

TEN WAYS TO MAKE WORKING WITH YOUR RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT MORE SUCCESSFUL

Many people feel a slightly queasy motion in their belly when they even think of needing an architect. Their minds fill with horror stories of arrogant artists and outrageous cost overruns. Fortunately not all architects fit the stereotype. But even if yours does, here are 10 things you can do to make working with your architect more successful.

1. Wake up your architect. Many people think that it helps to have as much done as possible before they call an architect. That's their first mistake. Better results occur if they talk to the architect before they go out looking for land or seeking financing. A short conversation can result in a realistic preliminary budget, a coherent description of the project and an understanding of how the process can work for you. Get your architect on board with your project early. Yes, you should pay them for this.
2. Have your architect look at your dirt. Place is everything. Even if you are only considering a small addition to your home, the site is important. An architect sees what you may miss: how adjacent buildings affect your project; where utility easements limit height or width of your addition; where natural features like trees, a stream and slope may limit your project or increase the cost. New locations have even more of significance including: soil types, traffic and adjacent noise sources, prevailing wind patterns and apparent setback requirements. A lot of information can be determined by looking at real estate sales documents and local zoning ordinances as well.
3. Have your architect redesign your pocketbook. No, I didn't say empty it. I said redesign it. How much you can build depends on how much you can afford. But there are many ways to get there. The design process goes from the general to the specific and financial calculations can work the same way. The architect can give you in a few minutes a rough estimate of how much your project is likely to cost simply based on the probable amount of construction. As more information is developed a more accurate cost opinion can be generated. If you allow your architect to assist you in setting a realistic budget you may find you can have all that you want by phasing construction. Your starter home can be the core of your dream home. You can start with a small structure and have the final work completed as your family grows. For financing, an architect can provide you with a preliminary design and an opinion of the probable cost (including a contingency). This will allow your bank to determine for you how the project's cost compares to it's value in the real estate market. This allows you to see immediately whether you need to rethink how big or how complicated your home will be. As you proceed, this becomes a guide that tells you your path to your dream home may not look like your neighbor's. Listen when your architect warns of high cost from feature overload.
4. Have your architect tailor your project to eliminate project waste. Bigger is not necessarily better. Many people believe they need a larger home when the real problem is that their home is inefficiently designed or does not really fit their life style. Pay your architect to sit down with you and determine how much space you really need. Focus on how you want to live and not on how much square footage your neighbor has. Architects call this process programming. You can think of it as making sure you only pay for what you need while making sure that everything

you need, you get.

5. Take a foreign language lesson from your architect. Architects, like many other professionals, speak a technical language all their own. There is a legal language of architecture as well. Whenever your architect has given you a document to review or has used a word you don't understand, don't be embarrassed to ask about it. In fact you might set aside a few minutes of each meeting to discuss the terms and jargon that he uses. This is critical to insure better communication. Better communication is critical to having the best project you can have. You ask your doctor about medical terminology and your lawyer about legal terminology. Ask your architect about design terminology.

6. Free your architect from the bonds of the mundane. To get a mundane project you really don't need an architect. Any uninformed person off the street will do. But to be a licensed architect means more than knowing how a building is built. It means knowing how people respond to buildings built in certain ways. The exam required for licensure includes a section on over 3000 years of architectural history. If you want to have an excellent project let your architect expand your experience. Many times clients ask for what they have seen. Or they respond with dislike for something they have experienced which did not appeal to them. The problem is that if you stick to these few experiences, you don't get the benefit of what you have not seen. Your architect has seen more. Allow her to take you to the design you would ask for, if you knew what to ask.

7. Let your architect review your ideas and desires. Have a relationship with your architect that allows you to discuss what you are interested in and allows the architect to respond. If you are interested in some exotic construction technique that the architect is not familiar with let him investigate it for you. His technical experience may save you from future problems. A person who acts as their own architect often gets the same quality of results as a person who acts as their own lawyer.

8. Have your architect create a choice for you. Two plans are better than one. Most people feel like they are hiring an architect to create the one perfect plan. Often there is more than one perfect plan. No two architects will create the exact same solution to a design problem. Most architects are quite capable of giving you two or more different solutions. Having them do so opens up a world of possibilities. Your perfect solution might include elements of both alternatives. You can not get to that point if you do not ask for two not one.

9. Invite your architect to show and tell. To have a project which really fits you, the architect has to know how you like to live and what is important to you. Within your home, is privacy more important or is community. How do you relate to the rest of the world? Would you prefer to lock it out or invite it in? Is security more important than connection to the environment? Is the use of natural materials and traditional methods more important than lowering the cost? Is the presence of natural light more important in your life that having an elaborately lit space at night? Or are they equally important?

10. Have tea with your architect often while building. There is no more important time to see your architect than while the building is being built. It allows your architect to make sure that the contractor understands how the finished structure is supposed to work. It allows for the clarification of information and occasionally the site inspired improvement to the design. It allows you the opportunity to understand what the contractor is doing and to have a knowledgeable person to discuss it with. Everyday may not be necessary. Try as often as you can though.

Source - AIA