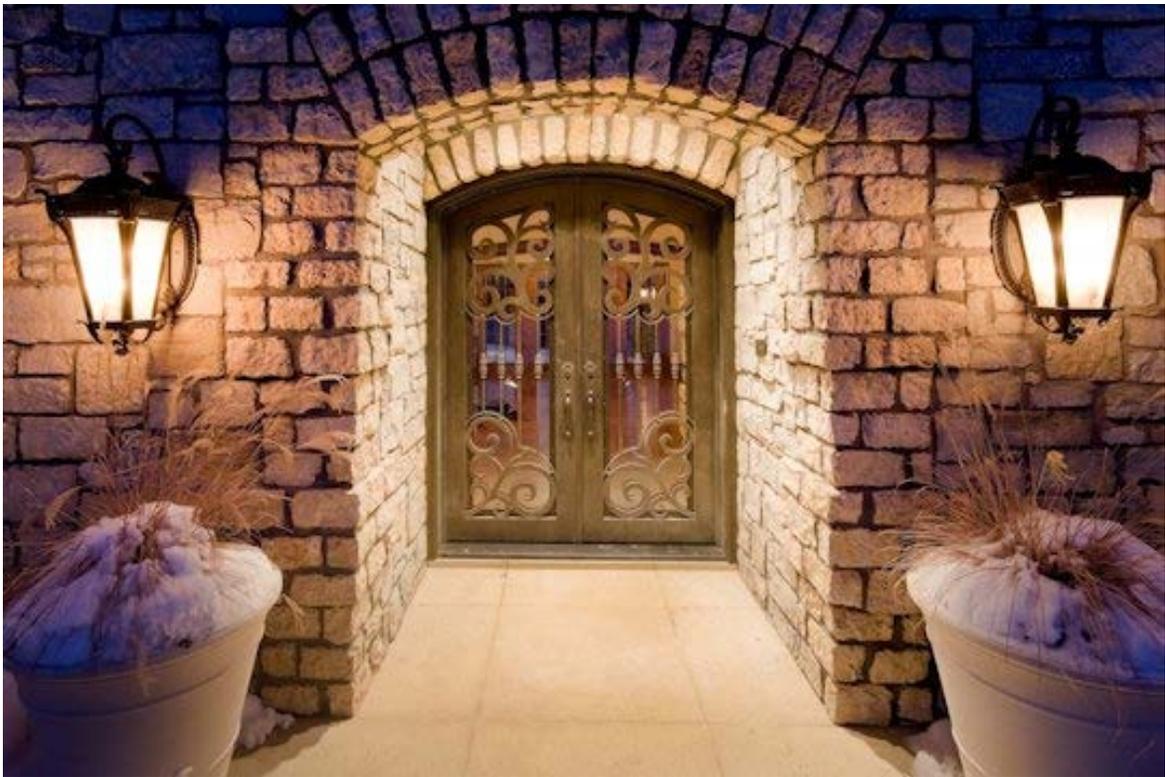


# HOW TO FIND & HIRE A CUSTOM HOME BUILDER



# HOW TO FIND & HIRE CUSTOM HOME BUILDERS IN YOUR AREA



## FINDING BUILDERS IN YOUR AREA

Congratulations! You've already taken the first step toward your dream home... **you've finally decided it's time to build, but you aren't sure how to go about finding builders in your area.** You are in luck. With the checklists included in this e-book, you can feel certain about the custom home builder you select.

## START WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Custom home builders do a significant portion of their business from referrals. It's not uncommon for a high quality custom home builder to build several homes for the same client throughout the years as their customers' needs change. Due to the nature of the home building process, a customer gets to know their builder at a very personal level. **Chances are, you know someone that has built a custom home** and has an experience that could be helpful. Start asking around!

## GOOGLE TIME!

If you are like the rest of America, you will probably do some online research prior to reaching out to potential builders. **You'll learn quite a bit by visiting the builders' websites.** What can you learn or, better yet, what should you look for? Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- **Does the builder attempt to educate potential customers?** How informative is the information?



- **Are there testimonials?** Builders with a good reputation are eager to share quotes from customers.
- The look of the site says a lot about the builder. **Is the builder's website professional? Is it up to date? Is it maintained?** Some builders have been around for a long time and receive most of their business through referrals, so their site may not be the most technologically advanced... However, it is certainly worth a look to get a feel for their style.
- **What does the portfolio look like?** Is it aligned with your personal style?
- **Does their personal and/or company bio give you any information** that helps you make a decision?

## GET SOCIAL... MEDIA

There is no shortage of social media sites today. But is a great Facebook page an indicator of a high quality builder? Not necessarily. **There are better social media sites than Facebook for homebuyers.** A really high quality site you may not be familiar with is Houzz (houzz.com). If you are building a home, this might just become your favorite website. It's full of design ideas, reviews, and recommendations for new technologies, builders, and designs. Pinterest is also a great place for home ideas. Many of the local builders and designers maintain active Pinterest pages. Additionally, LinkedIn can be a great place to find builders and view mutual connections you may have so that you can solicit reviews from people you know.

## CHECK INDUSTRY MEMBERSHIP SITES

**Reputable builders will belong to building organizations such as the Building Partners of Central Indiana (BPCI) (bpci-indy.com), Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis (BAGI) (bagi.com).** Typically, builders who are members of groups like this one are required to adhere to a particular set of quality standards. If you'd like to be certain the builders you sit down with are reputable builders, visit industry websites and review the guidelines for membership.

As an example, custom builders who are members of BPCI must:

- Be in good standing in the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis
- Agree to adhere and build to the BAGI quality builder standards
- Have consistent standards and written expectations for all vendors and subcontractors to follow
- Maintain an accurate schedule that ensures the home is built in a timely and orderly fashion

“I have had the pleasure to work with Carl McIntyre and his team at Carrington Homes for several years now, working on both residential and commercial projects, and have always found them to be knowledgeable, responsive and willing to go the extra mile to meet their customer's needs.”

-J.B.

## ABOUT THE BUILDER:

Carrington Homes was established in 1992 by Chuck, Sandy and Carl McIntyre. While completing over 200 custom homes, many remodeling and commercial projects, Carl has built a business with a strong foundation with a reputation built on trust. Our clients enjoy working with a partner who has values that emphasize integrity and excellence.

VISIT US ON LINKEDIN:

- Maintain credit by paying invoices promptly
- Maintain insurance themselves and require that all their vendors maintain appropriate insurance standards/warranty procedures
- Attend monthly BPCI meetings
- Have field supervisors on the job site
- Have written scopes of work and job checklists
- Attend required education seminars pertaining to quality standards
- Maintain safe job sites
- Have an accurate/efficient way to communicate with vendors and home buyers, ensuring that changes are implemented correctly

There are many review sites and membership sites available. It should be fairly easy to find a list of good options (and fairly easy to identify bad options).

## WHEN TO BEGIN INTERVIEWING BUILDERS

It's important to connect with your custom homebuilder as soon as you are ready to start asking questions. They are experts in the complete building process. Site selection, design, architecture, and finance are all areas where most builders will be able to provide expert advice and support. Often times, **an early consultation can help get you started in the right direction**, even if you are not sure what you want your custom home to look like. By sitting down with various homebuilders, you can



get a feel for what is out there and begin to get ideas.

Keep in mind, **the homebuilder will be the one coordinating and executing the entire process.** Some people initially reach out to an architect or a real estate agent, but it's time to change your mindset - talk to a custom home builder first. The builder that you select after the interview process can help facilitate these relationships or at least provide direction on how to use these services to maximize your budget. There is nothing more disheartening than having an architect or designer put forth a design that, while beautiful, cannot be completed anywhere near your budget.

Ideally, you will want to spend some time interviewing the builders that you are serious about. It's crucial that you select a homebuilder who will be a good fit for your needs. Builders have different specialties, different styles, and different price ranges. Hopefully you meet the perfect one in the first meeting, but you'll want to have a couple back up options, just in case.

## HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR INTERVIEWS WITH CUSTOM HOME BUILDERS:

- 1. Make a list of what matters to you.** Do you want an eco-friendly home? Are you craving a particular style of architecture? Talk with your family about what they want for their next home before you go into a meeting.
- 2. Decide who will be involved in your build.** On your end, who will be a part of the daily decision-making? Your spouse? Your mother? Just you? Deciding this in advance can help you understand who will need to be compatible with the builder you select. All required decision makers should attend the FIRST meeting.
- 3. Think about the budget.** You don't need a hard and fast number just yet, but you will definitely need a ballpark idea of how much you would like to spend. This will help your builder give you an idea of what your home could be like at your initial consultation. Also, think about your maximum price. If you have a hard and fast number, be ready to communicate that at the initial meeting.
- 4. Know what you don't want.** Even if you aren't quite sure what style you want your home to be or how big you want to go, knowing what you DO NOT want can also be helpful for a builder. This information can help the builder to get pointed in the right direction.

**Think about your personal style.** Start a Pinterest board or clip photos from magazines. Think as big as you'd like. It's important to show your ideas to potential builders when you sit down for your initial meeting so they understand the feel you

“We wanted someone that would listen, understand our family and what we wanted in a home. Carl became that person. Five years later, we have a home that not only makes a statement of elegance and charm but also obvious craftsmanship.”

- P.L.

### WHAT IS THE BUILDERS ASSOCIATION OF GREATER INDIANAPOLIS?

PROMOTE. EDUCATE.

NETWORK. These

three initiatives are the foundation of what the Builders

Association of Greater Indianapolis (BAGI)

offers its members.

BAGI gives members several opportunities throughout the year to network so they stay up to date on industry standards.

### WHAT IS THE BUILDING PARTNERS OF CENTRAL INDIANA?

The Building Partners of Central Indiana

(BPCI) exists to

facilitate a more

efficient, innovative,

and price effective

method for a group

of Select Custom

Builders to sell homes,

remodeling projects,

or commercial projects

in partnership with

a group of Preferred

Vendors.

are looking for in your new custom home. Also, this process may help you decide what you like and dislike, so choosing a builder who can suit those needs may become easier.

## THE FIRST MEETING

At your initial meeting, you will want to **get a good feel for the builder**. It's important that you get along well with your builder, because you will be working very closely with him or her in the months to come. If your personalities just aren't working, the project will be an uphill battle.

Ask your builder for sample contacts, budgets, draw requests, warranties, etc. It is good to **have an idea of what these documents look like before you select your builder**. These documents will help you discern that you are indeed working with a professional, well-qualified builder.

It's important in your first meeting that you **discuss your needs and expectations with your builder**. If you need your home built and ready for move-in by the end of the year, say so. Let the builder know your must-haves, your likes and your dislikes. Also, take the time to show your builder your Pinterest board or your ideas for your new home. Show styles you like from websites you visited (even if they are not from their website) – when working with a custom home builder, they can likely match styles even if they have never done the style in the past. This helps the builder get a feel for your style and tastes. Ultimately, you want your builder to be excited about your custom home project, and showing them your ideas can really give you a pulse on their level of enthusiasm.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- Are you a member of the Building Partners of Central Indiana or the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis?
- Have you ever gone bankrupt?
- How many years have you been in business?
- Do you have the appropriate licensing and insurance?
- Are your original estimates accurate?
- What types of warranties do you offer for your homes?
- Can you give me a list of client and supplier references?
- Do you build energy-efficient homes?
- What if we have changes to the design during the building process? Tell me specifically how you handle those?





- Who would be the point person for our custom home project?
- What is your game plan for helping customers stick to their budgets?
- How do you avoid unexpected changes mid-project?
- What is your process for selecting subcontractors for your projects?
- How long will a home (with a scope similar to my custom home concept) take to complete?
- Will I have access to the home during the process?
- What is your relationship with customers after the home is completed?
- Can you tell me about homes you are currently building?
- Could we visit a home under construction (this is your chance to see how a worksite is maintained)?

## ITEMS TO CONSIDER FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

- 1. Be certain the price makes sense.** If the price seems too good to be true or is significantly lower than other estimates for the exact same project, be sure to ask why. If their price is extremely low, one of two things could occur: a.) the builder may do poor work or use poor materials or b.) the builder will use good materials and do good work, but might hike up the price halfway through... they were only throwing you a low bid to secure your business. Most quality custom home builders will be able to provide a number that makes sense.

“There were no surprises in the process. Carl’s answer to our many requests or changes was ‘no problem’ as he assured us that building a custom home means it is made specifically for the customer. I would gladly recommend Carrington to anyone looking to build a home.

- A.K.

## WHY CHOOSE CARRINGTON?

You aren't looking for any ordinary home.

If you are thinking about a custom home or a custom remodel, you want something special... something unique that fits you and your family perfectly.

You've been looking for a distinctive home. Carrington Homes can help you.



- 2. Take time to ensure the estimate provides details.** You want to be certain the estimate provided by your builder contains a lot of detail about what you have discussed. Remember, a builder can only estimate a project based on the information given. If the information is incomplete, you should expect the estimate to be inaccurate. That said, if you've thoroughly discussed the details, you should expect an estimate that reflects that.
- 3. See if the builder has a long history of work.** If they don't, this is not necessarily a deal breaker. Everyone starts somewhere. Some of the best builders in the industry are new. They tend to be hungry and will sometimes go above and beyond to make sure you are satisfied. That said, established builders can show you their work and will have more references that you can connect with, which ultimately makes you a better-informed buyer.
- 4. Ask for references and see if you can visit current work sites.** Excellent builders will be excited to provide references and show you a current site. Great builders WANT you to speak to customers or see past work.

### AFTER THE FIRST MEETING

You've met with a builder that interests you. They answered the interview questions in ways that you understood and liked. Now, **it's time for some further vetting.**

First, **give their references a call.** Here are some good questions to ask:



- How do you like your new custom home?
- Did you have any issues during the build that were not resolved? (It's unrealistic to think that no issues occurred during the home process. Building custom homes is complicated and involves dozens of suppliers and hundreds of products. In fact, it is better to hear that the builder was readily available and willing to take steps to correct problems, rather than hearing nothing ever went wrong. The latter might be a clue you are talking to an uninformed buyer.)
- Did the project get done on time and within budget?
- Did the reference have changes occur during the home building process? How were they handled?
- How would you describe your ongoing relationship with them after the build was complete?
- Would you recommend this builder?

If you are feeling extra bold, **ask one of the builder's references for a tour of their home.** If you succeed in getting a personal tour, try to see if the style of the builder suits you... though bear in mind that design teams employed by custom home builders are often capable of designing many different styles proficiently. Also, the word "custom" in custom home builder is important. Just because the style doesn't match your tastes, doesn't mean it didn't match the reference's tastes.

Now that you've researched the references the builder gave you, **it's time to research the list of references the builder DID NOT give you.** Check out Google reviews and sites like Houzz and Angie's List to see what most people are saying about your builder. One glowing review is wonderful, but not if there are 100 terrible reviews for every good one. A cautionary note on this process: many custom home builders, especially in the luxury home price range, do not build many homes in a given year. Do not be alarmed if there aren't dozens of reviews available. Chances are, some of the elite builders have not built dozens and dozens of homes since online review sites became popular.

If you did not check into your builder's affiliations prior to your meeting with them, now is a good time to do so. Again, **reputable builders will have affiliations with professional groups** such as the Building Partners of Central Indiana or the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis.

Finally, if they are passing inspection on all points, **it's time to go visit a current construction site.**

## ITEMS TO CONSIDER AT A CUSTOM HOME BUILDER'S CONSTRUCTION SITE

“I was impressed with the forethought that went into every detail during our project. Carl did not change once the contract was signed, he is the same to us today as he was before our project started. I would highly recommend Carrington Homes to anyone wanting a quality project completed on time and on budget.”

- M.S.

You are wise to think about taking the time to visit one of your builder's current sites. You can tell a lot about his builder by the state of a current work site.

Driving by the site to see what is going on is all fine and good, but **you may want to schedule time to do a walk-through with the builder.** Unless you are an expert custom home builder, you WILL have questions about why something is being done the way you are seeing. Building technologies change rapidly. You'll want to have your builder there to ask questions about what you are seeing.

### **Here are some things to think about when you visit your builder's work site:**

- 1. Make sure the site is clean.** We aren't talking about a little dirt here and there. We are talking about things like beer bottles or cigarette butts on site. You want to make sure the builder's employees are doing their jobs properly.
- 2. Check to make sure construction workers have safety in mind.** If you see workers without safety equipment, the builder may not be complying with Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines. Make sure workers on site are dressed properly and wearing appropriate footwear on site. If they are, it's a good clue that your builder is complying with safety standards.
- 3. Take a look at the quality of service and materials.** You may not be a home building expert, but if there are glaring issues on the current site, ask the builder about them. Watch the workers to see if they are doing their jobs carefully and safely.
- 4. See if the workers seem happy.** You are unlikely to find everyone holding hands and skipping around gleefully, but it is certainly cause for concern if workers seem overly angry – especially if they know you are a potential new client. A happy construction worker is a worker who is more likely to do his job well.

## HIRING YOUR BUILDER

You've interviewed multiple builders, and you have found a builder that can build you the house of your dreams. Good work. The next step is hiring. It's a lot of paperwork. You will want to read the contracts provided very closely. Make sure the paperwork reflects your needs exactly. If it doesn't, be sure to communicate with your builder. If you see in your contract that your home is going to have a basement, but it doesn't include the walk-out feature you were hoping for, NOW is the time to say something. With so many moving parts, miscommunications are easy. Many changes mid-project could be avoided if both parties cautiously review the contract and the paperwork.



## ITEMS TO CONSIDER DURING THE HIRING PROCESS

Make sure the builder is ready and willing to make edits to your contract. A good custom home builder will be patient with you and understand that a contract is the backbone of any good custom home project. Getting this right is your first step on the road to success.

Be certain the contract is specific and includes the materials you discussed. Again, details mentioned in passing may have been forgotten in the contract. It's important to make certain you and your builder both understand what you want.

Make sure the down payment makes sense. Anything above 15% of the price should be cause for questions. Reputed builders do not require an enormous down payment before you begin.

## GET STARTED!

Congratulations! You are ready to build! If you've done your research correctly and you've selected a builder from the Building Partners of Central Indiana, you drastically reduce your chances of running into bumps during your custom home project. Be sure to make frequent visits to your site and touch base with your builder often. Before you know it, you will be packing up and moving into your beautiful dream home.



“Our home was constructed with a high level of quality and finish and was completed on budget and on time. With the knowledge of our experience, we would choose Carrington Homes all over again. Thanks to everyone at Carrington!”

- D.S.

# CUSTOM HOME BUILDER INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

TAKE THIS SHEET TO THE INTERVIEW WITH YOU SO YOU WON'T FORGET THE IMPORTANT POINTS.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR BUILDER

- Are you a member of the Building Partners of Central Indiana or the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis?
- Have you ever gone bankrupt?
- How many years have you been in business?
- Do you have the appropriate licensing and insurance?
- Are your original estimates accurate?
- What types of warranties do you offer?
- Can you give me a list of client and supplier references?
- Do you build energy-efficient homes?
- What if we have changes to the design during the building process? Tell me specifically how you handle those?
- Who would be the point person for our custom home project?
- What is your game plan for helping customers stick to their budgets?

- How do you avoid unexpected changes mid-project?
- What is your process for selecting subcontractors for your projects?
- How long will a home (with a scope similar to my custom home concept) take to complete?
- Will I have access to the home during the process?
- What is your relationship with customers after the home is completed?
- Can you tell me about homes you are currently building?
- Could we visit a home under construction (this is your chance to see how a worksite is maintained)?

## ITEMS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR BUILDER

- Be certain the price makes sense.
- Take time to ensure the estimate provides details.
- See if the builder has a long history of work
- Ask for references and see if you can visit current work sites.

## NOTES:

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