



10 Things to Consider Before Signing on the Dotted Line

Lisa Albrecht shares lessons she's learned while building her dream home.

Making the decision to build a new home is a thrilling prospect. For many, it is the realization of a dream. But many potential new home owners don't realize that some of the decisions made after signing a contract would be less expensive and better negotiated if they researched their needs before inking the deal.

We spoke to one woman who, in the process of considering her building project, took extra steps to research what she wanted. She ultimately saved thousands of dollars in "up charges" – changes or additions made by the builder once a contract is signed. Here are the ten items she considered before signing, and what she learned in the process.

1. Pre-qualify for a mortgage.

- Get credit information in order.
- Check out several lenders.
- Review needs for a construction loan or a bridge loan.
- Understand mortgage products; energy efficient,

"Pre-qualifying for a mortgage put my mind at ease. I knew how much home I could buy. I wanted to look for homes only within my price range."

2. Review your present home and situation.

- Are room sizes adequate?
- What special needs do you have, such as a blended family or the need for a workshop?
- What furniture will you keep?

"My existing townhouse is great for entertaining. And the master bedroom is separate from the other bedrooms, which works well for my blended family. I wanted to keep most of my furniture, so the rooms in my new house will need to be large."

3. Find a lot.

- Is it close to schools, church, shopping, health care, pizza delivery?
- What direction does the lot face?
- Do you want morning sun? A special view?
- Do you want a sloping lot for a walkout basement?
- Study covenant and community restrictions.
- What is the tax levy?
- Look around the neighborhood.
- What do you like? What bothers you?

"Trees are very important to me, and also a private backyard – so that I am not looking at my neighbor's house. My location was also determined by good pizza delivery service!"

4. Find a home plan by asking the following questions:

- How do I want to entertain?
- How much storage will I need? What kind?
- Does the plan have flexibility for special rooms or situations (exercise room, craft area, etc.)?
- How does the home help me de-stress? A quiet area for me?
- Built-in organization like drop zones? Whirlpool bath? Sunroom?
- Porches?
- Where do I want the master bedroom?
- Is a healthy home important to me?

"Once I identified that I needed an open floor plan with a lot of space in the kitchen and great room, as well as divided bedrooms and storage space, finding a plan was a piece of cake. I walked through a number of model homes to get a sense of room-size proportions and went on www.DesignBasics.com."

5. Select a builder.

- Is there a builder attached to the lot you want? If so, interview him/her extensively.
- If not, interview several builders. Try to find someone with whom you'll have good chemistry.
- Check references of the builder's former homebuyers, subcontractors and vendors.
- "My builder was attached to my lot, which was a big consideration, since I had to work with this person. I drove him crazy asking so many questions. But since this is a huge decision, I wanted to do it right."

6. Consult with an interior designer for a couple of hours.

- Make sure everything flows; coordinate colors,
- flooring and countertops; and plan placement of outlets.

"The time I had with an interior design consultant was the best money I spent. I wanted a contemporary look, and she helped me coordinate flooring, countertops and colors. While I have a sense of my style, I am now more confident with my choices."

7. Meet with an electrician and electronic specialists to pre-wire the house properly.

- Consider Christmas lights, other outdoor lighting, accent lighting, security, stereo surround sound, telephones, ample outlets and their placements, Internet and media rooms.

"I walked through the entire plan with an electrician to get advice on lighting, security, outlets, etc. This was time well spent, because I made sure the elements were incorporated before I signed the contract and avoided many upcharges."

8. Talk to as many people as you can who have been through the building process. Be sure to ask what they would do differently.

"I learned a great deal from the mistakes of others – which saved me tons of headaches."

9. Customize Your Home Plan.

- Make sure the working drawings are clear and exactly how you want them. Consult with an interior designer for a couple of hours.

"I did not want any ambiguity on my working drawings. I made sure everything was how I wanted it. I revised my plans many times; it's worth the hard work to get what I want."

10. Pack Your Survival Kit.

- A sense of humor
- A 12-pack of patience
- Drawers of chocolate
- Bottles of aspirin
- A jump rope for de-stressing
- "I'm ready to sign the contract and get started!"

"Now I'm ready to sign the contract and get started!"