

TEN WAYS TO GET MORE FROM YOUR ARCHITECT THAN YOU PAID FOR

Architecture is a complicated process that often results in a simple building. Many people look for ways to reduce the involvement of the architect thinking that will save them money. That is often an ineffective approach, as it tends to result in a less than satisfactory result. The following ten tips will help you get the most out of your architect. The goal is to have a satisfactory project without having it cost a great deal. Some of these suggestions are services you should get from your architect to make sure your result is impressive without being costly. Other things listed show you how to draw out your architect's knowledge and talent for your benefit. Still other things reduce your first cost but allow you to make improvements more easily in the future. All these items are less about paying your architect less than getting more value from your architect's work.

1. Show the architect the sketches, plans, and photographs you have collected but don't insist on her using them as presented. The architect can help you examine what you like about the plans and improve upon it. The architect can bring over 3000 years of historical perspective to your project. If you insist that what you present is best then you lose the opportunity to have better. Inspire rather than control.
2. Pay your architect to create a preliminary project assessment. When you get the first idea that you want to build an addition or a new building, call an architect then and pay her to look at the site and talk it over with you. If you don't have a site call them anyway. Ask her for a written report that gives you guidance on the design direction you should take, an opinion of how much the project should cost, and to note code restrictions that might apply to your project. This will allow you to get your project planning off on the right foot. It will also familiarize your architect with your project. Chances are she will start designing it and making notes on it long before you engage her to do an actual design.
3. Pay your architect to present a coherent concept that draws the project together. This is a step that most clients and more than a few architects are willing to omit. They do so at the peril of having a more expensive and less effective design. Great design gives the occupant the sense that everything fits together. Things which do not fit need not be done. The concept can be a simple spatial concept such as "the home is an indoor garden." Or it can be a simple aesthetic principle such as the home is a composition of horizontal planes and lines. The concept might be a visible interpretation of an ideological concept such as "security" or "openness." The concept can be inspired by the site and what's around it. Or it can spring forth from the architect's or owner's dreams. It need not be expressed literally nor followed so slavishly that project costs get out of line.
4. Pay your architect to work with a structural engineer to create an efficient structure. Architects are trained to understand and calculate structures. However structural engineers might have more creative ways to support the vision the architect creates. If you insist on the architect using a structural engineer, you can be sure that the architect will spend more time on the design with less worry about the structure. Because you involve a structural engineer you still have

assurance that this essential portion of the project is being well handled.

5. Pay your architect to prepare a graphic site analysis for your project. This is something that the architect might do in his head. You want him to show this information to you so that you can understand the site better. If you have a discussion with the architect about the site analysis, you can have an opportunity to affect the quality of the design and its fit in your life before any portion of the building is designed.

6. Pay your architect to consider future expansions and additions now. Architects are often as pragmatic as they are imaginative. As businesspeople they learn to give the owner what is requested and little else. By asking for this now you can make sure that any future work you might consider can be fit in with less difficulty. It might mean making a roof slightly higher now or a footing for a foundation a little wider but it can save you greatly by making future additions much less expensive to design and to build.

7. Take a lesson from your architect before they begin with design. Architects often love books about design and collect them like a philatelist collects stamps. Have your architect schedule some time to show you some of their collection—particularly those she might think would fit well to your project. Have her recommend before the meeting at least one design book you should read. Read it. Study the photographs. Allow your architect to open your eyes to possibilities you had not considered. They know a lot more than they will tell you unless you show interest. See the radical. See the foreign. See the outrageously expensive. Don't plan on duplicating anything you see but share inspiration with your architect. The time will be well spent if it lets your architect know what pleases and delights you. You get to learn about architecture. Your architect gets to learn about you. For extra credit show her your art collection. It is personal and reveals much about who you are and what you like.

8. Have your architect concentrate on no more than three special feature areas. This is a matter of establishing priorities. If you cannot afford to have every part of your project meticulously detailed, perhaps you can afford to have a few significant areas studied extensively and manage the handling of the rest in a simple fashion. You might select one public area like an entry or media room. You could select a couple of private areas such as an office or master bedroom suite. By not trying to have every possible feature you can have a higher quality for the feature areas you do choose.

9. Pay your architect to assist you with lighting, colors, and finish selection for the side of the house you use most—the inside. It is almost typical for new and sometimes even expensive homes, to be rather underwhelming when complete. Often this sense of dissatisfaction is because little thought has been given to lighting, colours and finishes. Simply providing a light fixture in a bedroom does not mean that how the room will look when lit by that light has been considered. The cost of the light fixture may not be different, but the placement of it may make a great deal of difference. Similarly, colored paint costs only a few cents more per square foot than white. But without considering color a new custom home can have the same sterile appearance as a generic apartment. Neutral finishes have the same problem. While they are safe, they are uninspiring. They may not align with the concept of the building. A home designed innovatively to reflect nature might use a color palette drawn from the immediate landscape rather than whites and beiges. Different shades of green, brown and even reds, violets, and blue might be included.

10. Have your architect predict your future. You can keep your immediate construction costs down by working with the architect to determine what things might be upgraded later. For example the initial construction might include inexpensive pine base for the walls. Later that base might be replaced with slate tile. Similarly a floor might be prepared to receive hardwood but have inexpensive carpet installed in the interim. Or a wall might be framed for a future window but the window can be omitted in the initial construction. The addition of the window can be more easily done if the header is already in place and plumbing and electrical runs have been run around the window location. In some instances a blind opening might be created in the siding to allow for a little trim to be added to adjust the siding for the new window. Having the changes detailed in the initial set means you don't have to start from scratch when you are ready for the upgrade. Just refer to the original plans.

Source - AIA