

## Article from the American Institute of Architects

### Why You Should Hire an Architect

#### Residential Projects

Few people realize how complicated it is to build--that is until they find themselves lost in the maze of design options, building codes, zoning laws, contractors, and so on. No two building projects are exactly alike, so there is no single, clear-cut path to follow.

The architect is the one professional who has the education, training, experience, and vision to guide you through the entire design and construction process, from helping you define what you want to build to helping you get the most for your construction dollar.

Whether you are remodeling, adding on, or building from scratch, the architect can guide the way. Working with contractors and other construction professionals, architects can help you end up with a well-designed project that meets your needs and works with your budget and time frame.

#### 6 Steps Toward Building a Home

Design and construction projects involve several steps. Typically, projects go through the following six phases. However, on some projects, several of these steps may be combined; on others there may be additional steps.

##### Step 1 : Deciding What to Build

This first stage, called programming, is probably the most valuable time you will spend with your architect. It is at this time you discuss the requirements for your building: how many rooms, what function the structure 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. The architect will ask you lots of questions to get a better sense of your goals and needs and to determine if your expectations match your budget. The architect may suggest changes based upon knowledge, experience, and your budget. After thoroughly discussing your functional requirements, the architect will prepare a statement outlining the scope of your project. During the next step, your program will be realized.

##### Step 2 : Rough Sketches

Once you have defined what is to be built, the architect will then do 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 the architect to explain. Depending on the project, some architects will also 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. The architect will refine and revise the sketches until a solution is developed that you agree meets the needs of your project. At this point, the architect 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 your architect 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 the architect intends 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, the architect 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. Outline specifications are prepared listing the major materials and room finishes.

When looking at these drawings, try to imagine yourself actually using the spaces. Ask yourself: Do the traffic patterns flow well? Does each space serve the intended purpose? 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.?

Based on these drawings, the architect will prepare a more detailed estimate, though final costs will actually depend on market conditions. Review every element with your architect to make sure you are getting the most out of your construction dollar.

#### **Step 4 : Preparing Construction Documents**

At this point, the architect prepares 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 the Contractor**

There are a number of ways to select a contractor. Your architect 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. The architect will help you prepare the bidding documents, which consist of drawings and specifications as well as invitations to bid and instruction 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.

While the architect 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 your architect to help you decide what will work best.

#### **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 renderings. When construction begins, your project moves from an abstraction to a physical reality.

The architect's involvement normally does not stop with the preparation of construction documents. Architects 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.

While the architect observes 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.

The architect can ease the way by helping you avoid wrong turns, but also can direct you to solutions you never considered. The result is a unique building project created to meet your needs, express your individuality, and provide enjoyment for everyone who uses it.

#### **20 Questions to Ask Yourself Before Getting Started**

1. Describe your current home. What do you like about it? What's missing? What don't you like?
2. Do you want to change the space you have?
3. Do you want to build a new home?
4. Why do you want to build a house or add to or renovate your current home? Do you need more room? Are children grown and moving on? Is your lifestyle changing?

5. What is your life-style? Are you at home a great deal? Do you work at home? Do you entertain often? How much time do you spend in the living areas, bedrooms, kitchen, den or office, utility space, etc.?
6. How much time and energy are you willing to invest to maintain your home?
7. If you are thinking of adding on, what functions/activities will be housed in a new space?
8. What kind of spaces do you need, e.g., bedrooms, expanded kitchen, bathrooms, etc.?
9. How many of those spaces do you think you need?
10. What do you think the addition/renovation/new home should look like?
11. If planning on a new home, what do you envision in this home that you don't have now?
12. How much can you realistically afford to spend?
13. How soon would you like to be settled into your new home or addition? Are there rigid time constraints?
14. If you are contemplating building a home, do you have a site selected?
15. Do you have strong ideas about design styles? What are your design preferences?
16. Who will be the primary contact with the architect, contractor, and others involved in designing and building your project? (It is good to have one point of contact to prevent confusion and mixed messages.)
17. What qualities are you looking for in an architect?
18. How much time do you have to be involved in the design and construction process?
19. Do you plan to do any of the work yourself?
20. How much disruption in your life can you tolerate to add on to or renovate your home?

#### **20 Questions to Ask the Architect**

1. What does the architect see as important issues or considerations in your project? What are the challenges of the project?
2. How will the architect approach your project?
3. How will the architect gather information about your needs, goals, etc.?
4. How will the architect establish priorities and make decisions?
5. Who from the architecture firm will you be dealing with directly? Is that the same person who will be designing the project? Who will be designing your project?
6. How interested is the architect in this project?
7. How busy is the architect?
8. What sets this architect apart from the rest?
9. How does the architect establish fees?
10. What would the architect expect the fee to be for this project?
11. What are the steps in the design process?
12. How does the architect organize the process?
13. What does the architect expect you to provide?
14. What is the architect's design philosophy?
15. What is the architect's experience/track record with cost estimating?

**16.** What will the architect show you along the way to explain the project? Will you see models, drawings, or sketches?

**17.** If the scope of the project changes later in the project, will there be additional fees? How will these fees be justified?

**18.** What services does the architect provide during construction?

**19.** How disruptive will construction be? How long does the architect expect it to take to complete your project?

**20.** Do you have a list of past clients that your firm has worked with?

## **Use a Good Contract**

### **Explanation of AIA Contracts**

The documents produced by the AIA are the most widely used standard form contracts in the construction industry. They facilitate communication among all the parties involved in construction, which makes it easier to produce a high quality project in a timely and economical fashion.

#### **AIA documents are fair.**

AIA contracts and forms are consensus documents that reflect advice from practicing architects, contractors, engineers as well as owners, surety bond producers, issuers and attorneys. AIA documents balance the interest of all the parties, so not one interest, including that of the architect, is unfairly presented.

#### **AIA documents reflect industry practices, not theory.**

Where practices are inconsistent or no guidelines for practices exist, the AIA documents provide a consensus-based model for practitioners to follow.

#### **AIA documents reflect changing construction practices and technology.**

AIA documents are revised regularly to accommodate changes in professional and industry practices, insurance and technology.

#### **AIA documents reflect the law.**

AIA documents are revised and updated to incorporate changes resulting from court interpretations and rulings, legal precedent, and nuances.

#### **AIA documents are flexible.**

AIA documents can be easily modified to accommodate individual project demands. Such changes are easily distinguished from the original, printed language.

#### **AIA documents are easy to interpret.**

AIA documents use the common meaning of words and phrases. Industry and legal jargon is avoided whenever possible.

## **Contracts for Residential Projects**

### **Type of Project**

When the owner's project is:

- (1) small, such as a residential renovation or addition;
- (2) straight-forward in design;
- (3) blessed with established, good working relationships among the project team;
- (4) of short duration - less than one year from start of design to completion of construction; and
- (5) without delivery complications such as competitive bidding, it may be appropriate to use the small project family.

### **Contract Document Family**

Small Project Family: A105, A205, B155

### **Description**

This family of documents is suitable for small projects such as residential renovation, additions, and other projects of relatively low cost and brief duration.