California Pool Bid Kit

What a complete pool bid should list, a side-by-side sheet for comparing builders, and the questions to ask before you sign.

By **Randy Beard**, licensed California pool contractor (CSLB #871188, C-53 Swimming Pool and C-27 Landscaping), in the pool trade since 1979, former CSLB investigator and construction defect expert witness. Publisher of **capoolbuilders.com**, a free directory of every licensed pool contractor in California.

> **How to use this kit**
> 1. Before you call builders, read Part 1 so you know what a complete bid looks like.
> 2. Hand each builder Part 1 and ask them to price every line, or mark it "not included."
> 3. Put the bids side by side on the Part 2 sheet. Bids that look cheaper often just leave things out.
> 4. Ask the Part 3 questions, then check the contract against Part 4 before you sign.

Most pool disputes Randy sees did not start with bad concrete. They started with a bid that left things out and a contract nobody read closely. The time to fix that is before you sign.

> **Want a second set of eyes?** Randy reviews one residential pool bid (contract, plans and specifications) for a flat $495, with a written summary and a 30-minute call. No bids yet? He can write your pool specification first so every builder prices the same pool. capoolbuilders.com/contract-review/ · (949) 264-3466 · rb@varx1.com

This kit is general information, not legal advice, and is not a substitute for engineering or permit plans. Laws change; check the current rules and talk to a California attorney about your rights. No builder paid to be listed on capoolbuilders.com, and Randy receives nothing for referrals.

Part 1: What a complete pool bid lists

A complete bid prices every item below, or says in writing that it is not included. Give this list to each builder and ask them to fill in the price column. Anything left blank is something you may end up paying for later.

Design, engineering and permits

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Scaled plan drawing of the pool: shape, dimensions, depths, steps, benches, spa	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Structural engineering (stamped plans) for this soil and site	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Soils (geotechnical) report, if the city or engineer requires one	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Plan check and building permit fees, and who pays them	☐ Yes ☐ No	
HOA approval, if your neighborhood requires it	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Setbacks from property lines, house footings, slopes and easements confirmed	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Underground utility locate (call 811) before digging	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Access, excavation and haul-off

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Equipment access: fence, wall or gate removal and replacement	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Excavation to the depths on the plan	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Haul-off of excavated soil (how many loads, where it goes)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
What happens if they hit rock, old concrete or hard digging: unit price per hour or per load	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Groundwater pumping (dewatering), if water is found	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Demolition and removal of existing patio, lawn or landscaping in the work area	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Protection of your driveway, lawn and house during construction	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Steel and shell

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Steel (rebar) size and spacing per the engineering	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Shell method: gunite or shotcrete, specified strength and wall/floor thickness	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Bond beam size, raised walls and any retaining walls	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Spa, steps, benches, swim-outs and tanning ledge (each listed)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
City inspections before the shell is shot	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Curing (watering) of the shell after it is shot	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Plumbing

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Pipe sizes for suction and return lines	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Number of return inlets, skimmers and floor/main drains	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Anti-entrapment drain covers (federal VGB Act) and drain layout	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Pressure test of all lines before they are buried	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Distance to the equipment pad and where the pad goes	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Equipment (brand and model number for each)

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Pump: variable-speed, brand and model	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Filter: type (cartridge, sand or DE) and size	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Heater: gas or heat pump, size; meets California Title 24 energy rules	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Pool cover, if required for a heated pool	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Sanitizer: salt chlorine generator or chlorinator, brand and model	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Automation / controller and app, if included	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Lights: number, LED, color or white	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Spa equipment: jets, blower, spa-side remote	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Equipment pad, and manufacturer warranties registered in your name	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Electrical and gas

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Electrical panel or subpanel work, and any panel upgrade needed	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Equipotential bonding of pool steel, equipment and nearby metal	☐ Yes ☐ No	
GFCI protection for pool equipment and lights	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Gas line run to the heater: size, length and trenching	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Who pulls the electrical and gas permits	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Tile, coping and interior finish

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Waterline tile: material and allowance amount	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Coping: material, size and color	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Interior finish: plaster, quartz or pebble, brand and color	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Start-up after the finish: who does it, for how many days, and the brushing schedule	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Decking and drainage

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Deck material and square footage	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Deck drains and where the water goes	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Expansion joint between coping and deck, and mastic sealant	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Grading so water runs away from the pool and the house	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Safety (required for a new pool at a home)

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
At least two of the seven drowning-prevention features in California law (Health and Safety Code 115922): for example an enclosure/fence, a removable mesh fence, a safety cover, exit alarms, self-closing gates, or a pool alarm	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Which two the builder will provide, and the price of each	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Gate hardware and fence height that meet your city's barrier rules	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Extras (only if you want them)

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Water features, fire features, lighting, raised walls	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Outdoor kitchen, patio cover or other non-pool work (may need other licensed trades)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Landscaping and irrigation repair after construction	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Handover

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Final clean-up and debris removal	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Owner walk-through: how to run the equipment	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Written warranty terms: shell, plaster, equipment, workmanship (how long, what is covered)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Final city inspection signed off before the final payment	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Allowances and exclusions

Line item	In the bid?	Builder's price
Every allowance listed with its dollar amount (tile, coping, decking, etc.)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Every exclusion listed in writing (what is NOT in the price)	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Unit prices for likely extras (rock, extra haul-off, extra deck, extra steel)	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Part 2: Bid comparison sheet

One column per builder. Compare what is included, not just the bottom line.

	Builder 1	Builder 2	Builder 3
Builder / CSLB license #			
License active today? (checked at cslb.ca.gov)			
Workers' comp or exempt			
Total contract price			
Down payment			
Number of progress payments			
Engineering and permits included?			
Rock / hard-dig clause and unit price			
Haul-off included?			
Pump brand and model			
Filter type and size			
Heater type and size			
Sanitizer			
Lights (number)			
Interior finish (brand, color)			
Tile and coping allowances			
Deck material and square feet			
Two safety features provided			
Start date / completion date			
Warranty (shell, finish, equipment, work)			
Exclusions listed?			
Lien releases with each payment?			

Part 3: 25 questions to ask a pool builder

1. What is your CSLB license number, and is the business name on the contract exactly the same as the license?
2. Who will be on my job every day, and are they your employees or subcontractors?
3. Do you carry workers' compensation insurance? (If the license says "exempt," who are the people on the crew?)
4. Do you carry general liability insurance? Can I have a certificate?
5. Is the salesperson on your license or registered with CSLB as a home improvement salesperson?
6. How many pools like mine have you built in the last two years? Can I see one and call the owner?
7. Who prepares the engineering, and is it stamped for my soil?
8. Who pulls the permits, and will every city inspection be passed before I pay for that stage?
9. What is the down payment? (California limits it to $1,000 or 10 percent of the price, whichever is less.)
10. Is each progress payment tied to a stage of work that is finished?
11. Will you give me a lien release from you and your suppliers for each payment?
12. What happens, and what does it cost, if you hit rock, groundwater or old concrete?
13. What is not included in this price? Please list every exclusion.
14. Which items are allowances, and what are the dollar amounts?
15. What brand and model of pump, filter, heater, sanitizer and lights are included?
16. Is the pump variable-speed, and does the heater meet California's Title 24 energy rules?
17. Which two drowning-prevention features will you provide?
18. What interior finish (brand and color), and who does the start-up and brushing?
19. When will you start, and when will you finish? What happens if you are late?
20. How do change orders work? Will every change be priced and signed before the work is done?
21. What does your warranty cover, for how long, and is it in writing?
22. Who do I call when something goes wrong after the job is done?
23. How will you protect my yard, driveway and house during construction?
24. Where will the dirt go, and how many truckloads should I expect?
25. Can I have a copy of the full contract, plans and specifications to review before I sign?

Part 4: Contract must-haves under California law

Check each one before you sign. These come from the Business and Professions Code (7159, 7159.5 and 7167).

☐ Signed and dated by you and the contractor before any work starts, and you receive a completely filled-in copy.

☐ Contractor's name, business address and CSLB license number, matching the license record.

☐ A "Description of the Project and Description of the Significant Materials to be Used and Equipment to be Installed," with a plan and scale drawing of the pool (Business and Professions Code 7159).

☐ Down payment no more than $1,000 or 10 percent of the contract price, whichever is less (B&P 7159.5).

☐ A "Schedule of Progress Payments" in dollars, each tied to work actually completed. No payment ahead of the work.

☐ Start date and completion date.

☐ Change orders: in writing, priced and signed by both of you before the extra work is done.

☐ The required notices: Mechanics Lien Warning, the three-day right to cancel (five days if you are 65 or older), the contractor bond and workers' compensation information, and the commercial general liability insurance notice.

☐ A statement about lien releases for the payments you make.

☐ For a pool contract, missing several of these items can make the contract unenforceable by the contractor (B&P 7167). Have it checked before you sign.

> **Before you sign, check the builder's license** at capoolbuilders.com or cslb.ca.gov: active status, bond, workers' comp, and any CSLB disciplinary history. Then, if you'd like, have Randy review the contract: capoolbuilders.com/contract-review/ · (949) 264-3466.

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