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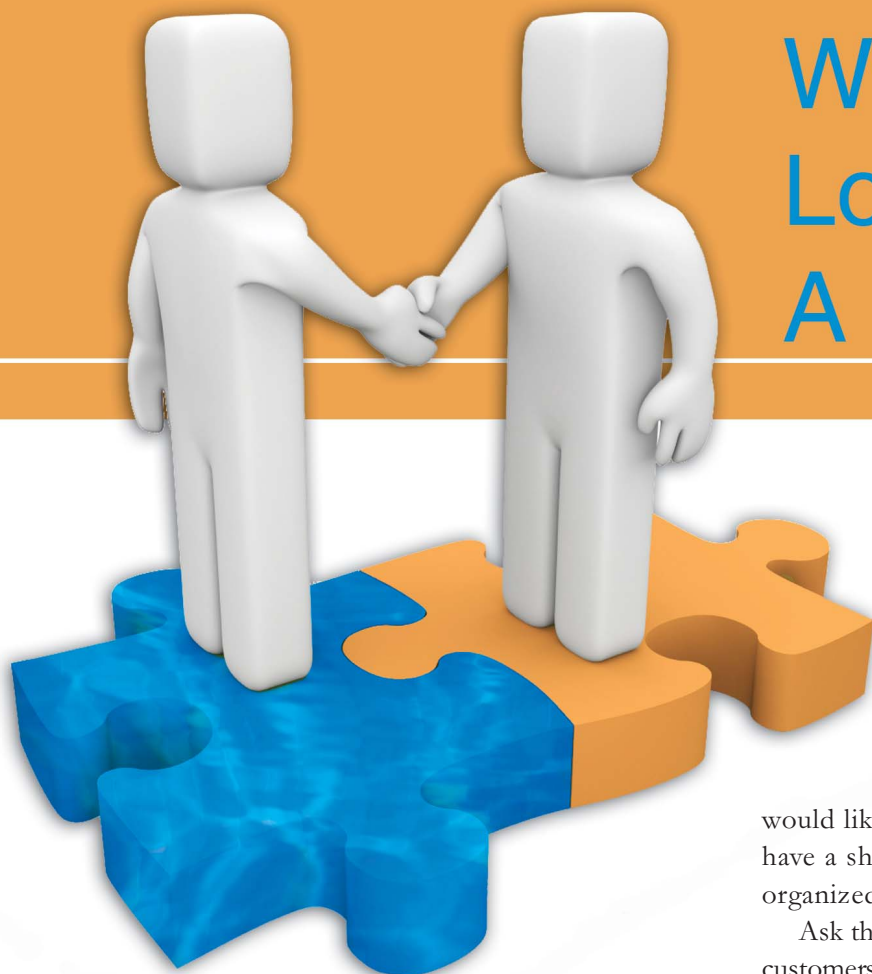
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Beautiful
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What To Look For In A Pool Builder



Make your experience a positive one by following these guidelines

by John Petrocelli

Are you one of the many lucky homeowners across Canada who has decided to create your own aquatic oasis in your backyard? If so – congratulations! Now it's time to find a pool builder. The following suggestions will outline what you need to know when choosing a builder so your pool building experience will be a positive one.

First, ask friends, family, neighbours and business colleagues who own a pool for the name of the pool builder they used. Were they were satisfied with the quality of work? Do an online search of various pool builders in your area. A pool builder's Web site usually includes a photo gallery of finished projects that will give you some idea of the type of work they do.

Look for a pool builder in your area who knows the community and has a history of good customer relations. Does the builder have a showroom? Visiting a showroom allows you to visualize how a pool will appear when finished and will help you decide what design accents you

would like on your own pool. A good pool builder will have a showroom and office that is clean, inviting, organized and professional.

Ask the pool builder for referral letters from previous customers or ask the builder to have past customers contact you. This allows you to find out if previous customers were satisfied with the work that was done.

How long has the builder been in business? The longer they have been building pools – the more references you can ask for. A good, reliable pool builder should have been in business at least 10 years under the same operating name. This lets you know that they have survived over past critical milestones where most businesses fail. If the pool builder has



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survived 10 years, they must be fairly solid and have proper overheads, processes and structures in place to build and maintain pools.

Does the builder emphasize the low cost of their pools and fast turnaround rather than the quality of their work? The best builders will emphasize the high standards they adhere to. Good builders will also be honest about their start times and will be willing to turn away or walk away from business if they can't meet the start times.

Stay away from a builder who promises they can start next week. In this business, that either means:

1. They are lying;
2. They have no clue about their schedule;
3. They have no business – which is pretty scary and probably means there are good reasons why they have no business.

Has the pool builder ever gone out of business or been bankrupt? If so, walk away. Never deal with a company that has gone out of business or been bankrupt. Ask for a list of the builder's suppliers and ask them if the builder is reputable.

Talk to the pool kit supplier. This is a good way to find out how well the company is doing since most of them have a really good, long lasting relationship.

Does the builder belong to any trade or business organizations? Members of these associations must abide by a code of ethics.

Make sure all subcontractors used in the project are listed on the estimate and final contract.

Will the pool builder provide a list of everyone (vendors, subcontractors) working on your pool and will the builder provide lien waivers to prove they have been paid? When the pool is finished, you should have lien waivers from all vendors and subcontractors to prove that you do not have to pay them again.

Get a written estimate that is easy to understand. A proper estimate will clearly state all the work and

materials to be provided and will state all the licenses and permits that are required and who is responsible for obtaining them. When comparing estimates from various builders, make sure the work performed and the materials used are of similar quality.

A final contract with a builder should list all the work to be done and who will be doing it; the materials to be used, warranties, approximate starting and completion dates; and price and payment terms.

It should also state that the pool will be built on the agreed upon location, using the agreed upon access route and the agreed upon unloading and material storage areas. Make sure any changes in the work to be performed, materials to be used, and

changes to the completion date are written down on the contract or on signed change work orders. Good builders have learned to put everything on a change order so that no one gets upset down the road. This protects both the consumer and the builder.

Deposits vary from builder to builder, but expect to pay about 20 per cent as an initial deposit. Make sure any checks are made out to an incorporated company – not just to the builder's name and not to a numbered company or an individual's name. Obviously, this is suspicious and the homeowner will probably not be protected if something should go wrong with the builder.

Payment for work should be progressive – i.e. – only pay for work that has been completed. This should be spelled out in the final contract and will protect you if work is not completed.

Ask the builder what trees, fencing or existing landscaping will have to be removed to gain access to your yard. Make sure the builder is aware if any jurisdictional issues in your neighbourhood – such as easements and municipal regulations concerning existing trees.



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Make sure the builder offers ongoing support after the swimming pool is completed such as service, maintenance and a retail location.

Expect the work to take four to six weeks for a vinyl lined pool and up to six weeks or more for a concrete pool – depending on the size of the project, weather and ground conditions. After the work is completed, do a final inspection to make sure everything has been done to your satisfaction.

Has all the work been completed? Has the equipment been installed and is it working properly? Is the pool water staying at the correct level and has it been properly treated and balanced? Have all the accessories been supplied that were listed in the contract (pool cover, automatic pool cleaner etc.)? Has the builder explained how to properly operate and maintain the pool's support equipment (filter, pump heater) and how to properly maintain the water? Has the builder provided you with all pool equipment instruction manuals and warranties? Have they provided pool safety literature and explained how to safely use a pool?

Make sure all the requirements of the contract have been fulfilled – but don't expect the builder to do more than you are willing to pay for.

If you want additional work done after the pool has been finished, put it in writing and make sure you and the pool builder agree on any extra work you want done and agree to a time frame. Finally, choose a pool builder who you are comfortable with who takes the time to understand your needs and what you want in a pool. They can be your best friend for as long as you own your pool or home.



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