

FREE GUIDE FOR AUCKLAND HOMEOWNERS

25 Questions to Ask Your Builder Before You Sign Anything

The insider checklist that separates reliable renovators from costly mistakes.

Add Value Renovations

Master Builder | Design-and-Build | Auckland

Add Value Renovations — addvaluerenovations.co.nz

Most homeowners sign a renovation contract without knowing what to ask. This guide gives you 25 specific questions — written by a Master Builder who has seen what goes wrong when homeowners skip them. Use it when interviewing any renovation company, including us.

CREDENTIALS & TRACK RECORD

Q1 Are you a registered Master Builder or Licensed Building Practitioner (LBP)?

Why it matters: This is non-negotiable in NZ. Only LBPs can carry out restricted building work.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes — and they can show you their licence number on the MBIE register.

✗ **Red flag:** Vague answer, or they say it's not required for your job when it is.

Q2 How many renovations have you completed in the last 3 years?

Why it matters: Experience matters. A renovator with 50+ projects has seen most problems before.

✓ **Good answer:** 30+ completed projects, ideally in your renovation type.

X Red flag: Under 10 projects, or they won't give a number.

Q3 Can I speak to 3 recent clients — not references you've chosen?

Why it matters: Pre-selected references are useless. Ask to contact 3 random recent clients.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes, without hesitation.

X Red flag: Resistance, delay, or only 1-2 references offered.

Q4 Do you have current public liability and contractor's all-risk insurance?

Why it matters: If something goes wrong on your property, you need to know who pays.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes — and they can show you the current certificate.

X Red flag: They say they're covered but can't produce paperwork.

PRICING & CONTRACTS

Q5 Is this a fixed-price contract or a charge-up (cost-plus) contract?

Why it matters: Fixed price means you know the cost upfront. Charge-up means the final cost is unknown.

✓ **Good answer:** Fixed price with clearly defined scope. Any variations are quoted separately before work starts.

X Red flag: Charge-up with no clear ceiling, or vague language about "budget" pricing.

Q6 What happens if costs go over the quoted price?

Why it matters: You need to understand who bears cost overruns before they happen.

✓ **Good answer:** Overruns only occur for client-initiated variations, which are quoted and approved in writing before proceeding.

X Red flag: "We'll sort it out" or "it shouldn't happen" with no contractual protection.

Q7 What is your payment schedule and what are the milestones tied to?

Why it matters: Payments should be tied to completed work milestones, not calendar dates.

✓ **Good answer:** Staged payments linked to verified completion milestones.

X Red flag: Large upfront deposit (over 10%), or payments not tied to work completion.

Q8 How do you handle variations to the original scope?

Why it matters: Scope creep is the #1 cause of budget blowouts. The process matters.

✓ **Good answer:** Written variation quote, client sign-off required before any work proceeds.

X Red flag: Verbal agreement, or "we'll add it to the final invoice."

Q9 Are consents, council fees, and engineer costs included in your price?

Why it matters: These can add \$5,000-\$30,000+ to a project if not included.

✓ **Good answer:** Explicitly included and itemised in the quote.

X Red flag: Not mentioned, or "TBC" without a clear process.

PROCESS & COMMUNICATION

Q10 Who will be my main point of contact throughout the project?

Why it matters: You need one person responsible — not a rotating cast of subcontractors.

✓ **Good answer:** A named project manager who you meet before signing.

✗ **Red flag:** "The team" or no clear single point of accountability.

Q11 How often will you update me on progress?

Why it matters: Communication breakdowns are the #1 complaint in renovation.

✓ **Good answer:** Weekly written updates, with a defined process for raising issues.

✗ **Red flag:** "Whenever there's something to report" or no defined schedule.

Q12 How do you manage subcontractors on site?

Why it matters: Subcontractor quality varies widely. You need to know who's vetting them.

✓ **Good answer:** They use trusted, long-term subcontractors and take full responsibility for their work.

✗ **Red flag:** "We use whoever's available" or they can't name their regular trades.

Q13 What are your site hours and how do you manage noise and disruption?

Why it matters: Important for neighbours and for your living arrangements if staying on-site.

✓ **Good answer:** Defined site hours, clear process for managing disruption.

✗ **Red flag:** No defined plan, or dismissive of the question.

TIMELINE & QUALITY

Q14 What is the realistic start date and how confident are you in it?

Why it matters: Builder availability is a major constraint in Auckland. Get a firm date in writing.

✓ **Good answer:** Specific start date written into the contract with a rationale.

✗ **Red flag:** Vague "in a few months" with no commitment.

Q15 What is the build programme and what are the key milestones?

Why it matters: A professional renovator can give you a week-by-week programme.

✓ **Good answer:** A written programme with specific milestone dates.

✗ **Red flag:** An oral estimate with no written commitment.

Q16 What happens if the project runs over time?

Why it matters: Delays cost you money — especially if you're in temporary accommodation.

✓ **Good answer:** Liquidated damages clause in the contract, or at minimum a clear accountability process.

✗ **Red flag:** "It won't" or no contractual consequence for delays.

Q17 How do you handle defects found after completion?

Why it matters: Every renovation has punch-list items. The question is how quickly they're resolved.

✓ **Good answer:** Defined defects liability period (typically 12 months), written process for reporting.

✗ **Red flag:** "Just call us" with no formal process or written commitment.

Q18 What warranty do you provide on your workmanship?

Why it matters: Separate from manufacturer warranties on products — this is the builder's own guarantee.

✓ **Good answer:** Minimum 12-month workmanship warranty, ideally backed by Master Builder Guarantee.

✗ **Red flag:** No written warranty, or warranty only on products not labour.

DESIGN & CONSENT

Q19 Do you handle building consent, or is that my responsibility?

Why it matters: In a design-and-build model, the builder manages consent. In other models, you do.

✓ **Good answer:** They manage consent as part of the project — with a clear process and timeline.

✗ **Red flag:** "That's your job" without guidance, or no experience with consent process.

Q20 Have you done projects requiring resource consent? How did you manage them?

Why it matters: Some projects (heritage zones, boundary issues) need resource consent — much more complex.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes, with examples. Clear understanding of the process.

✗ **Red flag:** No experience, or they conflate resource consent with building consent.

Q21 Do you work with an in-house designer or refer to an external architect?

Why it matters: In a design-and-build model, integrated design is faster and reduces miscommunication.

✓ **Good answer:** In-house or a dedicated design partner they have worked with repeatedly.

✗ **Red flag:** "You find your own designer" or no design capability.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Q22 Are you registered for GST?

Why it matters: Any business doing over \$60,000/year must be. If not registered, something is wrong.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes — GST number on all invoices.

✗ **Red flag:** Not registered, or they quote with and without GST as if it's a choice.

Q23 Can you provide a recent reference from a supplier or subcontractor?

Why it matters: Trade credit relationships reveal financial health. Builders who don't pay subs have problems.

✓ **Good answer:** Yes, without hesitation.

✗ **Red flag:** Resistance or an inability to provide supplier references.

Q24 What happens to my deposit if your company ceases trading mid-project?

Why it matters: Builder insolvency mid-renovation is rare but devastating. Know your protection.

✓ **Good answer:** Ring-fenced deposit, Master Builder Guarantee covering insolvency, or project bank account.

X Red flag: "That won't happen" with no contractual protection.

Q25 Have you ever had a project go through disputes tribunal or formal dispute resolution?

Why it matters: One dispute in 10+ years may be unavoidable. Multiple disputes is a pattern.

✓ **Good answer:** Honest answer. One or zero disputes. Willing to explain context.

X Red flag: Defensive or evasive, or you find multiple disputes via public records.

About Add Value Renovations

We are a Master Builder design-and-build specialist based in Auckland. We have completed 200+ renovations across Auckland — kitchens, bathrooms, full home renovations, extensions and recladding projects. Every project is covered by our Master Builder Guarantee and delivered on a fixed price. We are happy to be asked every question in this guide.