



### **1. Have you ever had any custom woodwork done before?**

The process may be a little different than working with your standard General Contractor. Expect a little more time in the design phase. You'll probably get more questions (and excruciating explanations) about design aspects, finishes and things that will relate to the overall look of the finished product. You will probably get a lot more questions about what you want. A woodworking professional typically works with a wide variety of processes and knows what it takes to give you the best result and will take the time to explain the pros and cons of all options and let you decide.

### **2. What's the difference between custom and "store bought"?**

Custom work usually has a little bit different look than pre-fab, store bought, mass produced items. A trained eye knows what to look for and can tell the difference. There's usually a good reason behind having custom work done. Custom work is done when the customer wants to bring their own ideas to life to match design or functional requirements. Sometimes it's to create something unique and one-of-a-kind that reflects an artistic flare. Typically, custom work will be at least a bit more expensive than store bought. How much more will vary greatly on the work being done. As a general rule, if you need a bookcase and there are no particular reasons to make it a custom size or add custom details, then go to one of many fine furniture outlets and buy one.

### **3. What is the style of your home?**

Think about incorporating these aspects into your project. If you have a Colonial house, add some colonial features to your project.

### **4. Do you have a favorite style or piece of furniture?**

Sit and stare at it for awhile. What is it about the piece you like? Think about incorporating these aspects into your design.

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## 5. Consider the room where the work is to take place?

When you walk into the room, what features do you notice? Square patterns in the flooring? The rosettes around doorways? Fluted woodworking? Scrollwork? There's probably something that captures your eye or you notice right away. Incorporate this idea or do something complimentary. If there just isn't anything, consider a design feature that will stand out when walking into your boring room.

## 6. Do you have an expectation of how long it will take to do the project?

Expect a little more time with a custom job. Pre-fab components are specifically designed with installation in mind so they tend to slide into place with minimal effort. They also come with clever ways of concealing joints, fasteners and other things that a woodworker may have to craft a custom solution to conceal. But woodworkers are clever people too and will probably use these things to add custom details that will set their work apart from pre-fab items.

## 7. Paint, stain, or natural wood?

Here's where I'm a bit of a wood "snob". I understand it is necessary and for design purposes, some woodwork is painted. However, I also believe (and prefer) that wood should be left in its natural color. If you want a dark look, use a dark wood. If you want a light look, use a light wood. There are many species of wood to accommodate many color hues and shades. Your woodworker can help you with the right choice of woods. Your local home fix-it store has a very limited number of species to choose from but your woodworker will know where to get anything you want. There are price considerations too. Not necessarily more expensive but talk it over with your woodworker. Not having to stain will save labor hours and you may very well get a higher priced (and unique) wood for the same price as less expensive ordinary stained wood. Stain should only be used if matching an existing finish or if you just have a preference for something like a dark stain on a light wood. In the end it is your choice and pleasing the customer always trumps a woodworkers' personal preference but expect at least one extended conversation if you plan to paint over some beautiful wood grain.

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**8. Do you plan on selling your house within the next 5 years?**

If so, resale value is an important factor. Consult a real estate professional to make sure you're doing the right thing. If it's your home and will be for a long while, do what you want. Enjoy and take pride in anything you do.

**9. Are you expecting a particular Return on Investment (ROI)?**

This is related to the question above. I watch some of the DIY shows and shake my head when someone spends \$10,000 on a bathroom remodel and the host of the show (along with a realtor) says that suddenly their house is worth \$40,000 more so they just "made" \$30,000. Be skeptical and use common sense when building expectations of ROI. If you're asking yourself ROI questions, do some research and talk with a realtor who will give you some honest answers.

**10. Do you have a clear picture of exactly what you'd like to have done?**

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Some people are very clear what they want while others want to change a look with something unique but really don't know exactly how. As a general rule, be as specific and take as much time as necessary to work out exactly what the finished product will look like. If it's a large project you might consider the help of an interior designer. A custom woodworker welcomes the opportunity to work with an interior designer. But if you have an adventurous spirit and really trust the woodworker, let them guide the design process. But be careful and be sure to have at least general overall approval. There's probably little chance of going back and you'll still have to pay for and live with the work.

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