

## Types of Contractors: There *is* a difference by Michael Watson

Now if you're a Contractor, don't go gettin' all worked up if I mention something that you don't agree with. None of this is meant to belittle or lift up one type of Contractor over another.

I would like to first mention that I have a tremendous respect for any person that chooses the Contracting field as their profession.

They say that "A" students end up teaching "B" students and that "C" students build the Universities. I guess that's true. Everybody I hung out with in High School ended up Contractors. And, for the most part they're all doing pretty well. But I am excited to tell you that anyone that has received his or her Contractor's License in the State of California now days has accomplished something. Understand that anyone that moves to California with an "out of state" Contractors License is required to take both his and her Trade, and California Law exam. However, there are exceptions. What I'm saying is that California does have some of the toughest requirements in the United States. Notice the State of California does not call us "Builders"; they call us Contractors, which in my book would mean we are experts at writing Contracts. Some of us know *that* isn't true! I have worked to, and have written some really bad contracts in the past. We are really Builders that have to write good contracts...with me?

In all honesty, I scored very high on my tests but as I quickly discovered, that test had little to do with the "real world" of Contracting. I'm sure there are Contractors that are nodding their heads and saying "*You got that right*" as they read this. So where is all this going? I'm clearly stating the fact that Contracting is a challenging field and my hat is off to you if you have your California Contractors License.

Okay, to the meat of this. For those of you who are considering building your home there are some basic things you need to know about Contractors. There are several types of Contractors. There are Subcontractors or "Specialty Contractors" that typically specialize in trades like Plumbing, Electrical, or HVAC. There are those who have certification in several of these specialty trades and there are many types of specialty trades. If you needed any types of these trades individually a specialty contractor would be the way to go. Then there are General Contractors, which I am. I look at myself, as a "Jack of all Trades and Master of One." General Contractors for some reason almost always seem to come from the Framing Trade. Why, I don't know. I did. But as a General Contractor we are required to have knowledge of all the trades in General Construction. Some General Contractors specialize in Commercial, others in Residential. Any construction outside of residential is considered commercial. Subcontractors are hired by General Contractors to take care of the specialty trades they do not perform themselves. General Contractors are allowed to cover several trades on a project and are often an Overseer of any given project.

There are also different types of Residential General Contractors. Some are the type that state, "Give me a set of plans and I can build it for you." Others are the type that say, "I have an inventory of plans that I have collected and I can build one of them for you." And yet there are others that state, "I will build your set of plans, my set of plans, or we can design a set of plans together. Martin Brothers is the latter type of builder. We are what is called a Design / Builder. We have sat down with hundreds of couples and helped them to design their plans. Why do I share this with you? Ahh...finally, he gets to the point of this article.

Many of our clients have come to us with a set of plans they had custom designed by a certified Architect and in many cases a Structural Engineer as well, and discovered they have paid for a set of plans they can not afford to have built!

One client about two years ago was the last great example of this. They came in the door with that "Mopey Joe" look on their faces, "Is there anyway you can build this for us at a price we can afford? We sat down with them and discovered that they had a custom design that they had spent hours dreaming up, went to a Contractor that had told them to get with an Architect/Engineer and have it drawn up. They did that. After they had spent nearly \$15k with this person they took those plans and began to solicit Contractors to build it. Evidently we were the first ones they came across that told them that it can be built differently and save a ton of money! That was not even in their vocabulary! How could they abandon \$15k!!!

We took their plans and redesigned them to our style of construction. We were able to remove a tremendous amount of specialty beams, brackets, and systems that were not really conducive to a cost effective build. We re-arrange some walls that gave them almost exactly what they were wanting, but placed them in a

fashion that made sense monetarily and we changed the roofline to give it a similar look but made it affordable. The End Result?

We not only saved them the amount they needed to move forward with the project, Martin Brothers nearly saved them the amount they paid the Architect! As one Framing Foreman told me back in my apprentice days, "There's more than one way to skin a cat!" Now I'm not really talking about skinning cats!" I'm talking about ways to do things. I'm not so macho that I'll admit that I like cats; who came up with that saying anyway?

Now, it doesn't always go that way and the savings may not be as dramatic, but a lot have gone that way and we ended up looking like we have connections too difficult here to describe.

**Fact:** A General Contractor should be obligated as a professional to assist it's client into making decisions that save them money and give them a great product, end of story. If they are doing the opposite, then in my opinion, they have no right to call themselves a Professional General Contractor. We have our costs of doing business and we have our percentage of profit that we are entitled to make. But that should not hover near the category of robbery.

As I have stated before, the most common question a Contractor hears is, "How much do you cost per square foot?" A Design Builder typically cannot easily state a standard Cost per Square Foot over the phone but they do have the ability to design with cost in mind and then structurally engineer that project to stay standing on a regular basis. Every one of our plans are Engineered and stamped per the requirements of the County for every project. They just may be designed with cost instead of "flair" in mind.

Last story and then I'll end this for you. A young new Real Estate Agent came to me with the need for a very affordable house to be built on a specific plot of land the Client desired to buy. The potential client was not that interested in the house as much as he was in the land. The aggressive young Agent went to a contractor who pointed him to an Architect/ Engineer who locked him into a set of plans. The Agent then went back to the Contractor who committed to a price way too low to build the set of plans. The Contractor later vanished into thin air. The Agent contacted us out of the phone book begging us to build this project for that price. We could not. I told him if we could eliminate his plans, I could build a home similar for much less. The Architect for whatever reason was paranoid that we would steal his design and would not let the Agent out of the agreement. The Real Estate Agent spent months on the project and ended up losing the project and the deal. He learned that there are different types of Contractors.

Architects, especially those that can Engineer the structural stability of a project are a much-needed commodity and I use one myself, but we design and draft all our Custom Homes and have him engineer it for a fraction of the cost since we do most of the work. Make sense?

So in conclusion, I hope that I am clearly stating that there are many types of Contractors and that they all have their fit in the world of building. Some are better suited for types of projects than others. Martin Brothers has chosen the path of a Design/Builder. We are also known as a "Turn-Key" Builder. That's a General Contractor that will not only build the Project, but also oversee the entire build process from Conception to Completion where we actually hand you the Keys to your new dream home. We include all of that in the costs of the project and are still competitive. It's a lot of responsibility to complete a project that the client envisioned, but I guess we wouldn't have it any other way. As always, I believe that educated people can make intelligent choices. I hope this helps!

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