

THE 5 FACTORS OF HIRING AN ARCHITECT

If you haven't worked with an architect before, it can be daunting to say the least. First, make sure the architect you select is licensed by the state in which your project is located. This immediately eliminates any technical concerns. But, keep in mind that some states do not require an architect to hold a license to design a home or remodel one. Additionally, an architect licensed in one state may be eligible for reciprocity in another (just a note here: "AIA" after someone's name does not mean they are licensed in your state, it means they are a member of the American Institute of Architects, an organization of architects and other professionals who pay a fee each year to be a member. This has nothing to do with a particular state license).

HOW DO I FIND THE ARCHITECT?

Ask for recommendations from:

- friends that have used an architect
- business associates that have used an architect
- local building department
- acquaintances' that have used an architect
- realtors
- builders
- American Institute of Architects
- the internet (this is the least desirable way to find an architect)

HIRE AN ARCHITECT THAT SPECIALIZES IN LUXURY HOMES

While architects design many different types of buildings and become quite well known for quality architecture, luxury homes require specific luxury home experience. You want an architect that focuses on the luxury home market and is up to date on the latest market trends. The architect should be constantly updating his library of products and specifications and is familiar with latest materials and techniques in residential construction.

When you interview: don't be afraid to ask, "Are you going to be the one working with me all the way through the project?" smaller, more focused firms are typically more attentive and the principal handles the design process from start to finish. This enables continuity and consistent design thoughts throughout the process.

JUST AN ADDED EXPENSE:

You really can't afford to design and build without an architect. An architect, with his technical expertise, can design the structure of the home in a safe yet economical way. He knows how to specify the project so that you get the most out of your money and can offer many alternative construction products and processes that can have a positive impact on your budget. An architect's design can reduce on-going energy and maintenance costs. An architect can help you find quality contractors and help you negotiate and administer the construction process. Architects offer a varied amount of services and structure fees several ways; on a % of construction costs, a cost per square foot, hourly or a combination of these. Begin with a budget 6%-15% of the overall construction cost for architect fees, however, the more famous, busy and better known the architect is ...the more his fees will be.

WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE THE DESIGN THEY CREATE:

After the architect understands what you are looking for, he prepares sketch ideas of floor plans and the exterior. If you don't like what you see, you part ways. For this reason, it is recommended that you start with your architect on an hourly basis until you determine that you are on the same page. Most architects allow you out of their contract if you aren't happy with the way the design or process is going. It is very important that you find multiple ways to

communicate with your architect: lists, pictures, magazine clippings, etc. the more you give your architect the better he can understand what you are envisioning.

THEY'RE CREATIVE BUT NOT TOO BUDGET CONSCIOUS:

Be honest with your architect on the budget. You have to work together to get this right, so there is no point in being anything other than open and frank. Ask your architect about his history of coming in on budget. What does he do when he realizes that the design isn't going to come in on budget? Make sure the architect gives you updates on the budget as often as possible during the design process.

AN ARCHITECT IS HARD TO WORK WITH:

You've may have heard horror stories of dominant professionals that dictate their design agendas onto their clients. They work on a design and say "here it is! You're going love it, trust me." Presenting a kind of the take it or leave it mentality. Those are not the norm, but rather the exceptions, the artistic prima donnas.

Generally speaking, architects are well educated, technically proficient and posses an artistic side. They are great at envisioning ideas and spaces, and are unique problem-solvers. If you maintain open lines of communication and talk to them about how they see the design process going with you will have a successful experience. If they keep pushing their ideas instead of listening to you and creating what you want, then it's time to look for another architect. Ask to see some of their previous designs and have them take you thru the design process on those particular designs. Ask how those clients communicated their ideas to the architect, and how they prefer to be communicated to.

Your architect should be a joy to work with and you should be excited each and every time you meet and review the design progress. The process of designing and building a new home should be full of excitement and anticipation, not dread and headaches. Hiring the right architect can go a long way toward making your experience a happy one.