

How to choose a carpenter

When the job legally needs a licensed builder, and why the cheapest deck quote is usually the one with the wrong fixings

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Carpentry covers everything from rehanging a sticking door to framing a house, and the licensing rules in Tasmania change depending on which of those you are buying. The second thing that separates quotes is everything you cannot see: the bearer sizes, the flashing, the treatment class of the timber and the type of fixings. In a Tasmanian coastal or wet climate, that hidden half of the job is where the money is won or lost.

What it should cost

Carpenters in Tasmania charge roughly \$60 to \$100 an hour, with Hobart and surrounds at about \$66 to \$110 and regional areas at \$54 to \$90. After-hours and emergency work runs \$90 to \$175, and a call-out fee of \$55 to \$95 is common, often waived if you proceed. A full day is usually \$440 to \$900. Most carpenters set a minimum of two to four hours, because travel, setup and pack-up cost the same whether the job takes twenty minutes or three hours.

Common job prices: a door supply and fit at \$250 to \$650, skirting at \$20 to \$55 per linear metre, a built-in wardrobe at \$1,200 to \$5,000, deck labour at \$80 to \$190 per square metre with materials extra, pergola or carport framing labour at \$1,500 to \$6,000, and minor stair repairs at \$300 to \$1,200. Always confirm whether the price is labour only or labour and materials, who supplies the fixings, and who takes away the old timber.

What the law requires

Small carpentry - a door, shelving, a repair - generally needs no licence. Structural work does. Carpentry that forms part of building work requiring a building permit must be carried out under a licensed building services provider, so framing, extensions, decks and pergolas sit under the building licensing framework, either under the carpenter's own class or under a licensed builder's contract. Ask which of the two your job is, and who holds the licence on the contract.

Decks, pergolas and verandahs are building work under the Building Act 2016, and whether yours needs a permit depends on height, area and how it is supported; get that answer from the council or a building surveyor rather than from the person quoting. The structure must comply with the National Construction Code, which is where bearer spans, footing sizes, connections and fixings are decided. If the house was built or renovated before 1990, cutting into walls or eaves can disturb asbestos sheeting, which is a licensed removalist job. For any deck or outdoor structure, ask about insurance: public liability for damage to your home and the neighbour's, and workers compensation if the carpenter employs anyone.

Red flags

Quotes a deck, pergola or extension without asking about a permit or a building surveyor.

Cannot tell you the treatment class of the timber they plan to use.

Uses standard zinc-plated screws outdoors near the coast, or nails where bolts and brackets belong.

No line item for flashing or for how the new structure connects and seals to the house.

Does structural work with no licence and no licensed builder engaged on the job.

Gives an hourly rate but will not estimate the total, then the job runs long with no explanation.

What good looks like

Raises the permit and surveyor question before they raise the price.

Names the treatment class, the fixing type and the flashing method without being prompted.

Explains the bearer and joist sizes and where the engineering came from.

Separates labour, materials and disposal in the quote so you can compare like with like.

Tells you honestly when a job is small enough that you do not need a licensed builder at all.

What to ask

- "Is this job building work that needs a permit, and are you licensed for that class, or working under someone who is?"
- "What timber treatment class are you using, and why?"
- "What fixings are you using - stainless, hot-dipped galvanised, or standard?"
- "Is this labour only or labour and materials, and who disposes of the old material?"
- "How will the deck or pergola be flashed and drained where it meets the house?"
- "What are the bearer and joist sizes, and where did the engineering come from?"
- "Are you insured for public liability, and do you hold workers compensation cover if you employ anyone?"

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