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## Playing Fair The "extras" in home construction and who should pay for them

By William Marquand, AIA

(Part two of a three part series read part one: [click here](#))

In tough times there are some good reasons to take on remodeling or building projects. Prices are very competitive, especially for materials.

But there are also dangers. Many projects cost more than anticipated. Will your credit cover it? Setting aside some extra funds is common sense. But more important is controlling costs to begin with, and knowing what is a justified "extra" and what is not.

Form realistic expectations at the outset. Forge a detailed agreement with your contractor that anticipates needed cost increases, but wards off needless ones. Finally, make sure you get in writing what any "extras" are, and what their "install costs" are.

Today's segment delivers the bad news first: What would be a "justified" extra that the owner, not the contractor, should pay for.

Let's say you want an item that you did not include at the outset. You may never be able to have it installed for a reasonable price again. First, get a realist estimate for materials and installation, and keep a running total, however sketchy, on ALL your changes. Partial "totals" are dangerous. Track your bottom line.

Such an extra could be anything from a window, to an appliance over your allowance or an added paint color. Be responsible, and don't kid yourself into thinking that you can toss in extras that you won't have to pay for in the end. It is not fair to think "I'm giving this contractor lots of work; it hardly costs him anything to include it."

Your project is a business arrangement. If the estimate is acceptable, tell your contractor to proceed. Or try horse trading, or talking him down on price. Don't proceed without an explicit agreement.

You are responsible for unforeseeable cost increases. Suppose the building department decides that they require slightly different construction. Maybe the soil is different than anticipated. This is something the owner has to allow for. If 1) it is necessary, 2) it is not part of normal construction and 3) it was not in the drawings, then it's your project, you have to pay.

That is why developers need deep pockets. When taking on a building project the owners should see themselves in a small way as a developer. Risk and a few gray hairs come with the territory.

Was the added cost really unforeseeable? If it is expensive, you may want to get a second opinion. A talented but shady contractor is a bad contractor to have on the job site - so is one who, rightly, feels cheated.

If this seems like cold comfort for your high hopes for building, the good news is that sometimes an owner has no place paying for a change. Surprisingly, that can be the hardest thing for an owner to insist upon. Contractors can be very enjoyable to work with, and sometimes it's tough taking a stand on that to which you have a right, under your agreement.

That's when personality gets too big. Remember, the project is always best when it is the most professional. You can't be a wallflower and, inside, be content with the result. Make sure you pay for what you get, but also that get what you pay for. My next column will describe what extras should not be at your expense.

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