



No Two Aquarium Sources Are Alike

If you live in Southern California naturally we want you to consider OC-FISH for your custom aquarium. We specialize in the design, installation and maintenance of custom aquariums for both residential and commercial applications. If you live outside Southern California and are seeking a source for a custom fish tank, here are a few tips to help you select an aquarium company:

Make sure the aquarium company carries insurance that covers on-site work. Almost all retail stores carry liability insurance, but most retail liability insurance policies do not cover work done off-premises. Many stores fail to inform their insurance company that they are doing this type of work until they have to file a claim. It is surprising how many retail stores THINK they're covered just because they carry insurance. If they can provide you with a minimum \$1,000,000.00 certificate of insurance for the installation that shows all parties to be listed as additional insured, they're covered.

You can ask for references, but they may mean very little. While references may establish that a company is honest, they mean very little unless you can see their work. Remember that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Most custom installations are in private residences and the chances are good you'll never see them. Anyone can come up with references. Instead of references, ask to see a portfolio. If the company is in the business of installing custom aquaria, they'll have a good portfolio with photographs of their work. If they don't have a portfolio, then they don't do many custom installations or they aren't very proud of their work. Read our policy on references.

Do they operate a retail store? If so, do they use a separate staff for installation and maintenance work? A beautiful retail aquarium store is a wonder to behold, but if their staff is limited, will the store have the time and resources to devote full-time to your project? It is our firm opinion that the best company to do customized aquarium installations is one that specializes in that field.

Get at least three bids on your aquarium project. If you live in or near a large city, this will be easy. If you don't have several large aquarium businesses near you, and you can't find a decent source, you may have to consider paying additional money to hire a company outside your area. Interview each company and ask a lot of questions. Ask the same questions of each company representative. Do not have all of the representatives from different companies present at the same time. This leads to chaos. Unless you supply exact specifications to the bidders, expect major differences in the sizes, types, brands and prices of equipment listed in each quotation.

Even if you don't know much about aquariums, you can usually tell if someone else knows their own subject. Once you've received all of the bids on a project, black out the prices and request that each bidder critique the other bids and explain why they want to use the equipment and materials they quoted. You'll learn a lot about aquarium equipment, and you'll also get a feel for how patient and thorough each company is in educating you, the consumer. There is no logical reason why a company would refuse to do this unless they aren't sure of themselves.

If you can afford it, consult a third-party aquarium company before requesting bids so you can provide exact specifications for bidders. This will level the playing field for the bidders so that the only differences in the bids will be the brands of equipment used. Some public aquariums will provide this service. Aquarium businesses that are located too far away to bid on the project may be willing to do this for a fee. Make sure the consultant signs a non-collusion agreement. Also make sure the consulting company knows what they're doing, as the downside to providing specifications to bidders is that YOU are responsible if the specifications prove to be wrong or inadequate.

A custom aquarium is not a used car! The net-profit on custom aquarium work is a fraction of that made on standard aquariums sold in a retail store. There is not a lot of room for negotiation. If a company is willing to make major price cuts on the equipment or their labor, something is probably wrong. Unless the aquarium will have major portfolio value (such as a written endorsement from a famous person or company), or it is in a high-profile public area, there is little reason to take a loss in profit. Good aquarium companies are always busy. An aquarium business that is willing to do so may be new in the business, inexperienced, or just plain desperate.

Make sure their guarantees cover labor for a certain period of time. Many aquarium companies will only cover manufacturer's warranties. They'll replace a piece of defective equipment with no charge for materials, but will charge you for the labor to remove and re-install the equipment.



If you are planning on using the company that installs your aquarium to provide on-going maintenance services, make sure they have the reputation, reliability, staff and resources to do so. Here is where references will work. As a minimum, they should:

- 1) Have a staff of at least three people who do outside aquarium work.
- 2) Offer good guarantees, both for their work and for livestock.
- 3) Offer a 24 hour emergency service (dying fish can't wait for a retail store to open).

Trying to choose an aquarium company?

Ask yourself these twelve questions:

- Are they fully insured for on-site work?
- Will they provide you with certification?
- Can they show you photographs of their work?
- Are their quotations complete and do they include everything?
- Is the aquarium equipment they install of the highest quality?
- Do they have a parts and labor warranty for their installation?
- Do they guarantee fish and other livestock?
- Do they have a large staff to ensure good service after the sale?
- Do they guarantee their aquarium maintenance work?
- Can they deliver materials and livestock to your door on demand?
- If you have a problem, will they come to you or will you have to go to them?
- Are they available for emergencies after regular business hours?

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