

crossfire

If you decide to hire a general contractor, but still want to save money on the project, the pros can suggest ways for you to participate in the battle and thereby save, too.

hope to save about 20 percent to 25 percent of the redo's total costs — essentially the GC's fee. On a \$40,000 kitchen remodeling and room addition, the savings could be about \$10,000, which can be quite an incentive to run the show yourself.

COMMONLY, THOUGH, the homeowner who successfully plays general is not a total novice.

He has some experience with construction (perhaps on an earlier, small project), and may have worked with many subcontractors. Where his own knowledge is thin, he is able to rely on the expertise of friends or family members (Dad is a plumber).

In addition to know-how and resources, this satisfied amateur GC has

an invaluable asset — time. Invariably, the successful homeowner — GC is someone who can spend every day, all day, on the job site.

"If I'd only been able to stop by once a day," reasons the veteran do-it-yourselfer, "There would have been problems discovered after-the-fact. That means ripping something out, and that means delays and more money."

If you're convinced a professional GC is the person to handle your remodeling headaches, consider these tips on shopping for a good one.

- Don't skimp on time and attention in the selection process. Comparison shop; invite several GCs to submit bids on the job. Choose as carefully as you'd choose your family doctor. The choice is particularly crucial if you will

be living in your home as it undergoes surgery.

- Professionals in the business agree: Word-of-mouth is the best advertisement. Shop for a GC by talking with friends and neighbors who have survived the redo process and are happy with the results.

- Look for a GC with a track record. That's someone who has been in the business awhile (mere survival is a good business indicator) and is a permanent member of the local business community.

- Ask a prospective GC for names, addresses and phone numbers of for-

mer jobs and clients. Then drive by the jobs and call the homeowners. (But, you wonder, wouldn't a GC be annoyed by these inquiries? "Not unless he's got something to hide," responds a pro.)

- Don't automatically select the GC with the lowest bid. Keep in mind that a wildly out-of-line low bid is probably cause for suspicion.

- Choose a GC whose standards coincide with yours. Example: Your plans call for matching existing trim. One GC says he can "come close."

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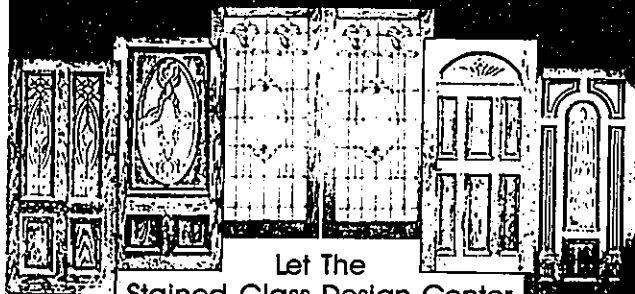
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