

Getting Started

At the heart of every successful project is a strong relationship between client and architect. We as architects know that the more knowledgeable our clients are, the more likely they are to participate fully in the process and enjoy the benefits of a collaborative effort. The following material covers topics related to finding and working with an architect, and managing your project and the design process. Time spent here will pay off in improved results for your project.

What do Architects do

You have a vision of what you want. Now you need to make that vision a reality. Here's how we can help you: We see the big picture. We are specially educated to help you define what you want to build, present options you might never have considered, and help you get the most for your valuable investment.

We don't just design four walls and a roof - we create total environments, both interiors and exteriors, that are functional and exciting places in which to work and live. We solve problems creatively. We are trained to be problem solvers. Need more room for your growing family? We can show you how to enlarge your home so you won't have to move. Have a limited budget? We can propose ways to get more for your investment than you imagined possible. We can help make your life easier.

Building is a long process that is often messy and disruptive, particularly if you're living in the space while it's under construction. We represent you, not the contractors. We look out for your interests and smooth the process; help find qualified construction contractors; and visit the worksite to help protect you against work that's not according to plan.

Finding the Right Architect

Each architect has an individual style, approach to design and a method of work. So it's important to find an architect who is compatible with your style and needs. Get recommendations from friends, relatives and acquaintances who have worked with architects. Check to see if the architect is a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Membership in the AIA means that the architect subscribes to a high professional purpose to advance standards of practice and service to society. This includes having a code of ethics and access to a variety of professional and technical resources. Like doctors and lawyers, architects are licensed professionals.

The title "Architect" may be used only by an individual who possesses a state license to practice architecture. Architects are the only professionals in the construction industry who are ethically bound to represent you, the building owner. Only those professionals who have fulfilled the rigorous requirements as stipulated by each individual state, may legally call themselves architects and practice architecture in the jurisdiction granting the license. Individuals may be registered, or licensed, in more than one state by means of reciprocal licensing agreements among the states. We subscribe to the AIA's code of ethics and professional conduct to assure our clients, the public and colleagues of our dedication to high standards in professional practice.

Managing the Process from Start to Finish

When building or renovating a home, you need someone who can both see the big picture and understand your project in great detail, someone who will look after your interests in what is likely to be unfamiliar territory. No handshake or letter of agreement is firm enough to cover all the roles, responsibilities, and obligations that must be carried out in your building project. We can efficiently prepare construction documents, detailed drawings, and specifications that the contractor will use to establish construction costs and build the project.

When we use AIA documents, you benefit from what are considered to be “the Bible” of the construction industry. These standard forms of agreement indicate the current consensus among construction industry leaders representing owners, contractors, engineers, and architects. Many details are covered in clear language that is widely known and accepted. In addition to the highly-regarded AIA owner-architect and owner-contractor agreements, we can make available documents for small projects, construction management, project administration, and a range of abbreviated-form agreements.

Selecting a Reputable Contractor

We are familiar with the abilities and reputations of the contractors in your area. In many cases, we share long standing working relationships which can help promote reliability and quality work. Or, if you wish to choose among several qualified contractors, we can prepare the necessary bidding documents. We can help you determine which bid may give you the best value in terms of the contractor’s reputation, expertise, quality of work, and reliability. We can also help you evaluate a contractor by using a standard Contractor’s Qualification Statement (AIA Document A305), available through our offices or local AIA Chapter, to verify the contractor’s background, history, references, and financial stability. When completed by the contractor, this form provides a sworn, notarized statement with appropriate attachments to assess important aspects of the contractor’s qualifications.

Interpreting Contract Requirements

Due to their complexity and technical nature, construction projects are typically described in language and symbols that are unfamiliar to the average homeowner. We understand the language of construction and can help you protect yourself from incorrect interpretations of contract requirements by the contractor. The general conditions of the AIA Owner / Contractor Agreement assigns us the role of a shortstop intermediary in disputes between you and a contractor before a controversy goes to formal arbitration or litigation.

Managing the Bidding Process

We can help provide a sense of fairness in the bidding process that is appreciated by both contractors and homeowners. By organizing the project requirements clearly, we can help minimize the

possibility for bidders to misinterpret your project's requirements. You and your architect have worked hard to envision your project. With our additional assistance, you can expect that a bidder's proposal matches the project scope that you have in mind.

Evaluating Contractors' Proposals

As the homeowner, a bid that is 30 percent lower than all others might seem the best deal. However, we would immediately suspect that the bidder omitted something from the bid, made a mathematical error, or did not prepare the bid carefully. You might assume that a low bidder has to do the project for the bid amount. But we understand that builders can make commitments they sometimes cannot fulfill. For a building project to be a success, it is crucial that the contractor selection process consider all factors.

Identifying Construction Project Early On

Everyone can make mistakes, and not all problems can be foreseen when pen meets paper. When a project runs smoothly, problems discovered during construction are quickly corrected. Of all the members on the project team, your architect has the best mental picture of how the project's components relate to each other and how to make those corrections. We have the experience to spot problems and deviations early on, before they can become too expensive or difficult to correct. Visit the job site and administer construction.

The creative problem-solving skills provided by your architect during the project design stage are still available to you during the construction phase. With your architect personally administering construction, you get informed reports of the project's progress, a trained eye toward quality control and protection against work that is not according to plan. With any building project, the familiar caution holds true: Expect the unexpected. Unanticipated problems - and opportunities - will arise during the course of construction. With an intimate knowledge of your project's history, your architect is a valuable asset in seizing new opportunities that are consistent with your design objectives.

Determining When the Project is Complete

Evaluating the point at which a project is complete is not as simple as it seems. In the last stages of construction, both you and the contractor are tired and eager to move on. Your contractor may consider a project is complete sooner than you. Your architect can weigh the state of completion against the contract requirements and fairly note any items that remain to be completed. Naturally, there can be tension between a contractor's desire to get paid as much as possible as soon as possible, and your need to see that payments are in proper proportion to the work that is completed. We have the expertise to assess the contractor's payment requests fairly. As your adviser, we can help prevent overpayment so that the contractor doesn't get paid until all obligations to you are fulfilled.

To Renovate or Not to Renovate

We can help you decide. The costs of renovating should be weighed against the value of your house, neighborhood real estate values and the availability of other properties that could meet your needs. Many times, renovations are not, or are just barely, cost effective. Kitchens and master bedrooms typically bring a higher return on your investment than other spaces or amenities. When analyzing your wants and needs, you should ask yourself: Do you want to improve your house for you and your family or to increase its resale value? If you intend to move three to five years after the renovation is complete, it may not be worthwhile going through the renovation process. It's easy for renovation projects to snowball when you begin to consider existing utilities, wiring, insulation, and windows - even finishing touches such as window coverings, furnishings, and artwork.

Meeting with us to plan your renovation sets the stage for building cost-efficiency into your project. By setting parameters early in the renovation process, we can help you control costs before construction begins. We will help you understand how you use the space you have now, and how you'll use the space you want to create through the renovation. Do you want formal, quiet space separate from common areas or airy, informal space? Have you thought about how the renovated space could be designed to fit your family as it changes in the future? Have you thought about how the space could serve a dual-purpose, such as a home office that can double as a second bedroom? Designing for multiple purposes can minimize the additional square footage you'll need and maximize the square footage you'll create. For example, you might want to expand the living room to provide quiet space for reading and occasional work at home. But after exploring how your family currently uses space, we might demonstrate how the space and privacy you desire is best attained by creating a large master bedroom instead. We have the knowledge and experience to show you the possibilities.

Seeing Through Walls and Floors

Behind those walls and beneath that floor can lie potential problems, especially in older homes; plumbing, wiring, heating ducts and foundations. It's important to consider how these systems might be affected by your renovation and the potential effect this could have on your budget. Outdated wiring may not support the increased power needs of your modern home office or family

- **Step 1. Deciding What to Build**

This first stage, called programming, is probably the most valuable time you will spend with us. It is at this time you discuss the requirements for your structure; how many rooms, what function it will have, who will use it and how. It is also the time when you begin to test the fit between what you want, what you need, and what you can spend. Don't come in with solutions already decided upon. Be prepared to explore new and creative ideas. Be very frank about how you want the end result to feel and work. We will ask you lots of questions to get a better sense of your goals and needs and to determine, in our judgment, if your expectations match your budget. We may suggest changes based upon knowledge, experi-

ence, and your budget. After thoroughly discussing your functional requirements, we may prepare a statement outlining the scope of your project. During the next step, your program will be realized.

- **Step 2. Rough Sketches**

If you have defined what is to be built, we will then prepare a series of rough sketches, known as schematic designs. These sketches will show you the general arrangement of rooms and of the site. If you have difficulty understanding the sketches (many people do), ask us to explain. Depending on the project, we often make models of the design to help better visualize it. These sketches are not “finished” construction documents. They are meant to show possible approaches for you to consider. We will refine and revise the sketches until a solution is developed that you agree meets your needs. At this point, we will also give you a rough preliminary estimate of construction cost. Remember, there are still many more details to be established about your project and that this cost estimate is very general. It is hard to predict market conditions, the availability of materials, and other unforeseen situations that could drive up costs. Therefore, this figure must include a healthy contingency to cover cost changes that arise as the design matures. Don't panic if these first sketches seem different from what you first envisioned. Ask how these designs satisfy the requirements you discussed in the first stage. It is vital that you and your architect are clear about what you want and what we intend to design. It is much easier to make changes now when your project is on paper, than later on when foundations have been poured and walls erected. Before proceeding to the next phase, we will ask for your approval of these sketches.

- **Step 3. Refining the Design**

This step, called design development, is when the architect prepares more detailed drawings to illustrate other aspects of the proposed design. The floor plans show all the rooms in the correct size and shape. When looking at these drawings, try to imagine yourself actually using the spaces. Ask yourself: Do the traffic patterns flow well? Do I have a good sense of what it will look like? Do I like how it looks? Do I agree with the selection of wall and ceiling finishes, door types, windows, etc.?

- **Step 4. Preparing Construction Documents**

At this point, we prepare construction documents, the detailed drawings and specifications which the contractor will use to establish actual construction cost and to build the project. These drawings and specifications become part of the contract. When construction documents are finished, you are ready to hire the general contractor or builder.

- **Step 5. Hiring A Contractor**

There are a number of ways to select a contractor. We can make recommendations, or if you already have someone you want to work with, you might send the construction documents to him or her and negotiate fees and costs. Or you may wish to choose among several contractors you've asked to submit bids on the job. We will help you prepare the bidding documents, which consist of drawings and specifications as well as invitations to bid and instructions to bidders. The bidding documents are then sent to several contractors, who within a given period of time, reply with bids which include the cost for building your project. The lowest bidder is often selected to do the work, but not always. We will help you make the contractor selection based on the best value. While we can recommend contractors and assist in the selection process, the final choice is up to you. Some people prefer to act as their own general contractor or to do part or all of the construction themselves. These methods can save you money initially but can also add problems and costs later on. Discuss the pros and cons of these methods with us to help you decide what will work best for you.

- **Step 6. Construction**

This final step is often the most anxiety-producing part of the whole process. Up until now, your project has been confined to intense discussion, planning, and two-dimensional drawings. When construction begins, your project moves from an abstraction to a physical reality. Our involvement normally does not stop with the preparation of construction documents. We also provide construction administration services. These services may include assisting you in hiring the contractor, making site visits, reviewing and approving the contractor's applications for payment, and keeping you informed of the project's progress. Even though we observe construction, the contractor is solely responsible for construction methods, techniques, schedules, and procedures. The contractor supervises and directs the construction work on the project. The path to a completed building project is paved with lots of challenges and uncertainty. There are literally hundreds of decisions to be made, decisions which have a strong impact on how the project looks and functions over time. We can ease the way by helping you avoid the wrong turns, but also can direct you to solutions you never considered. The result is a unique building project created to meet your specific needs, express your individuality, and provide enjoyment for everyone who uses it.