



## ***The Quantum Quote***

Issue 5, October 2011

Two quick notes before we dive into the October Issue of the Quantum Quote. First, there are a lot of charities who could use all the help they can get, and we went from a flood of responses to our "Charity Choice" in June to none in August. Just a few votes for your favorite could be a winner. Please take a few moments to respond, and if you feel inclined, forward the newsletter to a friend for their vote as well.

Second, we have some new hats in for our Sustainably Built Division. The genuine Mossy Oak camo pattern melds perfectly with the green and black of the logo for a stylish hat that is equally suited for a bird watching enthusiast or a [wetlands conservation-minded duck hunter](#). The first two people to email me back about them get a new hat (two camo patterns to choose from)!



*One of two patterns to choose from*

Until December!

Josh  
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## **Safety Corner**

### ***Slowing down for Safety***

Ever been in a hurry to finish a project, at work or around the house? Has your haste ever caused you to make a mistake? I certainly have, and fixing the mistake always seems to take longer than the rest of the project. Worse, have you ever hurried to the point that safety was compromised and you injured yourself? Let's hope the answer is a resounding no! This issue's safety topic is a basic one; just like sports, writing and

cooking, the basics are absolutely essential.

Cost aside, there are three factors that heavily influence each other: safety, quality and speed. Safety and quality go hand in hand; when you take the time to safely complete a project, there's a good chance you're taking the time necessary for quality too. On the other side of the see-saw is speed. While projects should be completed efficiently, excessively rushing through one makes you prone to mistakes that jeopardize quality and yourself. Here are a few examples:

- Cleaning Gutters & Failing to Properly Situate Ladder: Can cause falls, leading to severe injury or death
- Electrical Work & Not Shutting Off Breakers/Testing Current: Can lead to severe injury or death, especially if working off a ladder
- Yard Maintenance, Eye Protection & Hearing Protection: Can lead to eye injury, loss of vision or loss of hearing. Temporary vision problems (i.e., squinting) can lead to substandard work and increase the risk of other injuries
- Hand Protection: You can find gloves for any purpose, from dangerous household chemicals to Kevlar protection for cutting. Gloves can prevent burns, chemical burns, cuts, punctures, severed fingers, bloodborne pathogen contaminants, and food irritations (think habaneros)

Next time you're tempted to walk past the safety glasses, remember that you're not only protecting your eyes, you're also protecting your quality. You may even avoid a few setbacks and speed yourself up!

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## **Charity Choice & Last Month's Winner..or Not?**

Quantum has a long history of supporting local charities, from youth sports to medical and charitable organizations. Now, we'd like you to help us choose who receives a \$100 donation for each newsletter. It's easy: just reply to this email with the name of your favorite charity! Load the odds in your favor by forwarding this newsletter to your friends or coworkers and have them submit a response too! Remember, it has to be a recognized non-profit. Make sure that the newsletter is at the bottom of their email, that's the ticket to making their entry count! The deadline for entries is November 30, so get going!

In a surprising twist of events, we went from a flood of responses in June to zero in August. Did everyone take a long vacation? Don't forget to vote this month; most charities have extra expenses around the holidays!

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## **Sustainable and Efficient**

### ***Landscaping***

Proper landscaping can increase overall appeal of a home, reduce maintenance, preserve distant habitats, reduce water usage and even help protect your house from fires.

Landscaping usually incorporates aesthetic appeal. Sustainable or not, the natural environment surrounding us can be pleasing to the eye and lift our mood. When landscaping is well done and maintained, we feel more comfortable in our home, and our mood at work is elevated, often helping with our productivity. This approach dovetails perfectly with the right approach to sustainable building and finding solutions that work for occupants.

One of the cornerstones of sustainable landscaping is native vegetation. Native vegetation is the plants that were here before us and can typically survive with minimal maintenance and without watering. They conserve water, reduce pollutants, and increase microhabitats. It's not a sacrifice to use them; native species include pacific dogwoods, beach strawberries, madrona trees, bald hip roses and more. King County has even put together a collection of [landscaping plans for your use](#).

Erosion is carefully monitored because of its impact on wetlands, wildlife and soil quality.

Our iconic Pacific Northwest salmon are at particular risk. When we clear plants or add buildings and pavement, we increase the potential for dangerous erosion. One way to combat this is through landscaping features which promote healthy water infiltration, such as bioswales, infiltration trenches, and rain gardens. Another way is to reduce overall impervious surfaces (Editor's Note: Expect to see additional articles on rain gardens and pervious surfaces). You can use rain barrels to trap water from your gutters, helping to control runoff and providing a free water supply for your non-native plants.



*A rain garden "disguised" as tasteful landscaping*

Have you ever walked from a shaded park into a smoking hot asphalt parking lot? Proper landscaping, especially at neighborhood or city-wide levels, can make a welcome decrease in your cooling bill. From a city wide perspective, temperatures between green rural and city hardscape average temperatures can be 5.4°F during the day and 22°F at night. The [Heat Island Effect](#) is one reason many cities are pushing vegetated roofs.

And lastly, if you live in an area prone to wildfires (or near firework-crazy neighbors), consider [fire resistant plants](#) in your landscaping. These plants offer an extra buffer between your house and wildfires, giving you time to find safety and the fire department important time to respond.

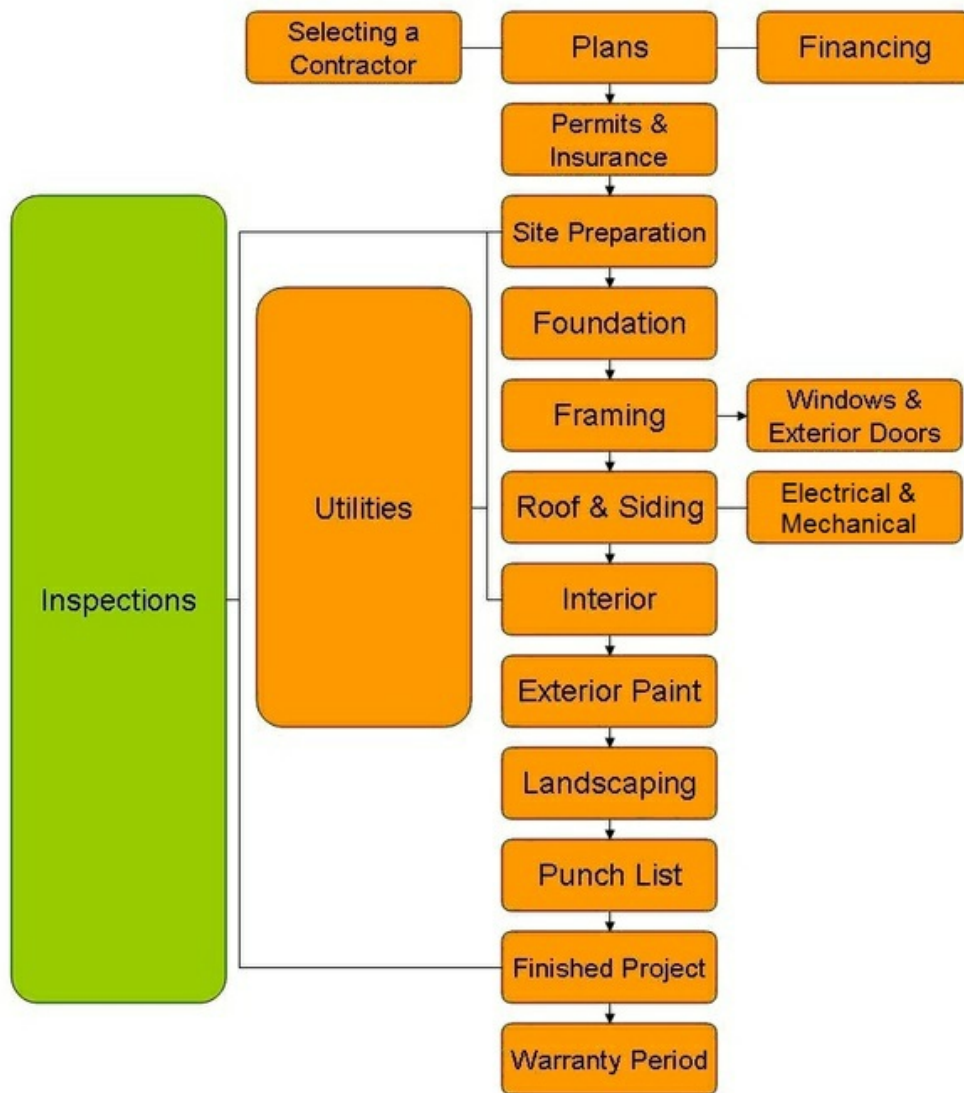
It's amazing that landscaping can serve so many purposes: curb appeal, water conservation, microhabitats, cooling control, fire buffer, and more! Most reputable landscaping companies can help you navigate what's best for your site, and if you'd like to do your own work, consider enlisting a [WSU Master Gardner](#) to help you plan improvements.

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## **Building, Start to Finish: Part 1**

Construction is a complicated process. Starting with the design of the building down through finishing touches, there are numerous opportunities to save money, make significant improvements and construct an overwhelmingly fantastic building. Over the next couple of newsletters, we'll explore the construction process from the ground up. There's also a brief overview of each step on our [website](#) under the "New to Construction- Building: Start to Finish" section.

The flow chart below will be our roadmap for the series. It is intended as a guideline only. Depending on the materials and specific project, some steps may be added, omitted or reordered.



### Contractor, Plans and Financing

The first three steps are closely intertwined. Once you've envisioned the building, you'll develop plans, arrange financing and select a contractor. The two common ways to develop plans are either to contact an architect or designer or to enlist a contractor in a "design-build" scenario. Both approaches have merit, and each will include (at minimum) an architect or engineer certifying the plans.

When reviewing potential contractors, you should look at experience, ability to work with you, schedule and price. First, the contractor should have clearly demonstrated experience in similar construction. Navigating code requirements, materials and building techniques are learning processes, translating into increased costs for you. For example, commercial building code is typically more stringent than residential, while the finish woodwork in a luxury home will be more demanding than that of a production home. Next, you'll work closely with the contractor for a few months or longer, so choose someone that you feel comfortable working with. The availability in a contractor's schedule to work with you may also determine your choice. Do you need the project to start immediately, or do you have the flexibility to wait for a chosen builder?

Price could easily occupy an entire article (for example, see our [August Newsletter](#) on Budgeting). There are two basic ways to determine your construction price. The first is a lump sum approach, in which one or more contractors submit a fixed price to you. The main advantage of a lump sum is your control over price. Conversely, the main disadvantage is that any cost savings are retained by the contractor. Also, competitive bidding may encourage contractors to select materials and subcontractors on price rather than quality. It's referred to as low risk for the owner, as the contractor assumes most of the price risk, so don't expect many discounts.

Negotiated bid is a practice that allows shared budget risk between the owner and the contractor. The contractor will still prepare a budget estimate as in fixed bidding, but the

owner will only pay costs which are actually incurred. In the event that a contractor is able to save money, the owner will also save money. If there are cost overruns, the owner will also pay the overruns. In negotiated bids, it is imperative that you have selected an experienced contractor that you trust. The main advantages of negotiated bid include potential cost savings, freedom from change orders, and more control over the budget as the project progresses. Some contractors may also provide a discount to their standard markup, as the owner is sharing the risk of price fluctuations. The disadvantages include the potential for cost overruns and no fixed price. Two common modifications to the negotiated bid approach include a “not to exceed” cap, which requires change orders for any costs over the estimate, and a shared savings approach, which provides incentive for the contractor to find cost savings by reward them with a percentage.

Ensuring proper financing for your project is important. You’ll want to make sure that you have enough money available to cover the construction cost with a spare contingency fund. Find a local banker that you feel comfortable working with; they can help guide you through the process and identify common pitfalls.

#### Tips to Savings

You have the most potential for cost savings in this step of the game. Ask your designer or architect how you can lower construction and operating costs. Then flip it around and ask your contractor for their recommendations as well. Each will have different, and valuable, information to offer. Since only paper is involved at this point, the cost to make changes will be minimum or nonexistent. You can also visit showrooms for various fixtures (lighting, plumbing, etc.) to narrow down costs on specific items.

#### Tips for Success

Take pictures, drive by similar buildings, and look through magazines, presenting your findings to your designer or architect. Keep a file or notebook with your ideas. Use masking tape to layout potential rooms if you need to check dimensions for specific furniture pieces. Look up contractors on the [Washington Labor and Industries Website](#) to ensure that they are licensed, safe, and in good standing. Ask for referrals and references from and for architects and contractors. Finally, be wary of prices that seem too good to be true (they probably are).

### **Permits and Insurance**

Prior to purchasing materials and commencing site work, you’ll need to obtain a permit from your local building department. The department will review your plans and may mandate certain changes to comply with code. Depending on your location and project, reviews may include fire, flood, traffic impact and more. A permit fee will also be required, which varies by jurisdiction and estimated construction cost.

You’ll want to obtain a copy of your contractor’s liability insurance naming you as an additionally insured. Your lender may also require you to obtain specialty insurance for the duration of construction.

#### Tips to Savings

In jurisdictions and projects with easy permitting, take care of the permit yourself and save on markups or associated labor costs. If your lender requires specialty insurance, check to make sure that your contractor’s insurance does not mirror the coverage. If it does, present it to the lender and ask them to waive the requirement.

#### Tips for Success

In jurisdictions where permitting may be complicated, such as certain watersheds, see if your architect or contractor typically navigates the process. Familiarity with complicated permitting can save you significant time and money. Next, do not mistake surety bonds for insurance. A surety bond, required by the state for licensed contractors, can help you complete the project if your contractor defaults. Liability insurance, on the other hand, will protect you from negligence or damage by the contractor.

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[Quantum Construction, Inc.](#) is a family-owned general contractor based in Anacortes, WA. Quantum has been building high quality commercial, custom residential and industrial projects since 1984. For information on how we can give you the best building experience, please contact us by [email](#) or by phone at (360) 293-0656.



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