

Finding the Right Architect in Nine Easy Steps

Contributed by AIA Knowledge Resources Staff

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MATCH THE ARCHITECT TO THE PROJECT

Every architect has an individual style, approach to construction, and method of work. For homeowners who wish to retain an architect to design a new home or renovate an existing one, it is important to seek out an architect whose style and working methods are compatible with the scale and type of project and the client's needs. Follow these nine general steps to find the right architect for you.

1) Make a list. Ask your neighbors or the owners of architect-designed new homes or renovated homes in your community for the names of architects who provide services in your area. Because the relationship between a homeowner and an architect is such a personal one, most residential clients and architects find each other through personal referrals. The AIA Architect Finder, an online tool accessible to the public through the www.aia.org Web site, also can generate a list of architects within a designated radius of your ZIP code (up to 50 miles) that specialize in the building type that matches your project.

2) Research. Contact your local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Many local AIA chapters maintain lists of AIA-member firms who specialize in different types of work. Some chapters maintain member portfolios that are available to prospective clients for review during business hours. This is a great way to become acquainted with the architects who work in your area before contacting them directly. Many firms, even small ones, have Web sites that feature their work.

3) Check credentials. While architects in the United States are not required to be members of the AIA, determine whether the architects on your list are AIA members. Membership in the AIA means that the architect subscribes to the AIA Code of Ethics, complies with the AIA's rigorous continuing education requirements, has access to a variety of professional

and technical resources, and is committed to high standards of practice and service.

4) Conduct phone interviews. Once you have conducted your research and have developed a list of prospective architects, call each firm on your list. Explain that you are interested in procuring architectural design services, and ask to schedule a brief phone interview with the firm principal. If you were referred by a previous client, be sure to share this information. During the phone interview, describe your project and ask if the firm is available to accomplish it within your desired time frame. Request literature outlining the firm's qualifications and experience. If the firm is unable to undertake your project, ask whether it can recommend another firm.

5) Interview select firms. The phone interviews and additional literature provided by the firm should help you narrow the list of candidates. Interview the firms on your short list, preferably at the firm offices. The interview allows you to meet the people who will manage your project and to learn if the chemistry is right; you may be working with them for a long time. Some architects charge a small fee for initial interviews or meetings, which often involve at least some professional design advice. Inquire about such fees prior to the interview.

6) Ask questions. How busy is the firm? Does it have the capacity to take on your project? Who in the firm will be primarily responsible for your project? What is the firm's design philosophy? What is the fee structure? What is the firm's track record for performance completed on time and within budget?

7) Inspect completed work. If possible, ask each firm to show you at least one complete or substantially complete project.

8) Check references. Ask for references from both past clients and contractors with whom the architect has worked, and check them thoroughly. Ask the clients the same questions you have asked the architect: Was the

project completed on time and within budget? Was the person primarily responsible for the project the person who was introduced as such at the initial meeting? Was the client satisfied with the completed project? Was the client satisfied with the architect's services? Would the client hire the architect again? Ask the contractors whether the documents prepared by the architect were sufficiently clear and detailed to enable them to prepare accurate cost estimates and complete the project in accordance with the design intent, and whether the architect addressed issues during the construction period promptly and thoroughly. Obtain an Architect's Qualification Statement (AIA Document B431) from your local AIA chapter, and ask each prospective architect to complete it and return it to you. This standardized form may be used to verify and compare an architect's credentials and other information prior to making a final selection.

9) Make the final choice. Architects provide a professional service, not a product. The right architect will be the one who has demonstrated to your satisfaction the judgment, technical expertise, design talent, and communication skills that suit your needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the AIA Architect Finder, visit www.aia.org/architect_finder/archfind_cando.asp.

To learn more about the AIA Code of Ethics, visit www.aia.org/about/ethics.

To locate your local AIA chapter, visit www.aia.org/components.

MORE BEST PRACTICES

The following AIA Best Practice provides additional information related to this topic:

23.01.01 Researching an Architect