

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

After you have selected and briefed the Architect and developed your program, you are ready to enter into the “design” phases.

Schematic Design

This is the first of three phases the architect refers to when designing the home. During this phase the architect will begin to explore the relationships between the uses you’ve outlined and the spaces/rooms as he creates the design of the home. This is all done with the site and the desired views in mind. Fitting the home on the site, view corridors, access, topographical impacts, etc. the Architect will investigate applicable municipal codes, zoning requirements, homeowner association restrictions and Architectural review committees.

Typically the Architect will present a few ideas to the Owner as this phase progresses. This is done to make sure he is on the same page (design/functionality-wise) as the Owner. It does no one any good to get too far down the path with ideas that are not what the Owner wants. Note: not all Architects involve the Owner in this phase. Some formulate the design (based on the program) and then present the idea to the client at the end of this phase. Others work on two or three solutions and present them to the Owner and let them “pick” the design he will proceed with. The drawings and sketches presented to the Owner at this phase are simple and are basically trying to communicate the flow of the design and the scale. A dimensioned preliminary floor plan(s) is typically reviewed, along with sections and possibly some 3D sketches or computerized views. Some leave the 3D and exterior elevations to the next phase. You should definitely ask the Architect prior to starting this phase, how much involvement you will have in this phase and what types of drawings you expect to see. Also, you may want to ask what consultants the Architect plans on using: lighting designer, civil engineer, structural engineer, HVAC designer, and how you will interact with them, if at all.

Once an approved design is in hand, you may want to consider hiring an interior designer to assist in selecting finishes and colors. The interior designer will “decorate” the design. This can be a bone of contention with many Architects, who would prefer they be brought in to the process after the next phase when the design is complete, and some Architects don’t want designers involved at all. Be sure to discuss this with your Architect sooner rather than later. Don’t forget to get an updated building budget for the design you decide to proceed with before moving into the next phase.

Design Development

This phase is exactly what it sounds like: design development. After you have signed off on a design in the previous phase, the Architect will prepare more defined drawings, building elevations, building sections, sketch details that will clearly communicate the design to you. This will include general plumbing, electrical and HVAC drawings as well.

An outline of the specifications is prepared by the Architect clearly identifying the materials to be used and their quality. Later they will include installation instructions. These specs are very important for you to review. The specific stone that is going to be used on the outside of the home, the drywall, the lumber, the roofing clay tiles or slate, recessed lighting, furnace and ac units, plumbing fixtures and so much more is detailed in these specs. They should be as complete as possible. You can opt to select items later in the process. You can even wait until construction. Items such as the kitchen cabinet manufacturer, the counter top material, tile

flooring, carpet, the Architect can call these out for selection later and instruct the builder or general contractor to include a dollar “allowance” in his bid for these items. ***However, it is in your best interest to select as much as you can with your Architect and include it in the specs and the budget, the less unknowns going into construction the better!***

You should be fully comfortable with the documents you review, understand them completely and ask for clarification or more drawings as needed to fully communicate the design. Once you sign off on this phase, the design is complete and the Architect prepares the final drawings (construction documents phase) these drawings (you receive and review as well) but are primarily for construction purposes. They are detailed such that a contractor can build the home with minimal questions for the Owner or Architect during construction.

Construction Documents Phase

The Architect during this phase is preparing final drawings and specifications that will ultimately be sent out for contractor pricing. There is no need for you to be involved in this phase other than receiving a set of documents once completed by the Architect.

Bidding and Negotiation Phase

Prior to getting to this phase, the Architect and Owner have decided on a type of project delivery, either a negotiated contract basis or a competitively bid basis. The first is where the contractor or builder has been decided upon prior to bidding. The second is where 3 or more qualified contractors/builders bid on the job, and then one is selected by the Owner. Either way, the Architect begins this phase by sending prints to the contractor(s) with bidding instructions and other pertinent information. Once bids are received by the Owner, the Architect aids the Owner in analyzing the bids. The Architect provides the Owner with a contract form for use between the Owner and the contractor, usually an AIA, (American Institute of Architects) form. The Owner should consult with his attorney before entering into a construction contract.

Contract Administration Phase

There are varying opinions on this phase. Some Owners hire the architect to see that the project is built per the construction documents, manage change orders, approve contractor’s request for payment, review and manage the contractor’s punch list, determine substantial completion, approve final completion, collect and review waivers of lien and contractor’s final certificate of payment. Other Owners perform the above mentioned services for themselves, or negotiate to have the architect perform some of these services as needed.

It should be noted that the architect, in designing the project, includes being available to answer contractor questions during construction and providing clarification drawings or sketches if needed. This service is normally included in the fee for designing the project. If the requests for information become substantial, the architect may be entitled to compensation for this service.

Post Construction Phase

During this phase of services (if the Owner has so elected), the architect will prepare a schedule of maintenance services to be performed on the home each year. In addition, the architect will catalog all product brochures and warranties. The contractor will provide a list of contractors and suppliers for the home and their contact information. With this information at hand the Owner is well prepared to maintain his home investment.