



LUXURY HOMES OF TEXAS

How to Choose a Custom Home Builder

The Questions to Ask Before You Entrust Someone With Your Home

Better Homes Begin With Better Decisions.

Built on Integrity. Guided by Vision. Inspired by Dreams.

A Note From Tim

Choosing the builder for a custom home is one of the most consequential decisions you will make in the entire process. You are not simply hiring someone to construct walls and install finishes. You are selecting the person or company that will help lead a complex project involving design, budget, schedule, consultants, trades, materials, decisions, changes, and thousands of details.

The best builder for your project is not necessarily the largest company, the most expensive company, or the one with the most impressive sales presentation. The right builder is the one whose experience, systems, judgment, communication style, and approach are aligned with the kind of project you are planning.

This guide is designed to help you evaluate builders more thoughtfully. It is not intended to tell you who to hire. It is intended to help you ask better questions, understand what strong project leadership should look like, and recognize the difference between a polished presentation and a disciplined building process.

You are not hiring a contractor for a transaction. You are selecting a team to lead one of the most complex personal projects you may ever undertake.

— **Tim Lansford**

Luxury Homes of Texas

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide during initial research, interviews, and proposal review. Do not worry about asking every question in one meeting. The objective is to understand how each builder thinks, how the company operates, and what the working relationship will look like after the contract is signed.

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01 Start With Fit, Not Price

Price matters, but it should not be the first or only filter used to select a custom home builder.

A custom home is a long relationship. Depending on the scope and complexity, you may work with the builder for months during design and preconstruction and then another year or more during construction and completion. The company you select will be involved in financial decisions, personal preferences, schedule pressure, design discussions, unexpected conditions, and moments when judgment matters more than a written specification.

That means fit matters. You should feel comfortable with how the builder communicates, explains decisions, responds to questions, and approaches problems. You should also understand who will actually manage the project after the sales conversation is over.

Look for Alignment

A builder who is excellent at production homes may not be the right fit for a one-of-one estate. A company that excels at smaller renovations may not have the systems or trade depth needed for a highly complex new residence. Match the builder's experience and operating model to the project you are actually planning.

THE LOWEST NUMBER IS NOT ALWAYS THE LOWEST COST

A lower initial proposal can become expensive if important scope is missing, allowances are unrealistic, details are unresolved, or the project is poorly managed. Compare what is included and how the number was developed, not just the total at the bottom of the page.

02 Experience That Matches the Project

Years in business matter, but relevant experience matters more.

Ask what kinds of homes the builder has completed recently, the typical size and complexity of those projects, and whether the company has worked with the type of architecture, site conditions, materials, or specialty systems you are considering.

Experience is especially important when the project includes difficult sites, extensive structural work, advanced mechanical systems, complicated roofs, significant glazing, specialty stone, pools, elevators, wine rooms, home automation, large outdoor environments, or unusual owner requirements.

Ask About the Difficult Projects

Perfect projects do not tell you much about judgment. Ask the builder to describe a difficult project, what went wrong, how the problem was handled, and what changed in the company's process afterward. The answer can reveal more than a gallery of finished photographs.

EXPERIENCE SHOULD CHANGE HOW A BUILDER THINKS

The value of experience is not simply having seen more projects. It is recognizing patterns earlier, asking better questions, anticipating downstream consequences, and knowing when a small issue needs immediate attention.

03 The Builder's Role Before Construction

Strong builders add value before the first day on site.

Ask how early the builder prefers to become involved and what preconstruction services are provided. A builder who participates during design can help evaluate constructability, test budget assumptions, identify long-lead items, review site logistics, and coordinate trade input before decisions become expensive to change.

Preconstruction may include drawing review, preliminary estimating, trade pricing, value analysis, selection planning, schedule development, permit coordination, procurement planning, and identification of unresolved scope.

Builder and Architect Should Collaborate

The builder should respect the architect's design role while contributing construction knowledge. Healthy collaboration is not about one party controlling the other. It is about bringing the right information to the table early enough to improve the project.

ASK FOR THE PRECONSTRUCTION ROAD MAP

A builder should be able to explain what happens between the first meeting and construction start, what information is needed, what deliverables you will receive, and how the project moves from concept to a construction-ready plan.

04 Budgeting and Financial Transparency

A custom home budget should become more accurate as the design becomes more defined.

Ask how the builder creates the initial budget, how frequently it is updated, and how estimates are reconciled with actual trade pricing. Understand which numbers are firm, which are allowances, and which are still assumptions.

A good budget should help you make decisions. It should show enough detail to understand where the money is going without burying you in information that is impossible to interpret.

Understand Allowances

Allowances are useful when selections are not final, but they should be realistic. An artificially low allowance can make a proposal look attractive while simply postponing the true cost until later. Ask how allowance amounts were established and whether they are consistent with the quality level you have discussed.

Ask About Reporting

If the project is cost-plus, ask what supporting documentation you will receive, how builder fees are calculated, how invoices are approved, and how frequently financial reports are issued. If the project is fixed price, understand what is included, excluded, and subject to change.

TRANSPARENCY SHOULD BE EXPLAINABLE

If you cannot understand how the builder's budget works before construction begins, it will not become easier once the project is moving quickly.

05 Scheduling and Project Control

A schedule is one of the primary management tools on a custom home.

Ask how the builder develops and maintains the schedule, how often it is updated, and how delays are communicated. A credible schedule should include major construction activities, inspections, owner decisions, design deliverables, procurement dates, and long-lead materials.

No builder can guarantee that weather, supply chains, inspections, or field conditions will cooperate perfectly. What matters is how the builder monitors the critical path, adjusts sequencing, and responds when something changes.

Procurement Is Part of Scheduling

Windows, doors, appliances, specialty fixtures, cabinetry components, stone, lighting, and mechanical equipment can have significant lead times. Ask when those items will be identified and ordered and who is responsible for tracking them.

ASK WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SCHEDULE MOVES

The useful question is not whether delays can happen. They can. Ask how the builder identifies a delay, communicates it, evaluates its effect, and develops a recovery plan when recovery is possible.

06 Communication and Decision Management

Custom homes generate hundreds of questions and decisions. The communication system matters.

Ask who your primary contact will be, how often meetings are held, how progress is reported, and where decisions are documented. You should know whether the builder uses project-management software, written meeting notes, selection schedules, email, or another system to keep information organized.

Good communication is not constant communication. It is timely, clear, useful communication that helps the owner understand what has happened, what is happening now, and what needs attention next.

Owner Decisions Need Deadlines

Ask how upcoming selections and approvals are tracked. A strong process should show what decisions are needed, who owns them, when they are due, and what other work may be affected if the decision is late.

YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE TO MANAGE THE BUILDER

The owner will always have responsibilities, but the project should not depend on the owner chasing people for answers, reminding the team about deadlines, or discovering coordination problems after the fact.

o7 Changes, Problems, and Accountability

Every custom project changes. Every complex project encounters problems. The builder's response is what matters.

Ask how change orders are initiated, priced, approved, and incorporated into the schedule. Also ask how the builder distinguishes an owner-requested change from a correction, design revision, unforeseen condition, or missing scope.

Problems should be surfaced early, not hidden until they become unavoidable. A strong builder explains what happened, what the options are, what each option affects, and what decision is needed.

Accountability Is a Leadership Issue

There may be dozens of companies involved in the project. Someone still has to own the next step. Ask how responsibilities are assigned and how the builder ensures that architects, consultants, trades, vendors, and the owner understand what is expected and when.

LISTEN FOR OWNERSHIP

A builder who constantly explains problems by pointing to everyone else may be telling you how accountability will work after the contract is signed.

o8 Quality Control and Trade Management

Quality is not created by a final walkthrough. It is managed throughout construction.

Ask how the builder selects trade partners, how long key trades have worked with the company, and how work is inspected before it is covered. Important details such as waterproofing, flashing, framing corrections, insulation, mechanical rough-in, and drainage become difficult or expensive to evaluate later.

A strong builder should have a process for identifying incomplete or unacceptable work, communicating corrections, and verifying that corrections are complete.

Trade Relationships Matter

Custom homes depend on skilled trade partners. Long-term relationships can improve communication, responsiveness, and consistency, but they should never replace accountability. The builder should still inspect, document, and manage the work.

QUALITY IS MORE THAN FINISHES

Beautiful cabinetry and stone are visible. Waterproofing, structure, drainage, air sealing, and mechanical coordination are not. Ask how the builder protects the quality of the parts you will never see again.

09 Credentials, Insurance, and Business Stability

Professional credentials are not a substitute for performance, but they can reveal commitment to education and professional standards.

Ask about licensing where applicable, insurance, professional designations, continuing education, association involvement, and relevant certifications. In Texas, where residential builders are not licensed statewide in the same manner as many other professions, due diligence becomes especially important.

You should also understand the stability of the business. Custom homes require significant financial and operational capacity. Ask how long the company has operated, whether the builder carries appropriate insurance, and whether the company is accustomed to projects of similar scale.

Verify, Do Not Assume

Request current insurance certificates and confirm that the legal entity on the contract matches the company you are evaluating. For particularly large projects, your attorney, lender, insurance advisor, or financial professional may recommend additional due diligence.

CREDENTIALS SHOULD MEAN SOMETHING

The value of education and professional designations is not the letters themselves. The value is whether the knowledge behind them improves planning, communication, construction, and decision-making.

10 References, Reputation, and Past Work

Past clients can help you understand what the building experience actually feels like.

Ask for references from projects that are similar in scale or complexity to yours. When you speak with former clients, go beyond asking whether they were happy with the finished home.

Questions for Past Clients

- How well did the builder communicate when something went wrong?
- Were budget changes explained clearly?
- Did you understand the schedule and major delays?
- How were changes handled?
- Did the builder remain responsive near the end of the project?
- How has warranty service been handled?
- Would you hire the same builder again? Why or why not?

Also look at the builder's completed work, but remember that photographs only show the result. A beautiful portfolio does not tell you how the project was managed, how the budget was controlled, or how the team performed under pressure.

THE EXPERIENCE MATTERS TOO

The finished home is important. So is the year or more you may spend getting there.

11 Understand the Contract and Fee Structure

Do not evaluate a builder's price without understanding the contract behind it.

Custom builders commonly use fixed-price, cost-plus, construction-management, or hybrid structures. None is automatically better in every situation. What matters is whether the structure is appropriate for the level of design completion, project complexity, and amount of uncertainty remaining when construction begins.

Ask what the builder's fee includes, how overhead is handled, whether fees apply to change orders, how allowances are reconciled, what insurance and supervision costs are included, and how deposits or retainage are treated.

Have the Contract Reviewed

A custom-home contract is a significant legal and financial document. Consider having an attorney experienced in construction review it before signing. The objective is not to make the relationship adversarial. It is to make expectations clear before the project starts.

COMPARE STRUCTURE, NOT JUST TOTALS

Two proposals can show similar totals while allocating risk and responsibility very differently. Understand the assumptions, exclusions, fee structure, and change provisions behind the number.

12 Red Flags Worth Noticing

No single issue automatically means a builder is wrong for your project, but patterns deserve attention.

- Pressure to sign before scope, process, or responsibilities are clear.
- A dramatically lower price without a clear explanation of why.
- Unrealistically low allowances that do not match the discussed quality level.
- Vague answers about scheduling, reporting, or who will manage the project.
- Resistance to involving the builder during design or to collaborating with the architect.
- No clear process for change orders or owner decisions.
- Reluctance to provide references, insurance information, or examples of comparable work.
- Promises that there will be no problems or delays.
- Frequent blame of architects, trades, inspectors, vendors, or past clients.
- A proposal that is difficult to understand or leaves major scope undefined.

PERFECTION IS NOT THE STANDARD

No builder can promise a project without complications. Look for discipline, transparency, judgment, and a demonstrated ability to respond when reality differs from the plan.

13 Questions to Ask a Custom Home Builder

Use these questions as a starting point for your interviews. The quality of the explanation often matters as much as the answer itself.

- What types of custom homes make up most of your current work?
- At what point do you prefer to become involved with the architect and design team?
- What does your preconstruction process include?
- Who will be responsible for my project day to day?
- How many active projects will that person be managing?
- How do you develop and update the budget?
- How are allowances established and reconciled?
- How do you manage the construction schedule?
- How are long-lead items identified and tracked?
- How are owner decisions and selections managed?
- How often will we meet and receive project updates?
- How are changes priced, approved, and documented?
- How do you manage quality before work is covered?

- How do you select and evaluate trade partners?
- How do you handle a problem when the solution is not obvious?
- What insurance coverage do you carry?
- Can you provide references from comparable projects?
- How does your warranty and post-completion service process work?
- What does your fee include, and what costs are outside it?
- What would you need from us to make this project successful?

PAY ATTENTION TO THE QUESTIONS THEY ASK YOU

A thoughtful builder should also be interviewing you. The questions a builder asks about your goals, property, design, budget, timing, and priorities can reveal how seriously the company is evaluating the project.

14 Builder Evaluation Checklist

Use this after interviews to compare builders on the factors that matter beyond price.

Project Fit

- ☐ Experience with homes of similar scale and complexity.
- ☐ Relevant experience with the site, architecture, systems, and finishes being considered.
- ☐ Clear understanding of the project goals and priorities.

Preconstruction & Budget

- ☐ Defined preconstruction process.
- ☐ Budget methodology is clear and understandable.
- ☐ Allowances and assumptions appear realistic.
- ☐ Builder can explain how the budget will be updated as design develops.

Project Management

- ☐ Named project leader and clear responsibilities.
- ☐ Defined scheduling process.
- ☐ Defined communication rhythm and reporting system.
- ☐ Owner decisions and selections will be tracked.
- ☐ Change-order process is clear.

Quality & Accountability

- ☐ Quality-control process is explained.
- ☐ Trade-partner management is disciplined.
- ☐ Builder demonstrates ownership when problems occur.

- ☐ Completion and warranty processes are clear.

Business & Relationship

- ☐ Insurance and company information have been verified.
- ☐ References are relevant and credible.
- ☐ Contract and fee structure are understandable.
- ☐ Communication style feels compatible with the way we want to work.
- ☐ We trust the builder's judgment, not just the presentation.

The Decision Is Bigger Than the Bid

A custom home builder will influence far more than the construction itself. The builder will affect how clearly the project is planned, how accurately the budget is understood, how well the schedule is managed, how quickly problems are surfaced, and how confidently decisions are made.

Take the time to understand the company behind the proposal. Ask difficult questions. Compare processes, not just promises. Pay attention to how the builder communicates when the conversation moves beyond finishes and photographs into budget, schedule, accountability, and risk.

The objective is not to find a builder who tells you everything will be easy. It is to find a builder whose experience and systems give you confidence that the project will be led well when it is not.

Experience matters most when the project does.

BEGIN A CONVERSATION

If you are planning a custom home in North Texas, already own the property, are evaluating land, or are working with an architect, Luxury Homes of Texas would be glad to learn more about your project and where you are in the process.

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