

The 5 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

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CHOOSING THE RIGHT BUSINESS TO WORK WITH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE REFINISHING PROCESS. WITH SO MANY BUSINESSES TO CHOOSE FROM, HOW DO YOU DECIDE? YOUR CHOICE

will affect the quality of the job, how your home and floors will look and function for many years to come, as well as how safe your project will be.

But with so many options available, how do you choose the right timber flooring business to work with you on your installation or sanding project?

We created this article to help you in the selection process. It will take you through 5 simple questions you should ask each business you get a quote from. Once you have the answers, you'll be able to easily decide on a competent company you feel very comfortable working with.

Let's get to the first question...



Question 1: What do you do about the dust?

Dust left behind after a floor restoration has been a huge problem in the timber floor refinishing industry for decades.

For a lot of people, it's their biggest fear of having their floors restored.

Imagine coming home to find the blinds and drapes, the light fixtures, the kitchen cupboards and everything in them, the linen closet with all your 'fresh' sheets and towels, the bathroom, your bedrooms, all your clothes in the closets, all the walls - actually pretty much everything in your home has a film of fine dust covering it.

Your heating and air conditioning ducts may be full of dust too if they were not properly sealed. You could be breathing it in for months afterward and not even know it.

Not the kind of mess you want to deal with I'm guessing.

If you don't get a satisfying answer to what will be done to contain the dust during your project, then this could be your nightmare.

Why is so much dust created?

The biggest reason is because many of the machines used to sand floors were not designed to fully handle the dust they create.

Some of these machines were not designed to contain the dust at all. Others use cloth bags that are tied to the machines, which are not particularly efficient.

And as these bags don't hold much, they need to be emptied several times throughout job. This involves untying it from the machine, holding it over a garbage bag and shaking it out till it's empty - causing another big cloud of dust.



A PROPER DUSTLESS SET-UP
There are dustless systems that retro-fit to sanding Equipment, allowing the restoration process to be almost dust free.

CONCERNED ABOUT A DUST STORM IN YOUR HOME?
If so, you'll want to make sure the business you hire has a good dust containment system to capture it.

What can be done to contain it?

Most reputable companies will put forth at least some effort into containing dust to the areas being refinished.

The most common way is by using plastic sheeting to seal the area off. If done properly, this can be quite effective. Heating vents and cold air returns will also need to be properly sealed to prevent dust getting sucked into the duct work and spreading into every room of your home. All of this still leaves a lot of dust in the rooms that have been refinished though.

A much better way...

Recently, there have been big advances made in the dust containment field that have revolutionized how floors can be sanded. New systems are being designed so high powered vacuums can be retrofitted to sanding machines.

This provides two huge benefits to your floor restoration project:

- You end up with minimal clean-up, and
- You get a much cleaner finished product.

With the traditional way of “containing” dust, there is still a lot of dust floating around in the air. This airborne dust lands on finish coats and causes contamination issues. Not so with this new dustless technology.

If you don’t want to be cleaning up a dusty mess for days and weeks after, and don’t want excess contaminants in the finish, make sure you ask each business what they plan to do to contain the bags of dust they will generate from sanding your floors.

If they shrug you off and say “don’t worry it won’t be an issue, I’ll just give everything a sweep or vacuum at the end of the job”... you may want to consider another option.

Dust really is a big issue for your project if not contained properly... but it doesn’t have to be.

Why don't all flooring companies use these new dustless methods?

Incorporating these new advanced dust containment systems requires major changes and a large investment for a flooring company. They’re expensive to buy and are time consuming and costly to maintain.

Time and effort is needed to train staff on how to run them. New sanding techniques need to be mastered. Setting them up and using them also adds more time to each job.

Many businesses are not able to (or just don’t want to) put in the time, effort and money it takes for this kind of large-scale change.



Question 2: Who will be working on my project?

If you're going to open your house to strangers, you at least want to know who will be working there. This question will allow you to size up the company structure and see how each business operates.

Is he a sole proprietor? Does he run a small crew? Is he the owner of a business with multiple crews that is very involved in the entire process? Is he a salesperson for a large 30+ employee company with sales people, managers, crew leaders and onsite workers? Or is he a salesperson for a company that farms out all their sales to subcontractors?

Each of these structures will provide a very different experience for you. Each has their advantages and disadvantages.

Ideally, the person estimating will be the owner of the company. That way you have a chance to meet him during the estimating process, see if you get along and if you find him trustworthy or not. You will, after all, be inviting him and his employees into your home for a substantial period of time.

While it's nice to just deal with a single sole proprietor, be prepared for them to take a lot more time as it's just themselves doing everything. There is a set number of hours needed to complete any restoration project properly. That can't be fudged. The only way to speed it up is put more manpower on the job. If you're short on time, this may not be the best option.

A large company will definitely have the manpower needed, but then you take a bigger chance of things getting lost in the shuffle as your project is bounced between salespeople, managers and the crew. And unlike working with a smaller business, you won't get to meet the people actually working in your home until they show up. The salesperson could be professional, neat and well-mannered, but the crew or subcontractors may be very different.



Be cautious about ...

hiring a company that has a professional salesperson "selling" the work but then they pass the projects on to subcontractors.

Not to say subcontractors will do bad work, you just want to make sure they're not cheap, unqualified, non-insured ones. You don't want to be surprised when the crew show up and have access to your home.

The Ideal Scenario

Ideally you want to be able to have contact with the same person during the entire process – from quote, to start of project, to clean-up and to handing the keys back and walking through the finished floor. This way there will be far fewer chances for any miscommunication and misunderstandings.

Then alongside him is a couple of highly skilled and qualified employees so they have the manpower to complete your project in a timely manner so you can get your home back to normal as soon as possible. That's what we offer here at LB Floors.

Whoever you decide to entrust your home and project to, you need to be able to trust the actual workers who will be in your home to do a quality job and look after your home and belongings. By getting to know them a little before the work begins, you'll have a much better indication of whether they'll live up to your expectations or not.

Question 3: What type of finish do you recommend?

The quality of the finish used and the number of coats applied is a HUGE factor in the long-term durability of your floors. There are so many types of finishes available, it can be extremely hard to know if you're comparing apples to apples.

We recommend making sure the brand, the name of the actual finish and the number of coats is written on the quote.

Applying cheap finish guarantees your floors won't perform well over time when it comes to scratches and wear. They'll need to be refinished again much sooner, which costs more money in the long run.

Some finishes (*read about lacquer sealers on the next page*), are downright dangerous but unfortunately still used widely by many of the "cheaper" guys. This is because it speeds up the job and saves them money by building up the layers with a cheaper finish.

Choose a business that takes the time to educate you on the different types of finishes available and which ones would be best suited to your timber floors and your lifestyle. Don't just accept the finish a business tries to push on you just because it's what they're comfortable with and get a good deal on.

We've put together an article for you that goes deeper into how to choose the perfect finish for your home. It's called: *'Which Finish System Should You Choose?'* You can download it on our website.

DO YOU WANT THIS TO HAPPEN TO YOUR HOME?

Many homes have burnt to the ground during floor restorations (see next page). This is why checking insurance coverage and using the proper finishes is so important.



Question 4: Do you have proper liability insurance?

It's extremely important that the business you end up hiring has sufficient liability insurance. Things can and do go wrong from time to time, no matter how competent the company and its workers are. It's just a fact of life. Mistakes happen.

If the crew restoring your floor causes some accidental damage to your home furnishings or your home itself, you want to be sure you will be adequately covered.

Apart from unfortunate mishaps, there are also serious risks involved in a floor restoration if the person you hire doesn't take certain precautions. Many businesses in the flooring industry work with flammable finishes. Because of a mixture of using these

cheap highly flammable finishes (such as lacquer sealers) and improper precautions (see insert below), homes have been burned to the ground.

Hiring a reputable company with well-trained workers and high safety standards can greatly reduce the risk of problems. But even if you do, nobody is perfect and mistakes can happen.

Confirming insurance coverage could save you a lot of hassle and money down the road if something happens to go wrong during the project.

Ask how much coverage they have and what their policy number is to be certain.

You want to see at least 5 million dollars of coverage in an up-to-date policy.



HOUSE FIRES CAUSED DURING FLOOR RESTORATION PROJECTS

As you can see from the cut-out section of the article above, the main cause of these fires is cheap highly flammable lacquer sealers. Please don't put your home and family at risk by hiring someone that uses these dangerous finishes.

What Can Go Wrong:

Here's a couple of direct reasons why you want to hire someone with proper insurance coverage...

Fire Risks: Restoring timber floors puts your home at potential risk of fire from a number of causes:

Spontaneous combustion is caused by incorrectly disposed of rags and saw dust catching fire. Ask any floor refinisher and they'll tell you a story about themselves or another business that this has happened to. The first news article from *The Morning Call* in the pictures above is an example of a house fire from spontaneous combustion.

Flammable finishes. Solvent based and very dangerous lacquer finishes (please don't hire anyone that is planning to use a lacquer finish on your floors!) cause a build-up of fumes and are a dangerous mix with pilot lights and cigarettes. The middle news article above from *The Somerville Times* reports a fatal house fire causing 3 deaths because of a mix of lacquer fires and pilot lights.

Electrical Risks: The machines used in timber floor sanding have very specific power requirements. At times, proper connections are not available. Other times there's not enough power coming from those connections.

Because of this, some refinishers may start acting as a backyard electrician and mess around with your panel box and fuses. We've even heard of guys connecting their leads directly to the panel!

This is a recipe for disaster. They could either do major damage to your electrical system, cause a fire or even electrocute themselves. If you hire one of these cowboys, you'll really want to make sure their liability insurance coverage is adequate.

These issues don't have to be a concern as there are easy ways of preventing them. But it's important to know what could happen in a worse-case scenario and why insurance (and hiring properly trained people that use safe products) is so important.

Question 5: Can I look at some references?

The goal of this question is to make sure that the company is established and experienced.

While we were all inexperienced contractors just getting started at one stage in our careers, you need to decide whether you want someone practicing and experimenting on your own floors.

It takes years to fully understand this craft and become highly skilled in it. Your floors are very valuable and an inexperienced person can quickly damage them beyond repair. Finding a business with a long history of happy clients is one safeguard to ensuring you have a happy outcome.

I would recommend you get at least 3 references from each company:

- One from a long-time customer.
- One from a customer about 2 to 3 years ago and...
- Another one that has recently had their floors refinished.

This varied range of references allows you to see if their work and the products they use stand up to the test of time. If they hesitate to supply them... well, need I say more?

A well-established company should have lots of online reviews from previous happy customers.

They should also be happy to provide you with contact details of past customers (provided they agree).

Find answers to the following questions:

- Are you completely satisfied with their work? If not, why not?
- Would you happily have them back in your home to refinish any other floors if needed?
- Would you recommend them to your friends and family without any hesitation?

Their answers will be invaluable in helping you to separate the professionals from the 'not-so-professionals'.

Other Questions to Ask Yourself Before Hiring a Business:

- Did they show up on time for the quote?
- If they were late did they call to let you know they would be delayed?
- Did they look presentable? What about their vehicle and estimating equipment?
- Did they take the time to listen to your questions and concerns?
- Did they help you understand the sanding process and explain what you can expect within your floors limitations?
- Did they clearly detail everything for you in the quote that you decided on?
- Do they seem interested and excited to be working on your floors?
- Do you feel they're trustworthy enough to be left alone in your home all day?
- Would you leave your keys and the alarm code with them?

The answers to these questions should give you plenty of insight in choosing a great floor restoration business you'll enjoy having work in your home.

In Conclusion

One last tip we'd like to pass on...

Don't accept a quote that has a price with no details. This is a sure sign of potential frustrations if there is a disagreement or misunderstanding down the road.

Make sure everything you've asked for is written in the estimate. If it isn't in the estimate, there's a good chance it won't be included and you won't be able to prove it should have been.

An estimator from a professional business will always take the time to sit down and type out a detailed but easy to read quotation. It should explain exactly what

you can count on from their crew, what preparations you need to make and what to realistically expect out of your floors.

If you'd like to interview us with these 5 questions and receive a detailed quote, please feel free to get in touch.

Call or make a booking on our website to arrange your free in-home quote and stain color consultation:

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