaboration with an interested and involved homeowner, will then take into consideration dozens of factors before attempting to prepare and propose a comprehensive solution: The Design.

Following is an abbreviated sampling of some of the many factors that must be considered and addressed in a design process:

- Homeowner’s goals and objectives
- Shortcomings in existing home
- Opportunities for improvement/change in existing home
- What rooms to remodel
- What features desired
- What is to be added and where to add it
- Exterior factors
- Quality level of finishes
- Aesthetic issues
- Physical needs (more space, update, change usage)
- Psychological/Emotional needs (ego, privacy, entertainment)
- Economic needs (budget, financing, return on investment, move or remodel)



WARNING!

Skipping steps or rushing through this process will probably result in big, painful and expensive mistakes!

The Design

This is what we have been after throughout the *Design Process* and *Design Program*. The Design will emerge from the information compiled in the *Design Program*. The *Design* is where the solution to your goals is created and presented.

Done properly the *Design* will satisfy your prioritized needs in the most comprehensive, cost-effective, practical, appropriate and attractive manner possible. The *Design* is the “blueprints” and specifications necessary for both accurately deriving the cost of the project and its successful construction.

Once the final *Design* is presented, you should be able to sufficiently *visualize* the end result so as to be able to confidently move ahead with your project at that time.

Now, if this all sounds intimidating to you, don't feel bad. That is why many homeowners and contractors shy away from going through a proper design process. It is also why there are so many horror stories about **Remodeling Nightmares!** What would be more disappointing than ending up paying for a poorly planned and ineffective “solution”?

Outline of the Design/Build process

So how do you get started with Design/Build? It's actually quite simple and natural.

- 1) Obtain the name and phone number of an outstanding Design/Build contractor. Which company's sign do you see often? That will tell you they must be doing something right for homeowners in your area.
- 2) Call the Design/Build firm and briefly discuss your project to determine whether the contractor can meet your needs. Not all firms do the type of work you have in mind. Don't be a “guinea pig” for an inexperienced contractor willing to “give it a try” at your risk and expense.

- 3) Set up an appointment to meet with the contractor at your home. It is critically important that:
 - a. ALL homeowner-decision makers are present at this initial meeting (i.e., both spouses, both partners, fiancé, co-owner, significant other, etc.) so that everyone will be on “the same page.”
 - b. You make the time investment and commitment to take off from work as necessary to meet the professional Design/Build contractor during business hours. You take off for dentist and doctor appointments, and to get your car inspected! Show the same interest in your remodeling project.
- 4) Honor your commitment (both of you) be at the appointment on time, or else call to reschedule. Note whether the contractor does the same.
- 5) Obtain the following information from the contractor at the initial meeting:
 - a. Ball park estimates for the projects, if appropriate;
 - b. Available start dates and estimated durations for your project;
 - c. Confirmation that the contractor has in fact built similar projects before - again, don't be his “experimental guinea-pig”;
 - d. Who will actually design, price, build and manage your project (i.e. an in-house professional design and construction management team (as at **COOK BROS.**) or just the contractor himself, alone!) Does he use subcontractors or his own employees for the design work?;
 - e. The contractor's process from this meeting onward; What is the next step, etc.? Is it an organized system, such as the one described herein?



- f. How many projects is the contractor into right now and can the firm competently handle yours too? Is the contractor already over-stretching their firm's ability to meet his commitments and trying to hire anyone he can find to throw at your project? How will one man competently manage many concurrent jobs?
- 6) Decide which Design/Build contractor you will select for your project. This is the single biggest risk a homeowner faces = choosing the wrong contractor, usually based on a misleading low-ball price bid alone.
- 7) Notify the contractor that you have chosen them to build your project and are ready to enter the design phase.
- 8) Enter into a Design/Deposit Agreement with your contractor. (More on this follows).
- 9) The project is then scheduled into the contractor's backlog, reserving your start date, so you won't be rushed during the design process. Your start date countdown is running during the Design Process!
- 10) Go through the Design Process. Homeowner applies for any required zoning variances, with contractor's assistance.
- 11) Final pricing is prepared once final design is complete.
- 12) Any redesign based upon pricing/budget is performed.
- 13) Construction contract is prepared and signed.
- 14) Construction working plans and drawings are prepared.
- 15) Contractor obtains building permit.
- 16) Construction begins on start date, as promised back when the Design/Deposit Agreement was signed.
- 17) Another successful Design/Build project is completed!

Someone Will Design Your Project, But Who?

By now you should be convinced of the benefits and importance of undertaking a thorough design effort. You may find yourself wondering *who* is supposed to do all of this design work.

The answer varies depending upon many factors including your own design ability, the scope and complexity of the project, and the relative costs of professional help. The important thing is that the designer is competent, aware, involved, experienced and shares your vision.

The designer's task is to analyze needs and conditions and develop an effective solution within the budget that satisfies the homeowner. As previously discussed, the designer should work with the homeowner, and not take the design "away from" the homeowner.

There are primarily four possibilities for who will be your project's designer:

- 1) Yourself as homeowner
- 2) An independent designer or architect
- 3) A Design/Build firm
- 4) A contractor (who isn't a design/build firm).

Let's take a closer look at each of these possibilities.

Yourself



If you feel confident that you can perform all of the previously discussed design process steps by yourself and you can generate the necessary drawings, then you *may* be able to successfully act as your own designer. But first consider the difficulties inherent in acting as your own advisor and counselor. Hiring an "outside" expert can lead you

honestly through the processes with the added benefit of a detached point of view. Remember the truism: “The attorney who represents himself has a fool for a client”!

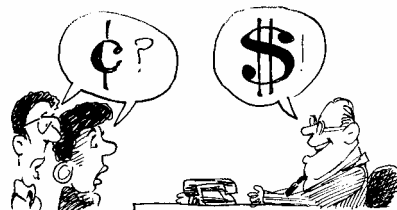
Often the required time investment may, itself, persuade you to seek professional help for the design work. If you are capable of performing the design work, have the time, and want to save the few hundred dollars, then go for it. However, I would only recommend your doing so if you *thoroughly enjoy* the process because your “rate of pay” will still probably be only \$2 to \$4 per hour! And remember, your contractor will still have to backtrack through the whole process anyway to effectively understand, price up and implement your design intentions. So what have you really saved?



Independent Designer or Architect

Hiring an independent designer or architect to design your home remodeling project is probably an expensive, unnecessary and possibly problematic overkill. Let’s examine some, admittedly generalized, realities about many independent designers or architects that may surprise you.

First, few independent designers or architects are trained *at all* in even the new construction of detached residential homes, *let alone* in the more complicated remodeling of existing homes. Rather, they are trained to help design skyscrapers! But seriously, commercial design is the entire focus of most architectural education programs.



Second, even fewer independent designers or architects have actual real-world experience in residential remodeling, and design. Many special situations arise in remodeling that can be “deal killers” when omitted or not anticipated by the designer. Remodeling is much more complex than new construction design and construction.

The truth is, I have a deep respect for **good** independent designers or architects that do not overstep their bounds usually by irresponsibly providing project pricing to homeowners without possessing adequate experience in the remodeling business itself. (COOK BROS. welcomes work from these good architects and independent designers, anytime!)

You wouldn't ask your plumber for medical advice, and you shouldn't ask a design-only independent architect for project pricing. Remodeling project pricing is just too complex and important to treat lightly. Ill-informed cost estimates, whether from incompetent or dishonest contractors or from well-meaning design-only independent architects can cause homeowners to be duped into hiring the wrong contractor (i.e., the “low-baller”) and dismissing the best contractors who based their price on realistic expectations. Remember, “high” or “low” prices are all relative, and the value offered and credibility of the bidder must be taken into consideration. If you are dead set on working with an independent designer or architect, then find one of the good ones with residential remodeling expertise, and leave the pricing to the builder.



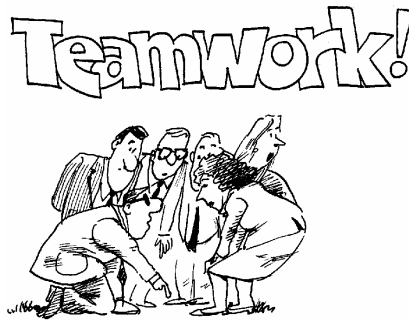
WARNING!

The risks of underestimated pricing and catastrophic budget overruns are great when the designer is NOT also a construction pricing expert, i.e., when they are not a Design/Build firm. COOK BROS. eliminates this risk.

Design/Build Firms

With many years of *real-world, hands-on* experience in the design and construction of *residential remodeling projects*, *Design/Build* firms are *specialists* with a full-time, in-house design and estimating staff and construction team -- all under one roof! These *Design/Build remodeling experts* take a remodeling project from start to finish -- from the homeowners' ideas and dreams through the design process and pricing, to construction and completion!

The benefits of *Design/Build* to both the homeowners and contractor are many, including very low-cost, experienced remodeling design services and critically important turn-key, concept-to-completion continuity of the entire project's management. No third-party, spare-wheel players to add expense and confusion. No finger-pointing or blame attributions. Nothing "falling through" the cracks due to unclear lines of responsibility. No ego battles to "preserve the integrity" of an unusable design that *cannot* be built as drawn due to real-life construction limitations or budget constraints, or both—which should have been anticipated by the designer. Just the homeowner and the *Design/Build* firm, working together as "partners" toward the same goal: A successful remodeling project! You gain all and lose nothing by choosing the **COOK BROS.** Design/Build option.



An important added benefit of working with a *Design/Build* firm: you get to really know your contractor before signing a construction contract with them! Don't skip this vital step. More on this follows in "Selecting The Contractor."

Contractors

UNDERPAID?
OVERWORKED?
DISILLUSIONED?



You may be surprised to learn that while most contractors are adequate craftsmen, few have the skills, training, experience, ability or staff to properly perform design work. Professional design work is a full-time job in itself and is best performed by a design staff. Verify whether the contractor has at least one full-time designer on staff before jumping-in! **COOK BROS.** has a four-person in-house design team.

When meeting with a contractor you will want to have them provide you “ballpark estimates” for the project during your initial meeting. Beware if they take the toothpick or chewing tobacco out of their mouth to answer: “It’s gonna run you”!
HINT: RUN! -- DON’T WALK AWAY FROM THIS “CONTRACTOR”!



Design Summary

It is probably obvious that I am extremely pre-disposed toward the *Design/Build* concept. This is the result of trial and error over a large experience. I could have been a practicing, independent architect -- my alma mater, Rice University, has a superb architecture program. I went into construction management instead. Since 1987 I have many times operated our remodeling firm with each of the four different designer options discussed above.

It became evident that the only way **COOK BROS.** could properly serve remodeling prospects was by adopting and practicing Design/Build. Without Design/Build, homeowners get uncommitted, short shrift, if they attempt to put their job “out to bid.” Competitive bidding actually harms homeowners in that it discourages contractor involvement and development of the necessary relationships.

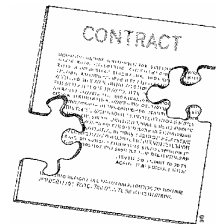
Long ago, we at **COOK BROS.**, decided never again to offer “discount remodeling services” via bidding that only tends to mislead and harm homeowners who do not realize what the “discount” really costs them. We would rather decline a project than do the homeowner the disservice of giving them a half-hearted, disjointed effort. Quality service is incompatible with bidding on jobs.

Homeowner-designers have sometimes turned out okay, but only on minor projects where the margin for design error created minimal exposure to trouble. Contractor-design worked okay for me early on in my career only because I was acutely sensitive to Design and was actually in “training-on-the-job” to be a *Design/Build* operator, learning the design-side of the business many years ago on dozens of successful “real-world” remodeling projects. Since then we adopted Design/Build and have never looked back.

In remodeling, there is simply no design method as effective and trouble-free as the *Design/Build* concept. It is a natural “fit” for remodeling!

Design/Deposit Agreement

An important first step in the design process is signing the Design/Deposit Agreement. This agreement serves to “fill the gap” between the point where you have selected your contractor, and the signing of the final construction contract. The design process requires a considerable investment of time and resources by the contractor. This is what “bid jobs” miss out on, as no contractor will invest much time and effort in a “competitive” process where all of the bidders except one WILL get stiffed. As a result, the bids reflect a cursory effort and invariably miss many of the details of the scope, and their bids are then inevitably low. Low bids do **NOT** mean lower cost. To encourage the contractor to commit the time to properly design and estimate your project, the contractor must be protected/compensated for their



investment, but cannot do so at this early stage merely by signing a final construction contract because there are no final specifications or pricing yet. Therefore no construction contract is yet possible.

Simply stated, there cannot be a construction contract until there is final pricing. There cannot be final pricing until there are final design and specifications. And there cannot be final design and specifications until a thorough design phase is accomplished which requires a substantial investment of the contractor's time and resources. Therefore, the Design/Deposit Agreement starts the entire process into motion. It is usually more helpful to view this as a deposit because many Design/Build firms like **COOK BROS.**, credit the full Design/Deposit fee towards the final project cost when, and if, the contractor is actually hired to construct the project. If, after the design/deposit agreement is entered, the homeowner does not eventually sign a construction contract with the Design/Build firm, then the fee is forfeited to the Design/Build firm to compensate them for their investment made during the design phase.



The Design/Deposit arrangement encourages the Design/Build firm to enthusiastically invest in your project during the design phase, without fear of being “used” or not being compensated for their time and consulting. It gets the homeowner and the contractor on the “same side of the table” as “partners” instead of noncommittal opponents.

The Design/Deposit agreement is very liberating and is not an “additional” expense at all. It simply serves to bridge an unavoidable gap and thus start the *Design/Build* process in motion! You need a committed contractor designing your project.

Selecting The Contractor

Next to having a poor design or poor design process, the worst threat to your project's success is *contractor selection*. Even a good design will be a disaster without a competent construction firm. Of course, if you had a *Design/Build* firm like **COOK BROS.** design your project, then you already know an expert remodeling contractor very well!

If you worked with an independent designer, perhaps they can make a contractor recommendation. Can you get any contractor recommendations from acquaintances who have recently had *similar* work performed and were satisfied? Do you see a particular contractor's yard signs and vehicles often, indicating that they are successful and busy? By the way, don't be surprised or offended if many Design/Build firms are not interested in bidding on your project if others already designed it. You may, therefore, lose access to many of the best remodeling contractors in your area and be stuck choosing from among the leftover contractors.

Otherwise, you have to do it the hard way: cold calling, setting appointments, re-scheduling no-shows, wading through incompetents and struggling in vain to gain a basis for comparison between them. And by "basis for comparison" I do NOT mean price! Understand, that *before* you have completed the *Design Process* and have a *Design* and *Plans* in hand, it is impossible to obtain meaningful price quotes by which you may discriminate. Even with plans to bid off of, it is impossible to get "apple to apple" comparisons of bids in remodeling as this is a service business where *construction management* is more important than the construction itself to the success of the project! How can you compare different firms' construction management capability by bids alone? You can't! The trouble is, *how* are you going to really get to *know* the contractor if all they do is bid on your project? That is a risky way to proceed.

It is critical that you choose a contractor that you know, trust and who shares your vision! Do not even think about

signing a construction contract with a contractor with whom you have not already developed a solid working relationship. Again, *Design/Build* eliminates this problem. Getting to know your contractor only after having signed a construction contract can be the biggest mistake of your life! A “bidding” contractor usually owes their loyalty to the architect that called them in to bid, because that is their source of future business. You are just another low-profit job to these types and you will get just that type of service.

Why the “High” Bid is Usually the Best Deal

We all want to get the “Best Deal” on everything we purchase. Bargain hunting is part of the “American Way.” We all have had the experience of “so called bargains” turning out to be no bargain at all. Well, when it comes to purchasing professional services, bargain hunting is even more difficult and counter – intuitive. When you hire a remodeling contractor, whether Design/Build or not, you need to understand what you are really buying.

Construction Management Services is what you are buying, and it is the one thing that differentiates good contractors from bad ones. You see, other than differences in firm’s management services, most are the same. All contractors have to adhere to the same building code and construction methods. All contractors use the same raw materials from the same suppliers. They probably even all pay roughly the same price for their supplies and materials. And although there are certainly issues related to construction quality, I can tell you that it is not generally the difference in skill levels of carpenters, or tradesmen that determines the quality of construction. Rather, it is the contractor’s management of the carpenters and tradesmen that determines quality. For example, nearly all of our **COOK BROS.** carpenters have previously made a go at running their own one or two man remodeling companies – being their own boss. The fact that they are now back working for a professionally managed company attests to the difficulty they all experienced due to the importance and demands of construction management of

remodeling projects. Please note that each of these **COOK BROS.** carpenters are excellent craftsmen with high skill levels in their trade, but they came to realize that skill in a trade does not have anything to do with operating and managing a construction company. They all decided to leave that to management pros like **COOK BROS.** so they could concentrate on practicing their carpentry trade.

There are simply too many balls to juggle in construction management. The high level of skills and the necessary staff required to competently provide these construction management services are why **COOK BROS.** is in business. Otherwise, you could simply hire a carpenter to build your project. Some homeowners try this, ONCE! The point is, high quality professional construction management services matter. And, alas, like most good things, they are not for free. Consider this analogy regarding why you might not want to go with the low-bid that cannot possibly provide the same professional construction management services as a higher price bid does (remember, they are not comparable bids, apple to apple, even though both are purportedly regarding the “same” construction project).

If your child was ill and in need of a major surgical procedure, would it even cross your mind to shop for the lowest priced surgeon to operate on your loved one? Of course not, because you would correctly perceive that the highest quality medical service, the only type you want for your child, would not be the cheapest. Instead, you want to locate and hire the most knowledgeable, capable, dependable and credible practitioner you can find, regardless of the price they charge. What if that child needed a defense attorney due to criminal manslaughter charges filed against her for an auto accident in which someone was killed? Would you want to have the least expensive attorney you could find standing between your child and a prison sentence? Of course not. Well, thankfully, few of

us ever have to deal with one of those types of personal nightmares, and as bad as a remodeling nightmare can become, it certainly doesn't compare. It is really the same logic that should guide you in your selection of a remodeling professional, too. All contractors are not created equal. Make sure you don't settle for less than the best – they'll probably cost you the least in the long run anyway.

Checking Out The Contractor

Following is an abbreviated listing of some of the information that you need in order to make an informed contractor selection:

- *Are they a “real company,” with a legitimate business office (not a P.O. Box or their home's basement), yard signs, company vehicles, business forms & cards, worker uniforms, advertising, etc.? Don't settle for less. Remember, we have “overhead” only because it raises our level of service to homeowners.
- *Get a list of references and check them out—better yet, visit the contractor's office and see for yourself.
- *Get a copy of their State Contractor's License, and confirm when they began business with the state (i.e., *10 years ago, or only 10 months ago*) Don't be fooled by their advertised claims of time in business— their time spent as an employee for another contractor does NOT indicate their ability to properly manage a business on their own.

- *Get a copy of their local business license (required before they can obtain a building permit)
- *Get an *original* Certificate of insurance, made out to you, and sent directly from their insurance agent to you, proving that they carry workmen's compensation insurance and multi-million dollar liability insurance and that that coverage is *current*.
- *Will contractor pull all permits, pay all related fees and manage all inspections? (If not, regard this as a huge red flag!)
- *Does the prospective contractor regularly handle your type and size project? (i.e. are they just handymen willing to "give remodeling a try" on your project.)
- *Are they reliable and punctual, meeting all commitments?
- *Do they have an office & management staff to handle administration? One owner cannot properly handle sales, production management, executive administration, design and customer service! Beware of 1 or 2 man contractors"! Just because THEY think they're superman doesn't protect you. There are only 24 hours in a day. What if they get sick during your project? Who will continue managing your project?
- *Are they well established in your community and financially solvent? Can they show a secure net worth? When their low bid proves wrong, who is going to pay? YOU! Don't rely on any notion of "being made whole" by a lawsuit. You cannot get blood out of a turnip.



- *Are adequate job site/office/management and customer communications systems in place (office staff, cell phones, e-mail, voice mail, etc.?)
- *Call authorities to check on them - Better Business Bureau, local county building Inspector's office, State Contractor's Board, local consumer advisory groups.

While these measures in the selection of a contractor may appear extreme, bear in mind that the cost of becoming



“snared” by a “fly-by-night” or incompetent contractor can be exorbitant. Be sure that you are dealing with a firm that has real offices and staff, company vehicles and long-term standing in your community, as they will not be able to “vanish into the woodwork.” By using the “dude working out of a pickup” who gave you the “lowest price,” you may well later end up

paying someone else *much more* than the difference that you thought you had saved, to correct shoddy work and complete the project. In fact, many reputable contractors will not, as a matter of good business practices, ever step in to fix these types of botched jobs, because it is a losing proposition. Know who you are going to be working with! Go with a well known, local “brand name” firm like **COOK BROS.** and you’ll never be sorry.

The Contract Documents

The purpose of the *Design Process* is to *define* what you are buying. The construction contract and drawings “memorialize” the design specifications so that as little as possible is left to chance or open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This will help ensure that the design solution that you worked so hard to achieve will actually be what you get when you are done paying for construction.

Drafting a detailed construction contract with adequate drawings is the only way to ensure your goals will be met by the contractor. Nevertheless problems may occur because even the finest contracts and drawings cannot cover all possible matters of conflict that might arise. In fact, both are merely symbolic representations of both parties’ understanding. It is simply not possible to avoid *all potential* confusion. These problems are particularly common when a “third party” designs the project to be constructed by a separate contractor who has had no input or involvement *in the Design process*. Especially a “bidder” who usually is unwilling to invest the necessary time to adequately absorb all of the information you and your designer carefully prepared.

Design/Build avoids most problems because the same firm handles *all phases* of the project from design to construction. Misunderstandings and miscommunications are virtually eliminated as everyone, including the homeowner, are involved at every step of the project, together. There are no “he-said, she-said,” “finger-pointing,” and “it’s not *my* job” situations in *Design/Build!*

It is important to understand how the integration of personnel and all of the project phases enables the successful remodeling project. The *design* often “evolves” throughout a project due to changing ideas, discovery of unknown physical conditions or budgetary issues. These changes must be handled efficiently, and if the designer does not do costing, it can bring a project to a standstill while new drawings are made and submitted to the contractor for re-pricing and then that pricing presented to the owner for approval, and around and around we go! Don’t put yourself through that **nightmare**. Deal with a Design/Build firm that does design and pricing and construction! All within the same firm!

Construction - What To Expect

Always as professionals, we know that it is crucial to a project’s serenity to let the homeowner know what to expect. It is *your* project and you should be informed of its progress.

First, realize that remodeling can be an intrusive activity where your life and your home are literally and unavoidably “invaded” during the project. Unlike new construction, remodelers must work on a house while people are living in it! Remember this when selecting your contractor.

You should be able to trust your experienced, professional remodeling contractor to minimize the intrusion and your resultant discomfort.

Second, be aware that there will inevitably be “problems” that arise, but expect a good Design/Build firm to diligently handle them. To a homeowner, the remodeling process can *appear* disorganized and slow-moving at times, even when all is well and actually proceeding on-track and on-schedule. This can drive a homeowner crazy until the situation is explained. Do not hesitate to ask anything, anytime! Professionals will appreciate your interest and the opportunity to ease your frustration.

Throughout the project, remind yourself that you did your homework. You participated fully in the Design Process. You selected the right contractor because you knew what was important to know and to ask and not be fooled by “low bidders.” So, when your blood pressure begins to rise a little, take a deep breath and relax, confident that *your* finished project will soon be worth all the effort.

Success!



The *satisfaction* of a job well done and the accomplishment of a worthwhile goal can be yours. You *can* make your remodeling dream become a reality.

Don't let anyone steal your dream or rain on your parade. Find the right Design/Build “partners” to help you successfully accomplish your remodeling project.

Can We At COOK BROS. Help You?

If you are considering a remodeling project in the Northern Virginia region, you may be interested in talking with my Design/Build firm, **COOK BROS.** Remember, we “wrote the book” on *Design/Build!*

A free site visit and consultation, courtesy of **COOK BROS.**, will get you started in the right direction. We want to hear what *you* have to say about *your* ideas and goals and see how your home can be changed. There is no obligation to hire **COOK BROS.** for either the design process or for construction. We will give you our ideas and reliable ballpark estimates, for free. Just call us at (703) 536-0900 to set up your initial appointment with **COOK BROS.**

Thank You & Good Luck!



5521 Lee Highway
Arlington, Virginia 22207

(Near the intersection of Lee Hwy. & Harrison,
behind First Virginia bank and next to Joe's Pizza)



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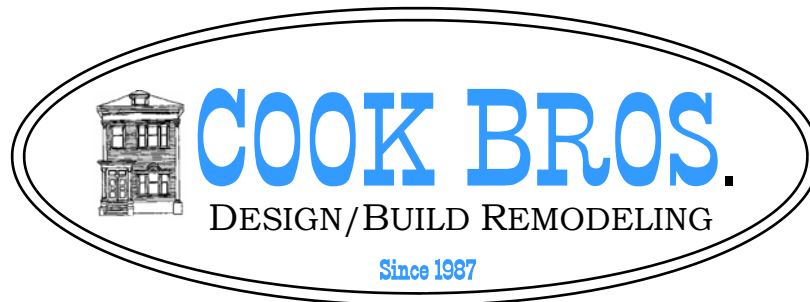


Rob Cook

Founder of Cook Bros., a full-service Design/Build remodeling firm, Rob has spent his entire adult life actively involved in the single-family residential housing industry. An Arlington resident since 1972, Rob graduated from Yorktown HS, concurrently working with his father remodeling investment homes. At 18, Rob became a licensed Real Estate Agent, locating and disposing of real estate investments for his father and other clients. At 19, he purchased his first investment property, the beginning of an extensive portfolio of realty holdings.

At 24, Rob graduated from Rice University with a BA in Energy Management. After graduation, he served as a construction manager for a major regional home builder in Houston, Texas, where he was personally responsible for the management of the construction of hundreds of houses from the ground up. In 1985, Rob first formed Cook Bros. Contracting in Fort Worth, Texas with his brother, Crit. After “coming home” to Northern Virginia in 1986, Rob returned to Real Estate Sales as a Top Producing Agent with RE/MAX in 1988 and 1989, while simultaneously establishing Cook Bros. in the Northern Virginia area, taking the company from a small painting and handyman company at inception in 1987 to the well-known Arlington Design/Build firm in operation today. Along the way, Rob earned his Law degree at George Mason University School of Law in Arlington.

Rob has traveled coast-to-coast on consulting projects for developers and investors holding properties out of state, and also buys neglected properties to renovate and rent. Rob sums up his industry commitment well: “The residential housing business is all I know.”



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