

THE INFORMED BUYER'S GUIDE

8 Costly Mistakes to Avoid When Purchasing a Custom Driveway Gate

For property owners who intend to get this right the first time.

Including real buyer experiences from across the industry.

By Justin Rose

Founder, JDR Metal Art

27 Years of Custom Gate Fabrication — Serving Nationwide

INTRODUCTION

If you've found this guide, you're already ahead.

Most people who invest in a custom driveway gate don't do this kind of research. They get a few quotes, pick a contractor, and hope for the best. Some of them get lucky. Too many of them don't.

A custom gate is a significant investment — often \$20,000 to \$80,000 or more for a premium quality installation. It's also one of the most visible things on your property. It's what every passerby, every visitor, every delivery driver, and every person who enters your driveway sees before they see anything else.

Getting it right matters. Getting it wrong is expensive, embarrassing, and difficult to undo.

I've been building custom gates for estate owners, ranchers, and luxury property owners for 27 years. I've seen the same mistakes made over and over — sometimes by clients who came to me after a bad experience elsewhere, sometimes in photos people send me asking "what went wrong?"

This guide covers the eight most costly mistakes I've seen. Whether you work with us or someone else, avoiding these will save you money, frustration, and the very real possibility of doing it twice.

"The bitterness of poor quality lingers long after the sweetness of a low price is forgotten." - Benjamin Franklin

Mistake 1

Choosing a Contractor Solely on Price

A few years ago, a client came to us for a quote on a custom gate for his estate. We provided a detailed proposal. He appreciated our efforts but found another contractor who was closer and promised it could be built for significantly less.

Six months later, he called us back.

The gates were already sagging and the powder coating had started flaking after just a couple of months. Rust was spreading across the gate and staining his brand-new concrete driveway. The welds were failing. The whole thing looked exactly like what it was: cheap work done cheaply.

By the time he contacted us for a replacement, our prices had since increased due to inflation. His total spend — the failed gate plus ours — was substantially more than our original quote. Plus the cost of removing the failed gate, repairing the stained driveway, and living with an embarrassing eyesore for months.

He could have had it done right the first time for less.

Why this happens

In the custom gate industry, you're not just paying for metal and labor. You're paying for:

- Expertise in design and structural engineering
- Architectural-grade materials — not standard commercial stock
- Precision craftsmanship: clean welds, proper surface prep, flawless finish
- Foundation work done correctly from the start
- Warranties that actually mean something
- A craftsman whose reputation depends on your gate looking great in ten years

The lowest bid almost always means corners are being cut somewhere. With something this visible and permanent, those corners show.

What to ask any contractor

- › *Can I see examples of gates you built five to ten years ago — not just recent work?*
- › *What grade of materials do you use, and how does that compare to standard commercial grade?*
- › *What does your warranty actually cover, and for how long?*
- › *Can you provide references from clients with similar properties?*

Mistake 2

Overlooking Foundation and Site Requirements

A gate is only as good as what's holding it up. I've seen beautiful custom gates begin sagging within mere days because the installer didn't pour adequate concrete. Or worse — they hit underground utilities during installation because no one called for utility locates first.

What most people (especially hobbyist contractors) don't realize

A quality gate system requires serious foundation work. For a large gate, you might need three to four yards of concrete just for the posts. Skimping here is like building a brick wall on a foundation of sand — it will eventually fall over.

Before any digging happens, every utility on the site needs to be located: electrical, gas, water, irrigation. Hitting a line is not only dangerous - it can cost thousands in repairs and fines, and delay your project by weeks.

Drainage matters too. Water pooling around gate posts accelerates the forces at play, even with quality materials. And large installations may require equipment access — concrete trucks, sometimes a crane — that needs to be planned for in advance.

What to verify with your contractor before signing

- › *How much concrete do you plan to use for footings, and why?*
- › *Will you call for utility locates before breaking ground?*
- › *How are you handling drainage at the gate base?*
- › *Is there anything about site access we need to plan around?*

A contractor who glosses over these questions is a red flag.

Mistake 3

Not Thinking Through Access Control

You've invested significantly in a stunning custom gate. But you didn't think through how you, your family, your staff, and your guests will actually open it.

Now you're dealing with keypads that fail, no way to admit delivery drivers when you're traveling, guests who can't figure out how to get in, and no integration with your property's existing security system.

Modern access control options worth considering

- Keypads with multiple user codes — different access levels for family, staff, and contractors
- Remote access via smartphone — admit anyone from anywhere
- Intercom with video — see and speak with visitors before opening
- Integration with your property's security system
- Backup power — so the gate functions during outages
- Vehicle sensors — automatic opening for your own vehicles

Questions to think through before installation

- › *How will you manage access when you're away from the property?*
- › *What happens if power goes out?*
- › *Do contractors or delivery services need temporary or scheduled access?*
- › *Should this integrate with your home automation or security system?*

Access control features are far less expensive to build in from the start than to retrofit later. Have this conversation with your contractor before the design is finalized.

Mistake 4

Choosing a Gate Out of Scale with Your Property

Nothing undermines a distinguished property like a gate that looks like it belongs somewhere else. Scale matters more than almost any other design decision.

What to consider

- Width — Can emergency vehicles pass through? Trucks with trailers? Moving vans during a future sale?
- Height — A five-foot gate on a ten-acre estate may look timid. Eight feet could command the respect the property deserves.
- Visual weight — The gate should feel substantial without being fortress-like, unless that's intentional.
- Sight lines — How does it read from the road? From the home itself?

Work with someone who understands design proportions, not just fabrication. Bring photographs of gates you admire. Discuss the impression you want to create the moment someone turns into your drive.

Mistake 5

Not Understanding Material Differences

Metal is metal, right? It isn't.

The difference between standard thin-wall commercial-grade material and architectural-grade material is the difference between a gate that shows its age in two years and one that looks new in twenty. This isn't theoretical — it shows up in real purchases, often within months of delivery.

“Gate rusted immediately. Tried contacting them... they refused and won't respond. Overpriced and terrible quality.”— Verified buyer, online gate supplier

That review — and others like it — share a common thread: buyers attracted by competitive pricing who received gates fabricated from inferior-grade materials with inadequate surface preparation. The powder coat fails. The rust follows. The company stops responding.

Why material grade matters

- Thicker steel means better structural integrity — no sagging, no warping, no flexing in wind or weather
- Thicker material allows for deeper, stronger welds that hold over decades
- Higher-grade material holds powder coating longer and corrodes more slowly — or not at all
- Heavier material simply looks and feels more substantial from the moment it arrives

Aluminum vs. steel: which is right for your property?

Aluminum is rust-free by nature, significantly lighter, and ideal for wide openings or coastal environments where salt air accelerates corrosion on untreated steel. Steel is stronger and more imposing, and less demanding to work with during fabrication. Both are excellent choices when sourced and fabricated correctly — and both can fail quickly when they're not.

What to ask any fabricator

- › *What grade and thickness of material do you use, specifically?*
- › *Where do you source your steel or aluminum? What is the country of origin?*
- › *What surface preparation happens before powder coating — sandblasting or wire brushing?*
- › *Can you show me gates you built five or more years ago, and how the finish has held?*

If they can't answer these questions clearly and specifically, that tells you something. A fabricator proud of their materials will welcome the conversation.

Mistake 6

Not Knowing What Quality Fabrication Actually Looks Like

You can't see inside a weld. You can't easily judge whether a powder coat finish will last two years or twenty. Most buyers don't know what to look for — and that's exactly how inferior fabricators get away with subpar work until it fails on your property.

Consider this situation, reported by a buyer who spent \$12,000 on a set of custom gates from an online supplier: when multiple professional installers attempted to hang the gates, they discovered that the hinges on one panel were welded a half inch lower than the other. Because the hinges were welded solid — not adjustable — there was no fix short of cutting and re-welding at a cost of several thousand extra dollars. The company stopped responding. The gates were unusable.

“We spent \$12K on gates that are not correctly built and no one will respond. DO NOT BUY FROM THIS COMPANY.”— Verified buyer, online gate supplier

This isn't a story about an unlucky purchase. It's a story about what happens when fabrication quality isn't verifiable before you buy — and when there's no single accountable craftsman behind the work.

What quality fabrication actually looks like

Welds should be beautiful; smooth, consistent, and properly ground with no gaps, no holes or porosity, and no weak points. The weld should be stronger than the base material itself. Hinges should be precisely placed, square to the frame, and — where the design allows — adjustable to accommodate real-world installation variables.

Powder coating should be UV-stable, applied over proper surface preparation — sandblasting, not wire brushing — with full coverage on edges, corners, and interior surfaces that lesser shops rush through or skip entirely.

A finished gate should operate smoothly without binding, with no rattles or looseness, and automation systems should be whisper-quiet with consistent travel on every cycle.

The most reliable test

Ask to see completed projects that are at least five years old — not a portfolio of recent work. Look at the welds. Look at the powder coat condition. Watch the gate move. A craftsman who stands behind their work will welcome the request without hesitation. One who deflects it is showing you exactly what you need to know.

Mistake 7

Ignoring Warranty Terms and What Happens When Things Go Wrong

How a company handles problems after delivery tells you more about them than anything in their marketing. And the pattern that emerges from buyers who've had issues with online gate suppliers is consistent: responsive before the sale, silent after.

“The paint quality was awful and started rusting after a year. No help from the company... You get what you pay for.”— Verified buyer, online gate supplier

Another buyer reported receiving a gate with dents and powder coat damage. The company's response: shipping damage is out of our control. When pressed, they offered to mail a spray paint can and sandpaper.

These aren't edge cases. They're the predictable outcome of buying from a company where no single person is accountable for what leaves the shop — and where the warranty is a paragraph, not a promise.

What you should expect from a quality gate

The gate structure itself should be genuinely maintenance-free. Premium UV-stable powder coating, properly applied, should not fade, chip, or require repainting. Rust-free materials, correctly specified for your environment, should not corrode. Stainless hardware should not bleed rust stains onto adjacent surfaces.

Automation components — operators, sensors, circuit boards — are mechanical systems that benefit from periodic inspection, just as you'd service any precision equipment. An annual check by a qualified automation technician is reasonable. The gate itself should need nothing.

What to read carefully before signing

- › *How long is the structural warranty, and what exactly does it cover?*
- › *Does it cover labor as well as materials?*
- › *Who performs warranty work — and will they still be in business in ten years?*
- › *Are there maintenance requirements that could void the coverage?*
- › *What is the actual process if something needs attention after delivery — who do I call, and what happens next?*

A lifetime structural warranty from a craftsman with 27 years in the business and a real name on every gate is worth considerably more than a one-year warranty from a shop that may not exist when you need it.

Mistake 8

Not Knowing How to Vet a Remote Fabricator

The finest custom gate fabricators in the country rarely live in your city. The nature of specialized craftsmanship means that truly exceptional work comes from people who have spent decades perfecting a specific skill — and those people ship nationwide.

But the internet has also made it easy for lower-quality operations to present themselves as premium custom fabricators. The experience of buying from the wrong one is remarkably consistent across buyer reviews:

- Charming, responsive sales contact before the deposit
- Communication deteriorates after payment is sent

- Gate arrives late, damaged, or built to different specifications than agreed
- The original salesperson is gone, left the company, or unreachable
- The company stops responding entirely

One buyer described paying for a gate that arrived nine weeks late, with wrong handle placement, sloppy hinge welds, mismatched touchup paint, and a lock mechanism that failed within weeks. When she contacted the company, the salesperson who'd made the promises no longer worked there. She was offered sandpaper. The replacement and repair cost her an additional \$1,300 out of pocket.

“I’m left with having wasted money on a gate that doesn’t close or lock and looks ridiculous.”— Verified buyer, online gate supplier

Another buyer ordered from a different online supplier and waited over five months for a product that was listed as in-stock. A third received gates missing the hinges — which had been quoted and paid for as factory-installed — and was forced to hire a local contractor to complete the work at additional expense.

The common thread in every one of these situations: no single accountable person behind the product. A business, not a craftsman.

How to vet a remote fabricator properly

- Ask for references from past clients with similar projects — and actually call them
- Request photographs and video of your specific gate during fabrication, not just portfolio images
- Confirm there is a physical address, a real owner’s name, and verifiable years in business
- Ask who installs in your region and contact those installers independently before committing
- Get the warranty in writing with specific terms — not general assurances
- Ask explicitly: what happens if something is wrong when the gate arrives? Walk me through the process.

The question that separates craftsmen from operations

Ask the fabricator: “Can I speak with someone whose gate you built three or more years ago?” A craftsman who has been doing this for decades and stands behind their work will have a list of people happy to take that call. A company that routes you back to a portfolio page is showing you exactly what kind of accountability you can expect after your deposit clears.

“The question isn’t where they are — it’s whether they can prove their work and name the person responsible for every weld.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

Get it right the first time.

Your driveway gate is likely one of the most visible investments you’ll make in your property. It’s the first thing every visitor sees. It’s what you pass through every single day. Done right, it adds lasting value, security, and a quiet pride every time you come home.

Avoiding these eight mistakes won’t just save you money. It will save you the frustration of managing a problem that was entirely preventable — and the far greater cost of doing it twice.

Take your time. Ask the right questions. Choose a fabricator based on demonstrated quality and accountability, not the lowest number on a quote.

ABOUT JDR METAL ART

Justin Rose has been designing and hand-fabricating custom driveway gates for 27 years. Every gate that leaves the JDR shop — the design, plasma cutting, welding, powder coating, and hardware — is built by Justin personally. No employees. No subcontractors. Complete accountability, start to finish.

Lindsey Rose serves as client concierge for every project, guiding each client from initial consultation through final installation. At JDR Metal Art, every client receives direct access to the people who built their gate.

JDR Metal Art has served 500+ estate clients across more than 40 states. Every gate is backed by a lifetime guarantee.

Measure twice, cut once.

Justin & Lindsey Rose

JDR Metal Art

Custom gates designed to match your lifestyle

Direct Line - (614) 800-9840 (cell)

custom-driveway-gates.com