



# HOW TO HIRE AN ARCHITECT

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## **Welcome.**

I prepared this guide after seeing so many people struggle with understanding the design and construction process. This process can seem like a complex and frightening roadblock for those who haven't been through it before. The first and most important step is to find and hire your architect.

You may be wondering: how do I find the right architect for my project? Do I really need to hire an architect? How much are architects fees? What about contractors? And most importantly: what are the key, critical steps I need to take to ensure that I hire the architect that is the perfect match for my project?

In the following pages, you will discover the answers to these questions – and more.

I hope you enjoy this guide and look forward to your feedback on the contents.

Thomas J. Curro, AIA



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Nothing is more exciting than creating a new building whether it's your home or a commercial project and nothing will affect the success of your project more than the right architect. The architect determines the design and function of a building as well as the emotional toll and financial costs involved in its construction. Finding your perfect match in an architect is not impossible and the following eight points can guide you along the way. Use these to help analyze the personality, design strategy and communication skills of your candidates. Your goal is to find the right architect for your project, for your budget and for you.

## **1. Finding an Architect**

Like many other fields, word of mouth is the best way to look for an architect. Ask family, friends and professional colleagues for referrals. Is there a particular home you admire? A knock on the door can yield an introduction to your project's potential architect. Professional organizations such as your city or country's local architectural institutions are also great sources to find architects. General contractors, interior design studios and other trade-related personnel would also be able to furnish some referrals. Be sure to visit web sites of your candidates. Look at their previous work. Get a feel for what is their design style and language – is it about blending in the neighborhood, is it environmentally sound designs or is it about making a big statement? Then, start a conversation. Make an appointment for a consultation. Meeting face to face will help you decide if it is a fit.

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## **2. An architect's biggest success and largest obstacle**

How will the architect approach your project? Let them know the most important aspects of your project and ask how they will be incorporated into a process. If you are doing a home remodel or an addition, start with what aspects of your home you currently like and ask how they can be improved? Typically, a remodel should try and blend seamlessly with the rest of the home. Ask how will this be achieved? Even though the architect might have an attractive portfolio and good references you will still want to make sure their design process and approach is right for you and your project.

## **3. Signature Style: Who's got it and do you want it?**

It is common for an architect to be known by a certain design style – Spanish colonial revival, ultra-modern, French country to name a few. Though most architects are able to adapt their signature style to what you want, think twice about hiring an architect with a neoclassical signature style to rehab your California craftsman style home. Have plenty of examples of the look you want; these can be found from catalogs, magazines or the Internet. Environmentally friendly, sustainable “green” designs and construction however can be applied to any style. Discuss the importance of these elements with your architect from the outset.

## **4. Meet your project Architect**

Signing a contract with an architect representing an architectural firm does not

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necessarily mean that person will be your project architect. Actually, outside of single-architect owned operations, this is common procedure. Be sure to meet the project architect before making any final decisions. Being able to communicate freely and openly with your project architect is vital to the success of your project. You should share a clear understanding of the project with your architect and feel completely comfortable.

### **5. 3-D modeling: Don't build your home without it**

Architects understand how elevations and floor plans translate into actual buildings; their clients necessarily don't. I know an established firm that was fired from a project because the homeowner, who approved the plans, thought the roof looked like a fast food restaurant even though the contractor had built per plan. So, what happened? There wasn't a 3-D model of the project. A 3-D model is the best way to see how your new home will look when built. Software today allows design reviewing from multiple angles and room walkthroughs. Being able to work in 3-D helps clients get better involved in the design process and they enjoy the viewing experience and "walking" through the space before it is built. Don't hesitate to ask for a 3-D model before the commencement of your project.

### **6. The full-service architectural firm**

Conceptual renderings and blueprints are not the only services architectural and planning firms provide. Ask about other services your candidate's firm offers. Ask about benefits of specific services to you and their corresponding costs. Ask your architect if there are any additional services offered and how they could be useful to

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you for your particular project. If a firm doesn't offer a requested service, they should be able to refer a firm that does.

Below is a glimpse into some additional services a typical architectural firm provides:

- Project Feasibility Studies
- Programming
- Master Planning
- Entitlements
- Evaluation Of Potential Building
- Architectural Design
- Traditional And Computer Renderings
- 3 Dimensional, Fly Through, Computer Visualization
- Comprehensive Construction Documents
- Leed ® Coordination And Certification Assistance
- Detailed Cost Estimates
- Furniture, Furnishings & Equipment Specifications
- Construction Administration

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## 7. Figuring out the fees

Typically, an architect's fee is calculated as a percentage of the project's entire cost (minus the architect's fee of course). Depending on the services provided by the architect, the rate could range from 5 to 20 percent. However, when you first start the design process for your project, it is difficult, if not impossible to accurately determine the final project cost. During this initial time period (before a good estimate of the final project cost is possible) the architect may charge an hourly fee or a retainer. The retainer or hourly fee will be credited towards the total architectural fee once it has been determined. Billing monthly is the industry standard. Also, ask when payment is expected and the preferred method of payment, i.e. check, credit card, etc. Keep in mind that the architect's fee applies to all the costs of your project. Examples of project costs are the construction budget as well as consultant fees such as environmental impact studies or structural engineering fees. The most important thing about fees is complete transparency. Insist upon it.

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## 8. Hiring a Contractor

An experienced architect should have a list of contractors they like to work with. Your architect should be able to help you choose the best contractor for your project. Always get multiple bids on the construction of your project – even if you already have a contractor. This is an industry standard and gives you better leverage at the bargaining table. Additionally, having a contractor during the design process ensures you will not be building more than you can afford.

These tips are meant as a guide to choosing the best architect for your project. You will be working very closely with your architect on what may be one of the biggest investments of your life. Not only are an architect's answers to your questions important, but how they are answered speaks volumes, too. Did they take time for details to clear up any confusion? Did you feel comfortable with them? Did they conduct business in a transparent manner? The creation process is exciting but can get intimidating at times, however choosing the right team can make it an enjoyable process. That team always starts with choosing the right architect and we hope these tips will help you with that for your next project.

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## The Next Step

**Congratulations!** You now have the key information that will help you lay a successful foundation for understanding how to find and hire an architect.

Unfortunately, I can't include every important piece of information about this most important step in the design and construction process successfully in this guide.

Actually, that would be impossible because each project is unique and the requirements differ based on a multitude of factors. But with the 8 steps explained in this guide, you have the critical information to help you hire the architect that will ensure that your project is a success.

If you are in the process of looking for an architect for your project, let's talk. I can help you wade through the necessary requirements and make sure you aren't overlooking a crucial factor that could doom your project to failure. I offer a custom **needs and options review** where I will identify the specific requirements pertaining to your project and your available options.

Typically, the **needs and options review** saves my clients *thousands of dollars* and *weeks* of lost time, not to mention the stress and headache of getting something wrong.

To learn more about the **needs and options review** as well as the price for this service and why it is critically important to your project's success, visit my website at [www.curroarchitects.com](http://www.curroarchitects.com). If you are ready to talk now, please give me a call at 914.662.2827.

Best wishes for the success of your project!

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