

What You Need to Know before You Build or Renovate: Demystifying the Architect's Role

by Emilia F. Ferri, AIA

Planning your dream home, renovating an existing residence, creating additional spaces or simply modernizing current conditions? You may have asked yourself these questions: When do I hire an architect? Do I even need one? What should I expect when working with one?

Architects are not only responsible for the aesthetics and functionality of spatial conditions, but most importantly, the health, safety and welfare of you and your family. There are four phases an architect will proceed with: programming, schematic design, design development and construction documents.

▶▶ **Programming:** A designer will start with the existing conditions of the project at hand, evaluating what can and cannot be achieved based on the desires, budget, site, and overall project constraints.

▶▶ **Schematic Design:** A designer will provide her/his expertise by responding to and interpreting the client's early design intent and concepts.

▶▶ **Design Development:** This stage will further expand upon design components, details and the function of spaces and systems.

▶▶ **Construction Documents:** A complete set of drawings are prepared for estimating and furnished to builders to get competitive bids for construction.

Architects orchestrate and keep clients abreast of the customization and organization that transpires when planning their home. In addition, the architect will identify, analyze, and manage issues that may arise not only during the design phase, but also during construction. Beyond design, architects may be hired for, but not limited to:

▶▶ **Managing** the design schedule

▶▶ **Designing** according to current building codes (setbacks, size and height restrictions, etc.)

▶▶ **Coordinating** technical trades (electrical, mechanical, plumbing, engineering, etc.)

▶▶ **Legalizing** previously non-complying work done

▶▶ **Monitoring** budget limitations

Choosing the right architect with a compatible vision and style can generate confidence and build a professional rapport, which is critical in achieving a successful project. In my architectural practice, I encourage open lines of communication with my clients. This limits misunderstandings and can help expedite design decisions.

Not all designers are the same. Here are some tips for choosing a well-suited architect for you and your project:

▶▶ **Credentials:** Ask if they are a licensed or accredited professional.

▶▶ **Portfolio:** Review previous work.

▶▶ **Personality:** Are you compatible?

▶▶ **References:** Ask for previous client referrals.

▶▶ **Compensation:** Determine how they will charge for their fees: stipulated sum, percentage of construction cost, or hourly rates.



An architect's fee varies vastly, depending on the extent of design contracted for. One client may be looking for a spatial layout, versus another searching for detailed design drawings that are ready for construction. Architects can also be hired to manage or periodically review construction progress as an owner's representative.

How long does it take? Most of us are intrigued and enchanted by the magical transformations we see during the 60-minute segment of our favorite home makeover show. We are attracted to the speedy construction and spectacular finish, yet "reality TV" does not show the lengthy process and development of the entire design and construction duration. Each project varies in duration, but by reviewing the design schedule with the architect and the construction schedule with the contractor in advance, a client can fully grasp the extent of their specific project.

Cost/Benefit. Though using an architect may add to the overall project budget of your new home or renovation/addition, the detailed drawings can also save you money by enabling you to get competitive bids from builders. In today's competitive market, many astute buyers in this part of the country are now more often asking for an architect's expertise.

Architects are not only responsible for the aesthetics and functionality of spatial conditions, but most importantly, the health, safety and welfare of you and your family.

A well-designed and executed project is likely to add value to your property by enhancing its aesthetic appeal and functionality. By choosing an architect with the right skills, aptitude, diligence and collaborative personality, you are more likely to achieve paramount results and have a spectacular unveiling yourself.



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