



HOW TO CHOOSE A BUILDER

By: Sven Iversen

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Sven began his career in the industry as a Civil engineer.

He was involved in projects like the Lesotho Highlands water project and the Columbus Stainless steel expansion project. He also gathered extensive experience from various other commercial, industrial and residential developments.

It is within these projects where he became firmly coached in ethical and precise building methodology.

Sven founded Ivecon Projects in 1996, undertaking a range of residential builds. With his civil engineering advantage and knowledge he set out to establish a construction company that offered professional service.

Now girded with over 23 years of experience, Ivecon has grown to become a respected industry leader in construction management.

Contact Details:

Cell: 082 448 3322
Email: sven@iveconprojects.co.za





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Introduction

You plan to complete your dream home and settle in by Christmas. Your partner's pinboard is full of ideas and you have a pile of catalogues ready in the wing. You have set a budget and selected an architect. Now, all that remains is to choose the right builder.

Simple internet searches will produce many promising options. You may think that it will come down to the best quote, but there are a few things to consider while deciding.

Most forget that the builder you choose will be a part of your weekly life for the full duration of your project. Even more so, if you are living in while renovating. Depending on the scope of work this could vary from a few weeks to two years or more. You will be in constant communication with your builder. You will have weekly site meetings and ample decisions to make.

Finding someone who is not only competent but agreeable as well will aid in creating a positive experience.

Selecting an architect

Meet with at least two architects, as no two are the same, and each will bring a unique feel and design to your ideas. Besides being able to draw your plans these are a few important things to keep in mind.

- It is important that your architect is registered with the South African Council of Architects.
- Your architect is consulted and employed to do the concept, design, drawings and submission of your proposed dream home.
- An architect is knowledgeable in various aspects which an untrained person would not consider. This includes light orientation, study of the sun's movement, current trends as well as specific styles and finishes.
- In accordance with South African law, an architect needs to submit plans to council for approval. Your architect will know the numerous plans, energy efficiency calculations etc needed for a submission.
- This approval can only be obtained if the plans conform to the local authority's requirements, as well as any specific building codes as set out by any regulatory bodies.

Your architect's involvement

Once your architect has received council approval, and Home Owners association approval if necessary, you have the option to employ them to be involved for the duration of the build or to manage it yourself.

We highly recommend that the architect is considered for full project involvement. This assists with ensuring that the builder is building what he is supposed to. This also protects you, as an architect can mediate between the contractor and client should there be any discrepancies.

The architect can also ensure contractual obligations are met, as well as monitor budget constraints, variations, and schedule management.

We believe that the architect's involvement will give you peace of mind because they are equipped and capable to deal with industry related issues that arise. Protecting your project and all parties involved.

Going out to tender

We recommend that you involve your architect in the complete adjudication of all tenders received.

Your architect will submit your plans to a few construction companies for tender. (Tender meaning the opportunity to quote). They will perform a fair and comprehensive adjudication on tenders received.

Unscrupulous contractors know how to manipulate their tenders and appear 'too-good-to-be-true', catching many unsuspecting clients. An architect who is well acquainted with the industry will pick up unrealistic or hidden elements in quotes.

Based on the architect's opinion and judgement, you will be better equipped to make the right decision. You will also know what to look out for during the project and have the experience of your architect to assist you.

Choosing your own builder

If you chose not to involve your architect for the duration of the project, these are the important factors to consider when appointing a contractor.

- Visit a few sites of the prospective contractor. Make note of their site management, order and cleanliness. Paying attention to finishes and quality thereof.
- Contact current and previous clients and ask important questions like:
 - a. Were they satisfied with the overall management and quality of their project?*
 - b. Were the staff and project manager agreeable in character?*
 - c. How well did the contractor deal with changes?*
 - d. How proficient was the contractor in managing suppliers, schedules and costs?*
 - e. Were there any conflicts and how were they settled?*

Choosing your own builder

- Consider how the tender is presented, this will speak volumes as to what can be expected going forward. Your tender should be clear, orderly and comprehensive. It should include all elements stated on the plan.
- Appearance may not be everything, but it does say a lot about a company. Take note of the small things like, vehicle quality, staff and document presentation.

Finally, make sure you are able to work with the contractor. Investigate their company ethos, their values and characters. Do you agree with them?

Tips: Finding the right builder

Other than character and previous experience, here are some important elements to ask for from a professional and safety point of view:

- What accreditations do they have? Ask for proof
- What associations are they registered with?

You should avoid contractors who are not associated with accredited organizations.

Associations like the NHBRC and the Master Builders Association bind contractors to meet regulated and enforced requirements.

- If VAT is being charged, is the builder vat registered? Ask for their certificate.

Final word of advice

Quality of product and experience is always remembered long after the price is forgotten.

As a new home owner, still learning building practices and methods, you may not always pick up on poor workmanship. A coat of paint and plaster can hide a lot of things from the untrained eye.

The experience of a reputable, reliable and ethical contractor is invaluable to your home building process.



Ivecon is professional construction company based in Johannesburg, Gauteng. Specialising in luxury home construction, renovations and developments.

Sven Iversen

Director

082 448 3322

sven@iveconprojects.co.za

Office

Tel: 011 472 3154

Fax: 011 472 4153

Alt: 086 516 0726

www.iveconprojects.co.za

Ashley Svensson

Director

082 566 1274

ashley@iveconprojects.co.za

Address

104 Hendrick Potgieter Road

Florida Hills

Roodepoort

Johannesburg, Gauteng

1712

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