



Custom Home Designers

A DANIEL ALLEN DESIGNS GUIDE

# The Builder Interview Checklist

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Twenty questions to ask before you hand someone the most important project of your life — and how to read the answers.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

# The interview is where the project is won or lost

Most homeowners choose a builder on a referral and a friendly first meeting. Both matter. Neither tells you how the build will actually go when the framing is up, the budget is tight, and a decision has to be made the same afternoon.

This list is the one I use when I am sitting at the table with a client and their builder. It is written from the side of the person who has to read the plans and watch them get built — so the questions are designed to surface how a builder thinks, not just what they charge.

Ask all twenty if you can. Listen less for the perfect answer and more for whether the answer is *specific*. Specifics come from experience. Vague reassurance does not.

Bring this to the meeting on paper. A builder who welcomes the questions is already showing you something. A builder who bristles is showing you something too.

# Track record & the work itself

## EXPERIENCE & FIT

- 1 How many homes like mine have you completed in the last three years?  
*You want recent, relevant volume — not a long career mostly spent on different work.*

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- 2 Can I visit a current job site and a finished home from two years ago?  
*A two-year-old home reveals how the work ages. A live site reveals how a crew actually operates.*

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- 3 Who, specifically, will run my project day to day?  
*The person who sells the job is often not the person who builds it. Meet the builder, not just the owner.*

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- 4 Will my home be your crew or subcontractors — and are they the same subs you used last year?  
*Stable, repeat trades are a quiet sign of a well-run company.*

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## PLANS & PRECONSTRUCTION

- 1 How do you price a project — from a complete drawing set, or an allowance-heavy estimate?  
*A bid built on a complete set is a real number. A bid built on allowances is a placeholder.*

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- 2 What do you need from my designer before you can give a firm price?  
*A serious builder can tell you exactly which documents they require. Vagueness here predicts surprises later.*

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- 3 Where do you usually find gaps in a set of plans?  
*A strong builder reads plans critically before the dig. This answer tells you how carefully they look.*

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- 4 How do you handle decisions the drawings don't fully resolve?  
*No set answers every field condition. You want a process, not improvisation.*

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- 5 Will you sit down with my designer before we break ground?  
*The best outcomes come from the builder and designer reading the same plan together, early.*

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# Money, change, and schedule

## BUDGET & CHANGE ORDERS

- 1 What is your process when something costs more than estimated?  
*Change orders are inevitable. A documented, signed-before-work process is the only acceptable answer.*

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- 2 How are allowances set, and what happens if I go over one?  
*Lowball allowances make a bid look cheap and the final invoice expensive. Ask how each was calculated.*

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- 3 How do you mark up changes and subcontractor work?  
*You are entitled to know the structure. Transparency now predicts transparency later.*

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- 4 How often will I see an updated budget versus actual spend?  
*Monthly reconciliation keeps surprises small. "We'll let you know" keeps them large.*

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## SCHEDULE & COMMUNICATION

- 1 What is a realistic timeline, and what most often delays a project like mine?  
*An honest builder names their own risks. An optimistic one names none.*

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- 2 How and how often will you communicate with me — and who do I call with a question?  
*Set the cadence now. A single point of contact prevents most disputes.*

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*"No gaps. No chaos. No expensive surprises."*

# Paper, protection, and the close

## CONTRACT & PROTECTION

- 1 Are you licensed and insured, and can I see current certificates?  
*Verify, don't assume. Ask for general liability and workers' compensation in writing.*

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- 2 What does your contract include for warranty, and what is excluded?  
*Read the warranty before you sign, not after a problem appears.*

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- 3 How do you handle a dispute if one comes up?  
*A builder confident in their work will have a calm, clear answer.*

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- 4 Will you provide lien waivers from subs and suppliers as you're paid?  
*This protects you from paying twice. The right answer is an immediate yes.*

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- 5 What's the one thing that most often goes wrong on a custom home, and how do you prevent it?  
*The best answer is honest and specific. It is the truest measure of experience on this list.*

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A pattern worth noticing: the strongest builders answer faster, with more detail, and with fewer reassurances. They've lived these questions.

## THE NEXT STEP

# The best protection is a complete plan

Most of the questions above come back to one thing: how clearly the work is drawn before anyone picks up a hammer. A complete set of construction documents is what turns a builder's estimate into a real price and a smooth build — because there is nothing left to guess.

That is the work I do. I design homes for Metro Atlanta families and the builders who construct them, and I stay involved from the first sketch through the final document — so the plan the builder prices is the home you actually get.

If you're interviewing builders, you're close. Let's make sure the plan in their hands is one worth pricing.



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**Start the conversation**

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