



Selecting Your Architect

Whether you are building, renovating or remodeling your own home or designing a commercial complex, choosing the right architect is vital to a successful project.

- **Finding the right firm**

Architecture firms come in a variety of sizes and types ranging from sole practitioners to very large firms with staffs of 100 or more. Some firms specialize in one or more project or facility types. Others have very specific specialties. Some firms include in-house engineering (structural, mechanical, electrical, etc.). Each architectural firm brings its own combination of skills, expertise, interests and values to its projects. All good architects will listen to you and translate your ideas into a viable construction project.

- **Introduce an architect as early as possible into the project**

Architects can help you define the project in terms that provide meaningful guidance for design. They may also do site studies, help apply for planning and zoning approvals and offer a variety of other pre-design services.

- **Interview more than one firm**

An interview addresses an issue that can't be covered by brochures or a firm's website – the chemistry between you and the architecture firm.

Unless you have a special relationship with a particular firm, it is recommended that you interview three to five firms. Talk to firms that have designed buildings or projects that you have particularly admired or that seem appropriate. Contact other owners who have developed similar facilities and speak to them about their experience working with their architect.

Be frank. Provide the architect with as much information as possible about what you know and what you expect. Choose your architect as carefully as you would your dentist or doctor.

- **Request the appropriate information from the firm**

Ask to see projects the firm has designed that are similar in type and size to yours or that have addressed similar issues. Ask them to indicate how they will approach your project and who will be working

on it, including consultants. Ask for the names of other owners you may contact.

Your architect can help you analyze your project's requirements and select the appropriate services.

- **After a selection has been made**

Yours will be a business relationship. The more on the table at the outset, the better the chances are for a successful project. Once you have selected the best firm, enter into detailed negotiations regarding services and compensation.

- **Use AIA Contract Documents**

AIA Contract Documents offer an excellent starting point for negotiations. These standard forms of agreement, first developed in the 1880's, have been carefully reviewed, court-tested and modified over many years of practice.

Even the simplest of projects can be very complex. Each situation is different, including people, needs, site and financing and regulatory requirements. Many of the owner's needs and expectations come into focus only in the process of design. As the owner and architect mutually evaluate alternative approaches to the project's design, priorities are clarified and new possibilities emerge. A good relationship with your architect will ensure that this process will progress successfully.

This information was originally written for the American Institute of Architects by AIA Honor Award recipient David Havilland, professor of architecture at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and is updated periodically to reflect industry practices.