



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

AN ARCHITECT'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

As part of their education and training, architects acquire specialized knowledge in building, design, and construction. As an advocate for the home owner, an architect's first obligation is to ensure that plans are executed as designed. This is especially important during construction if changes in materials and construction procedures are proposed. An architect's services encompass the following:

Programming

The initial phase in which the architect and home owner discuss the goals, needs, and function of the project; design expectations and available budget; and pertinent building code and zoning regulations. The architect assists home owners in developing a realistic design and budget estimate through a life-cycle cost analysis, which calculates the design's expected future impact on operating and maintenance costs. Following the initial discussions, an architect will produce an outline of the scope of the proposed project.

Schematic design

The architect provides concept sketches of design options and explains how they meet the requirements discussed in the programming stage. The overall scope of the project, building materials proposed, and a preliminary budget related to the schematic design is also discussed. Refinements are discussed until the home owner approves the design.

Design development:

The architect prepares detailed drawings and finalizes the design plans, showing actual sizes and shapes for rooms. Also included is an outline of the construction specifications, which lists the major materials to be used. When the home owner approves the design drawings, the architect prepares a cost estimate.

Construction documents

One of the most important elements of an architect's services. The architect develops detailed drawings and materials specifications. The contractor will use both to estimate construction costs and to build the project.

Hiring the contractor

The home owner has several options available, including asking the architect to make contractor recommendations or choosing a contractor on their own. The architect can assist the home owner in selecting contractors by reviewing bids and estimates based on the construction documents.

Construction phase

The architect represents the home owner to the contractor and observes the pace and quality of construction. As the home owner's agent, the architect looks out for the home owner's interest, making the construction process go smoothly by keeping the homeowner informed of the project's progress and overseeing any changes or problems that may arise with the project.

The process works in the following manner. In home building, a lot's size and location represent a sizable amount of the total cost of a new home. An architect helps determine the best location of the house for the home owner's needs through the process of programming, examining all of the project variables and home owner needs prior to the design stage.

Understanding the site's characteristics as well as home owner's needs and financial resources is essential to create an intelligent design, developed to best use available square footage, yet flexible enough to change as future needs require. Above all, the design is balanced between the home owner's program and budget and local building and zoning codes, focusing on long-term resale value so home owners get the maximum benefit of their investment in property.

Written contracts to make life easier

AIA architects use forms of agreement first developed in the 1880s that have been carefully modified and tested over many years. These contracts are widely accepted in the construction industry and represent a current consensus among organizations representing owners, lawyers, contractors, engineers, and architects.

AIA contracts are coordinated, designed to work in sets as needed and with the flexibility to cover every aspect of the agreement between an owner and an architect. The agreements thoroughly cover all the roles, responsibilities, and obligations of the owner and architect.

Also, the AIA provides a written contract intended for use with small projects, such as residential renovations and additions. These contracts outline each phase of an architect's services, helping home owners better understand the type and quality of services expected from an architect.

Before proceeding with a project, an AIA architect prepares an agreement that includes the scope of work, services and responsibilities of the architect, home owner responsibilities, construction budget and schedule, and architect's compensation. The contract also addresses the architect's role should scheduling or quality-control issues arise while the project is under construction. Under no circumstances should a home owner proceed with a project unless the architect provides a detailed written contract. Also, the home owner should consult legal counsel before signing these agreements.

Choosing an architect

Each architect has a unique style, approach to design, and method of working. The best building projects result when architect and client work as a team. Home owners should be prepared to take an active role in decision-making throughout the process.

Begin the search for an architect by building a list of potential architects and firms. Contact a local AIA chapter for the names of architects and firms that specialize in residential projects. Because architects must obtain a state license to practice, a state's consumer affairs department may also provide guidance. Additionally, both the AIA and the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards maintain a list of all licensed U.S. architects.

Call several architects and firms, describe the project, ask if the architect is available, and request literature outlining qualifications and experience. Narrow the list and schedule interviews to determine how well the architect or firm understands the project expectations.

Review background on key personnel, call references, and if possible visit previously completed local projects. Ask questions concerning design philosophy, interest in the project, anticipated budget and fees, and the person who will actually design the project. To make the final selection, evaluate the past experience, technical expertise, and creative design skills of the primary candidates to determine who can best meet the needs and requirements of the project.

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