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# GROUNDWORK

*Finding a trustworthy builder who will deliver on time and on price can seem like looking for the Holy Grail. Lucy Denyer has some sound advice*

**F**or Steffi Rox, it started with the roof. She needed a new one. She also wanted her bathroom replacing and a bit of a general overhaul. Endless phone calls, quotes and half-done jobs later, the work in her home in Torquay remains unfinished. 'Nothing is more frustrating than having money for the work set aside and no-one to do it!' she says.

Sound familiar? While the recession has sent many builders out of business, it is often difficult amongst the ones who remain to find a reliable person to do the job: last year alone, the Office of Fair Trading logged 64,780 complaints about bad workmanship. It's a depressing record, particularly when the money people spend overhauling their property is often the second biggest outlay after buying the house itself.

So how can you go about finding a good builder, and how can you manage the work they are doing to everyone's satisfaction?

Word of mouth recommendations are a good starting point. 'The majority of what we do comes through recommendations,' says Louise Brasseley, marketing consultant at building company Cordles (cordles.com). Not entirely surprising: Cordles doesn't take on projects worth less than about £50,000. Regardless of the size of the job however, it's always worth asking friends who did their work, particularly if they have been pleased with it. Don't be afraid to probe, advises John Thursfield of Broseley London (broseleylondon.com), or ask about the work that was done, how much it cost and how long it took. And inspect the work: your friend's idea of a good job may be different from yours.

If your friends fail you, it's always worth turning to the internet. A number of sites have sprung up in response to the problem of finding reliable tradesmen, which allow clients to give feedback and workmen to bid for jobs. Ratedpeople.com allows customers to post their jobs and the website will find you three of its members who are closest to you, to give quotes; you can check their ratings from previous work and pick the one you like the best. Mybuilder.com works on a similar premise, while checkatrade.com offers a directory of tradespeople, all



of whom have been vetted and required to provide six references. It's always worth doing your own due diligence though: check how long a firm has been around, go to their website – does it have a landline telephone number? An address?

Once you've narrowed your choice down to one or two, get quotes – definitely more than one so you can compare prices. Quotes should include the whole cost including labour, materials and any

extras; avoid ones that are significantly cheaper than their competitors. Ask for references, and ring previous clients. Go and see the work to inspect the level of finish. And be wary of any builder who says he can start immediately: a good builder should always be busy.

Can't be bothered faffing around online? Check out *C&TH's* new directory, *The List*, which launches with this issue. It only recommends top-end builders all with genuine testimonials, or get someone else to do the work for you. Good London Builders (goodlondonbuilders.com) does what it says on the tin, liaising between clients and building teams: they will do everything from project management to finding the right builder for the job, while you can rest assured that all the people it works with have been tried and tested. You may end up paying a little more: the company takes a cut of any jobs it arranges, but it does save a lot of time. Whatever you do don't forget: mistakes can end up even more expensive than doing the groundwork in the first place.



**TOP AND BOTTOM** Examples of the kind of projects that Cordles undertake