

McCanse Builders, Inc.
105 S. Daysville Road Oregon, IL 61061
Phone: 815-757-5665 Fax: 815-732-7333
Email: rick@mccansebuilders.com

Finding Quality Construction in a Custom Home Builder

When selecting a builder for your new home, it is important to know that you are getting quality construction. This document is meant to help people in finding a quality builder, and to learn what they should expect to see in a well-built house. Here we have listed some items you can watch for and questions you can ask before signing a contract. Does your builder do all, or at least most of these items? Can you see some recent houses he has built to verify this? It is important to note that while many of these items only affect the aesthetics of your home, many others have a large effect on the durability and liveability of your home.

Start by getting to know your prospective builder and how he does business. Ask some of the following questions:

- Is he rooted in the community? (Will he be around in the future to be accountable?)
- Does he belong to trade organizations?
- What trade magazines does he read?
- Does he attend trade shows? (New products and techniques that he should be aware of)
- Can he handle your project in your time frame?
- Is he able to develop and customize your plan to best serve your needs?
- Does he work in the price/quality range you are comfortable with?

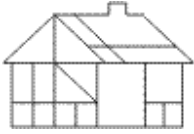
Items you can only see during construction:

Exterior

- Is flashing tape installed correctly around all windows? (see Tyvek website <http://construction.tyvek.com> for proper installation)
- Did they caulk behind the window nailing flanges? (bottom edge should not be caulked to allow water drainage)

Roofing

- Was step flashing used where a roof meets a wall?
- Was ice & water shield used in all valleys?
- Do the shingle lines look even & straight?
- Is the attic well ventilated with either a number of pod vents or else ridge vent?
- Are there any nails showing on the shingles?
- In a damp location, such as a wooded area, did they use shingles with fungus inhibitor?
- You can tell if an attic is properly ventilated by putting a thermometer in it on a hot day. If the attic temperature is more than 15-20 degrees over the outside air temperature, then it does not have enough ventilation. In the winter, does the snow or frost melt faster than other houses in the area? (not good)
- Is flashing used at the top of brick half-walls?
- Is flashing used where a deck attaches to the house?
- Is flashing used above exterior doors and windows where they are not protected by an overhang?



McCanse Builders, Inc.

105 S. Daysville Road Oregon, IL 61061

Phone: 815-757-5665 Fax: 815-732-7333

Email: rick@mccansebuilders.com

- Do they use housewrap over the entire heated area of the house, or better yet, over the entire exterior?
- Do they flash the top of the housewrap on gable ends, so water does not run behind it?
- Is there a vapor barrier used inside the house, behind the drywall?
- Are all the gaps around windows & doors insulated?
- Is the plate that sits on top of the concrete walls well sealed to the concrete, or are there air gaps?
- When mounting doors, are long screws used in or behind the hinges to carry the weight of heavy doors?

Items you can see when the home is complete:

Cabinets:

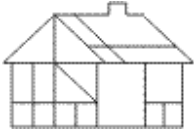
- Are cabinet frames flush with each other with no gaps?
- Are crown molding joints tight with no visible nail holes?
- Do countertops fit tight to the wall?
- Are countertops caulked to the wall?
- Do cabinet doors & handles flush out with each other, and are they level?
- Do cabinet doors sit tight against the cabinet frame, both top and bottom?
- Do end cabinets fit tightly against the wall, so there are no gaps?

Interior doors & trim:

- Are nail holes filled with colored wood putty so they are difficult to spot?
- Open doors part way and see if they swing by themselves. (They definitely should not!)
- Do doors rattle when they close? (Note: double doors with ball catches always rattle, others shouldn't)
- Are the joints in casing and base tight and flush?
- From inside the door, is the gap between the door and the frame uniform on the top and sides, with no obvious taper?
- Do any of the doors rub on the carpet?
- Do bifold and french doors close tightly and operate smoothly?
- Did they install trim to cover the bifold door track?
- Are there door stops for every door?
- Did they use baseboard door stops where possible, or just hinge stops that can damage the hinges?

Windows:

- Do the windows open & close smoothly?
- If you open the window a quarter of an inch, is the gap between window & frame uniform? (window could be installed out of square, which makes it not seal tightly, and makes the window difficult to operate)
- Does window trim fit flat to the window frame with no gaps between the casing and the window?



McCanse Builders, Inc.
105 S. Daysville Road Oregon, IL 61061
Phone: 815-757-5665 Fax: 815-732-7333
Email: rick@mccansebuilders.com

Flooring:

- Are tile grout lines all straight and even?
- Can you feel uneven edges in ceramic tile?
- Are the stairs completely quiet or do they make noise when you walk on them?
- Are there any squeaks in the floor?
- Do joints between different types of flooring meet exactly under the doors so that they are invisible when the door is closed?
- Do the hardwood floors squeak?
- Does water puddle up anywhere in tile showers?

Walls:

- Are there any gaps around outlet & switch covers?
- Are the cold air returns painted behind the register so that the register blends into the wall?
- Are tub & shower units caulked to the wall, and if so is it caulked with a paintable caulk (not silicone)?
- Are there a lot of nail pops in the drywall or visible drywall joints?

Vinyl siding:

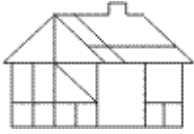
- Are the joints in the J-channel around the windows mitred and good-looking?
- Does the J-channel fit tightly to the window?
- If you grab a piece of siding, can you slide it a short distance right and left? (if not, the siding is attached too tightly and it will ripple on hot days)
- If you sight down the siding, is it level or does it dip?
- At the top of the siding, is it a uniform width all the way across the house?
- If you sight down the siding, are there ripples in the wall where they used crooked lumber?
- Do the lines in the siding match up at the corners?
- Are the exterior lights mounted to a J-block, or right on the siding?
- Are all of the wall penetrations caulked?

Decks:

- Does the deck feel good and solid, or does it feel spongy?
- Is the railing system neatly installed and solid feeling?
- Does the overall deck look good?
- Did they use regular nails that will rust when framing your deck, or did they use galvanized nails or exterior screws? (epoxy coated screws are the best)
- Did the builder encourage the owner to use composite decking? (it is great stuff and lasts a lifetime)

Soffit & Fascia:

- Look up at gable ends – are the fascia cover, drip edge and trim pieces all level and true, and do the joints blend in, or are they rough and obvious when you glance at the gable?



McCanse Builders, Inc.

105 S. Daysville Road Oregon, IL 61061

Phone: 815-757-5665 Fax: 815-732-7333

Email: rick@mccansebuilders.com

- Did they use, god forbid, staples, or painted trim nails in the fascia? (Staples will rust and make rust lines on the fascia within a year)
- Are there any gaps or holes where birds, bees, bats, wasps could build nests?
- Is there vented soffit installed on the eaves for proper roof ventilation?
- Did the builder use drip edge or gutter apron behind the gutters to seal any gaps against moisture and/or bugs & birds?
- Is there step flashing along the sides of the chimney?
- Are the exterior door frames wrapped with aluminum or well painted so that they are protected against weather? (not just the factory primer that comes with the doors)
- When you stand inside and look at the exterior doors, can you see any air gaps around the door?
- Are there small square foam rubber door seals installed in the bottom corners of the door frame?

Unfinished Basement:

- Has there been bathroom plumbing roughed in in the basement floor, so that a bathroom can be installed later?
- Has there been an egress window installed in the basement, so that a bedroom could be installed later?
- Have the utilities been run in such a way that most of the basement could be finished at a later date, without a lot of things in the way on the ceiling?

Owner Interviews

Talk to one or more people that have owned a house by this builder for more than a year, to see what problems develop and how the builder handles these problems. The builder should be able to provide you with a list of clients for the last 1-2 years.

The owner interview questions:

- How would they rate the overall experience with the builder?
- Did he add value in terms of customizing the design, helping them to make sound choices, add innovative materials & techniques, plan out the electrical intelligently, etc.
- Was he fun to work with?
- Was he responsive to their needs?
- Did he really listen to & communicate well with them?
- Did he meet the budget (not counting changes and add-ons?)
- Did he do well with the schedule?
- Were the subcontractors good to work with?
- Did he finish all the details in a timely manner? At the end of the warranty, did he take care of all the issues that came up? (there are always some settling cracks, nail pops, etc.)
- Did he fix any water leaks in the basement?
- Does the floor squeak?
- Would they hire him again?