

If I Weren't a Custom Home Builder, Who Would Build My Home?

Every once in a while someone asks me, “Dean, if you weren’t a custom home builder, who would build your home?”

Like most honest answers in this business, the answer is simple: **“It depends.”**

Do I have a short list? Sure. But before I tell you *who*, let me explain *how* I’d choose—because the builder you hire doesn’t just shape your home. They shape your experience, your stress level, and whether this process feels exciting... or exhausting.

How I’d Choose a Builder

If I were building my forever home, I’d spend serious time getting to know the builder—not just their homes, but their thinking.

I’d want real conversations about:

- Building science,
- Materials (and why they choose them),
- Risk management,
- Communication,
- How they handle problems when things inevitably don’t go sideways.

That may sound like overkill. But for most people, this is the largest investment of their life. This decision deserves more than a few glossy brochures and a firm handshake.

Start With the Owner

These conversations should happen with the **owner or president** of the company.

If you can’t get time with them during the sales process, consider that an early warning sign. If they won’t meet you before you sign a contract, imagine how accessible they’ll be once construction is underway.



Me and My Favorite Framer Mr. Nick

There's also a personal reality here: like it or not, this person will be part of your life for years to come and maybe a lifetime. You should trust them—and actually enjoy working with them. This isn't a blind date. It's a long-term commitment.

Four Questions Worth Asking

Beyond websites, model homes, and references, these are the questions I'd start with.

1. How Do You Stay Current in the Industry?

This question reveals whether a builder believes in continuous improvement—or believes that “what worked 15 years ago is still good enough.”

At ZAMKRO Homes, we study industry publications like *Fine Homebuilding* and *Journal of Light Construction*, attend the International Builders 'Show every year and read, read and read. The industry evolves. Your builder should too.

Homes don't fail because of new ideas. They fail because of outdated ones.”

2. What Three Things Keep You Awake at Night?

This is one of my favorite questions because it reveals priorities.

My answer comes in threes:

Water management. Water always wins. Over time, it destroys everything. Controlling bulk water and moisture vapor requires a real understanding of building science—not wishful thinking.

Ethics and long-term responsibility. A builder's responsibility doesn't end when the warranty does. As former NFL football coach Tony Dungy said, *Integrity is doing what is right, not what is convenient.*”

Skilled trades availability. No builder does it all alone. With a skilled labor shortage, our goal is to be the builder, trades *want* to work for—through clear scopes of work, clean job sites, strong communication, prompt payment and pizza Friday's. Strong trade partners build better homes.

3. What Is Your Pre-Construction Process?

Projects that finish on time and on budget are won—or lost—before construction begins.

I strongly believe in a **pre-construction planning agreement**. You should essentially build the home virtually before breaking ground. At ZAMKRO Homes, this phase includes design development, selections, walkthroughs, budget validation, and scheduling. It's thorough by design.

4. What Professional Organizations Do You Belong To?

Residential construction is too complex to go it alone. Builders who care about their craft stay connected—to education, evolving codes, and best practices.

Membership in the **National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)**, in particular, shows commitment beyond the job site. At ZAMKRO Homes, not only are we an NAHB member, we're also part of an NAHB Builder 20 Group—peer builders from around the country who openly share systems, numbers, and lessons learned.

Final Thought

There are many excellent builders out there, and plenty more questions you could ask. These are simply where I'd begin.

So, back to the original question. If I weren't a custom home builder—(and for the record I built our forever home and would challenge anyone to find a better-built home)—who would I consider to build my home?

Well, you just need to call me for a consultation to find out ...