



The Lowest Bid Is Rarely the Best Choice!

You're planning to use a large custom aquarium as a design element for the new addition to your home. You hired an architect who drew up a beautiful design. You consulted an aquarium expert for assistance during the design process to ensure everything was properly planned. You submitted the blueprints to several aquarium stores. Now you're looking at several bids for the project and wondering why there are huge discrepancies for specified aquariums & aquarium equipment and total costs for the job. You're not alone! It happens every day in this industry.

Even though you may specify sizes and types of equipment for a custom aquarium, there are many different brands available to choose from. Every aquarium company sells different equipment and will use what they regularly sell when bidding on a project. The problem is that like anything else you buy, there are high quality products and those of lower quality. Once again, just like anything else you buy, you get what you pay for.

So how do you decide which bid to accept for your custom aquarium project? The last thing you want to do is make your decision based solely on price. Custom built-in aquariums are expensive, and there's no such thing as a discount source. No matter what you're told, nearly all good aquarium stores use the same mark-up on the products they sell. For that reason, experienced custom aquarium designers will usually submit bids that are relatively close in price. If one bid for equipment is much lower than others, it is either because the store is inexperienced in sizing equipment for a big job and has chosen items that are too small for the job, or the store is quoting equipment that is cheaply-built and of much lower quality than those listed in the other bids.

Look out for low installation labor quotations. You're probably not going to get a bargain. We recommend always getting at least four bids for any large aquarium project. For experienced aquarium sources, the labor to install is the one item with which they can compete. In spite of this, labor prices from experienced stores will usually be much higher and closer in cost to one another. After all, they have done a lot of jobs, and know the time involved in completing your project. An inexperienced store that has underbid the labor for a job will quickly learn their mistake when they start work on the project. If a business isn't making that much money on a job, their heart won't be in the work. Unless you have a lot of experience with aquariums, you may not know if a problem exists with an installation until there's a serious problem with livestock or water quality. By then, the aquarium store will be paid in full. Getting your money back or getting them to make improvements for free will be difficult, if not impossible, regardless of any guarantees they gave you.

Negotiating a Better Price - Is It Worth It?

We know we'll get a few mean-spirited comments about this next statement, but the truth can sometimes hurt. Not all great aquarium stores are good at designing custom built-in aquariums. Good custom aquarium work usually requires an excellent working knowledge of plumbing, HVAC & electrical, carpentry & millwork trades, and the ability to read blueprints and coordinate with other trades. Aquarium stores that are an excellent source for hobbyists may know aquariums and fish inside and out, but they may not know everything about requirements by other trades or may lack the engineering knowledge needed to do a good job on a very large built-in installation.

Unfortunately, good professional aquarium businesses that know all the ins and outs of custom aquarium design are hard to find. They command top dollar for what they do, and they know they can because competition is low and they don't consider some competitors as competition at all. Using the "other guy is a lot cheaper" technique won't work with them. They'll tell you to use the "other guy" and wish you "good luck."

So what's the bottom line? The majority of people who have large custom built-in aquariums installed in their home or office are not aquarium hobbyists. It is important to be an educated consumer, but



with aquaria this presents a problem. Making a truly-educated decision on an an aquarium purchase will require months of study. Remember, you're talking about a living ecosystem! Only a company with extensive knowledge and many years of experience can consider all of the intricate details involved in recreating Mother Nature. A smaller, less experienced company might be able to sell you an aquarium for a low price, but an unsuccessful tank will cost you much more later on down the road. Unless you know a lot about aquariums, it is usually better to select a good [reputable source](#), [bite the bullet](#), and [pay their price](#). You'll save money in the long run.

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