

## Barn Builder Selection

**Choosing your builder is an important step in the building process.**

Probably the best way to choose a barn builder is to talk to horse people who have built barns of their own. Go to horse expos where sales reps from the various barn manufacturers congregate and are anxious to acquaint you with their company. Check out the websites of the major barn manufacturers and compare the quality of their materials and especially their warranties. Attend company-sponsored barn building workshops and ask a lot of questions. Some sales reps will even squire you around to take a look at barns they've previously built.

"It's a good idea to ask a sales rep to show you one of the company's barns that was built five to seven years ago as opposed to one that was just finished," says Neal Wiebelhaus, sales consultant for Morton Buildings Inc., in Ixonia, Wisc. "New buildings all look pretty good, so they can be deceiving. Customers can get a better idea of which barns offer the highest quality and longevity by comparing the older barns."

Even though it might seem that researching various builders is going to take some effort, the time you expend to get the right one for your project will be more than offset by the years you live with the result. You want a company contact who is experienced, responsive to your ideas and concerns, knows every aspect of the building process, works with a number of reliable subcontractors and returns your phone calls.

Dennis Rusch, equestrian facilities project manager for Morton Buildings in Morton, Ill., believes people should choose their barn builder by examining the company's history, customer service and the quality of its product.

"Our sales reps gladly take people interested in knowing about our company to visit previous customers' barns and also periodically host free barn building seminars. We have a complete staff to manage every aspect of a project, or we can work with customers who want to handle part of the job themselves."

### Experience

Kyle Whalen, owner of Back Construction in Lexington, Ky., has built many world-class horse barns, including several for Taylor Made Farms & Sales Agency, a renowned Thoroughbred sales and breeding organization in Nicholasville, Ky. He believes clients should first consider a builder's experience followed by a careful examination of its insurance and financial background.

"Make sure your contractor carries general liability and workers' compensation because without it, you are liable for any job-related accident," Kyle says. "Also, it's a good idea to run a credit check on builders and get their Dun & Bradstreet rating. If you want more than financial information, ask if they belong to any trade organizations or home building associations. Members of these groups are often held to higher professional standards than independent contractors."

### Company Estimates

Before you make that all important final choice of a builder, get project estimates, but be careful that you are comparing apples to apples. If a contractor cuts corners by using inferior materials, he will be able to undercut quality builders on price. You need to compare details such as steel gauge, type of columns, lumber grade, insulation, windows and doors, to see if your estimates are based upon like materials. Don't necessarily go for the cheapest barn because over the long run, it probably won't be the cheapest. In other words, you often get what you pay for.

### Self-Contracting

If you are planning on being your own contractor, you will be responsible for arranging the financing, obtaining building permits, finding and hiring all subcontractors (perhaps firing those who disappoint you), daily scheduling and performing quality checks.

This in itself can be a daunting task because, depending upon the size and scope of your project, you may need different companies for site engineering, architectural design, excavation, grading, concrete, framing, plumbing, electrical, roofing, window and glass, finish work on the interior, stall installation and arena footing. You must check references, make sure each contractor is properly insured, negotiate contracts, schedule all work, and monitor quality and progress. You need to contact the building inspector at certain junctures of the project to get the go-ahead to take the next step. Actually, your to-do list may seem endless. Note the prevailing word here is you. You are responsible for everything that happens—right or wrong. Many people choose this option with fine results, but it is clearly not for everyone.