

Perhaps the best way I can advise about choosing a contractor is to tell you about our experience getting a pool built for our home.

By the time we decided to have a pool built in our backyard, we had developed an entire landscaping plan for the area and had very specific ideas about what we wanted in a pool. After performing our due diligence prescreening various contractors, we contacted four well known companies to request estimates.



In our meetings with all of them, we presented the same information: the design for the finished yard and the placement and role of the pool. At the time, our yard was completely unfinished except for a 10' x 20' deck in the far left corner that we planned to keep. We wanted a 10 meter by 2.5 meter salt water lap pool, with a retractable cover, off the deck, and since our rear property line was 18" above the main yard grade, the front of the pool would act as an 18" high seating wall. We had already run both a 1" water supply line and 1½" electrical conduit under the side yard concrete.

All the contractors presented similar information about their products at our initial meetings: pool construction, equipment, finishes, designs they'd done and company experience. What was interesting were the differences at those initial meetings.

Contractor #1's sales rep took a brief look at our back yard from our patio door then sat down with us at our dining room table. He eventually wrote up a price quote based on our yard diagram and told us this was the best price he could give and that we wouldn't find a better price anywhere else. He informed us that no measurements would be taken and no drawings or renderings made until we had committed to a contract. He left us with his 1 page handwritten estimate and nothing else.

The salesperson from Contractor #2 stepped into our yard for a couple of minutes before sitting down with us. She spent a great part of the meeting describing and showing us pictures of large, complex pool projects they were working on and touting water features, fountains, etc., that we weren't interested in. She wasn't able to answer any construction or building code questions because she didn't have her "builder's book" with her, and she was opposed to salt water chlorination systems. When I mentioned the pre-run water line and electrical conduit, she told us that they would run their own electrical route and draw water from our backyard hose bib. She didn't leave us any literature either.

The rep for Contractor #3 had just started working for the company having recently moved here from outside the US. After walking the yard with me to get a feel for the area, he talked to us about our project and told us about pools he'd built in other countries. He said he really couldn't answer any building code questions since where he'd worked before there really weren't any and besides, his office handled all that part. He didn't have any materials to show us regarding equipment, finishes, etc., and had to borrow a pen and pad to take notes. He also insisted that the existing deck would have to be torn out before construction began. A likeable enough guy, he left us with his business card.

Contractor #4 was a family owned business, and the contractor and his wife came to see us. They spent a great deal of time going over our plan and getting a clear idea of what we wanted out of our pool and for our yard. They showed us a great deal of information on equipment, finishes, etc., and while my wife stayed behind with Cindy to further discuss finishes (I don't do color), Mike and I went into the backyard. He took a lot of measurements including the change in yard elevation from the back fence to the house, and he complimented me on my foresight when I told

him about the water and electrical pre-pipe. He pointed out that, since their estimate always included a 5 yard concrete pour and since the pool area wouldn't use that much, the remainder could be used for whatever else we wanted, walkways, patio, etc., at no extra charge. They left us with a complete packet of information about the pool and the company including pricing for various upgrades.

Contractors #2, #3, & #4 all called us back in a timely manner to set appointments to present their estimates. Contractor #1 never call back which was OK since we'd decided not to use them even though they did have the lowest price. That decision proved fortuitous since the company folded a week after we broke ground.

Contractors #2 & #3 presented renderings of their plans that were so different from what we wanted that we wondered what meeting they'd attended. One was for an 11' wide pool (by definition not a lap pool) and would have dominated our yard and left us only 3 feet between the pool and air conditioning pump. They're prices were also substantially higher than the other bids.

Contractor #4 showed us a plan that completely fit with our goals and included all the concrete walkways we needed done throughout the yard. After my wife and I discussed it that night and agreeing that their price was reasonable, we called them the next day to schedule the project. The pool came out beautifully, and while we expected construction to take 3 months, it was finished in 6½ weeks. In fact, I feel completely comfortable recommending Sacramento Custom Pools to anyone considering a pool.

So what drove our selection? Though they're price was not the lowest, it was within our expectations and budget. They were very knowledgeable about their business, willingly and accurately answered any questions and provided information we didn't even know we needed. They really seemed to care about the product they produced and stood behind their workmanship. Not the least important, they listened and created a design that met with all our needs.

In total, we chose a contractor that inspired confidence that we would get a quality, lasting pool.



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