

How to Hire an Architect

Overheard: “Everyone can design, just like everyone can sing.”

While everyone can design, it doesn't mean all people have the same skill or talent. If you are interested in learning more about the design and construction process, this guide is a good place to start. After years in the business and seeing (maybe even making) some of the biggest mistakes in architecture, we prepared this to help you better understand the project, from start to finish.

From “Why do I need an Architect?” to “How much will this cost?” to “How can I find the right person for the job?”, all your questions are answered. We know finding the right architect is a complex process, and there are several deciding factors, such as taste, budget, personality, and more. As daunting as this seems, we promise to provide you with clear guidelines to follow through with and understand your project clearly.

When you choose to hire an architect at the start, you ensure your investment is well spent. By the time your home is completed, your reward will be the excitement of a new space and the anticipation of the memories you will create there. With this guide, you can get to know the various roles required on your project, the qualifications and skillsets needed to complete it, and the communication skills you can use to find your right fit. Use these tools to find your match—after all, whoever you hire should stand by you from start to finish.

How we Can Help – What Architects Do

Architect – /'ærkətekt/ comes from the Latin architectus, which derives even further from the Greek word arkitekton (arki- and tekton-), meaning “chief builder”.

What's the difference between an architect and a draftsman? While a draftsman may know a lot about buildings, it is not legal for them to provide architectural services. To become an Architect, one must pass special registration exams that allow them to provide these services.

The role of an Architect is much broader than most people realize. Architects are licensed professionals, most commonly holding a degree in the art and science of building design and construction. This is an extremely old profession, spanning back thousands of years. Original architects were known to build anything and everything – not just homes. Think of Leonardo Da Vinci and his inventions.

An Architect's role begins with research before they can design a building. They take the project from start to finish, from the design concept, through to construction documents and regulatory measures, all the way to leading a team of people who will bring the concept to life. Throughout it all, the Architect will select contractors, negotiate construction budgets, and monitor the construction process. They have a pretty big job.

Understanding the Process

Where does your project start? The design of a new building, or the renovation of an existing one, is divided into several stages. Your architect should involve you from the beginning, solidifying your vision and keeping you informed while they work with your consultant team and builder.

How will your architect approach your project? Is this process clear and logical? Is their process suitable for you? These are important questions to ask, as there is a great deal of uncertainty when hiring the people who will bring your vision for a new home to life. Some of the most important questions to ask your potential Architect:

PROCESS:

- What steps are in the design process? How are they organized?
How long will each step take?
- How can you help me understand the scope and design of my project?

DESIGN:

- What is your design philosophy?
- What issues and considerations do you see as the most important for my project?

TIMELINE:

- What issues and considerations do you see affecting the delivery of my project?
- What is a realistic timeline?

VALUE/COST:

- What unique value can you bring to my project?
- How do you establish fees?

Use these questions as a guide when making a decision on who you want to work with. Make sure you familiarize yourself with the firm you would like to hire to make sure their approach matches your ideas.

An Architect's Basic Services

An Architect's services are defined by the Alberta Association of Architects (AAA) and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). Typical services include: schematic design, design development, contract documents, bidding and negotiations, and contract administration.

However, before any of these begin, you should commission an Architect to assist you in a Pre-Design or Feasibility Study. This will help you determine the forecasted outcome of your project while understanding your wants and needs. Don't rush into the design process, as this can be costly in the long-term.

Basic Architectural services include:

- Schematic Design Phase (Conceptual Design)
- Design Development Phase – development of the design scheme, material and finish selection, and detailed development
- Construction Document Phase – detailed construction working drawings and specifications
- Bidding and Negotiations – solicit bids from contractors and negotiate contract for construction
- Contract Administration – on-site contract administration and construction observation to
- ensure the project is built according to design and specifications

Fee Structures

An Architect's fee is usually calculated as a percentage of a project's final construction cost. This percentage varies based on the type of construction. For a single-family residence, this fee will be around 10-15%. This fee sometimes includes the hiring of other disciplines, such as a landscape architect or interior designer, and other times it may exclude these additional services. Whether the fee includes this or not depends on the contract you make with your Architect. For this reason, you may want to agree for the fees to be charged on an hourly basis until the scope of your project becomes clearer.

Some architects may ask for an up-front retainer to begin work. Bear in mind that the final construction cost is not the final cost of your project. The final cost includes both hard costs (construction) and soft costs (fees and testing). These soft costs typically average at 25% of the final construction cost, so make sure you set aside some money for this at the end of your project.

Time to do Some Homework

You have your vision, you know you want to work with an Architect, and now you're ready to find out who's right for the job. At this point, you should have finalized your budget and financing, and you are up front about what you can afford. Good! Now it's time for some final homework.

Step 1: Research

First, you should do some research on the best person for your project. You can ask a family member or friend. You might see an advertisement in a magazine. You might just google it. However you look, make sure you view your options. Don't know where to start? A great source is the Alberta Association of Architects (AAA).

A good tip is to look for a firm with quality graphics and 3D imagery. Digital modelling is a vital tool for communicating thoughts and ideas. It allows both you and your Architect to understand and visualize concepts before the shovel hits the ground. You get to see the interior and exterior of your home to finalize your design.

Step 2: Portfolio Review

Once you've done your research and narrowed down your candidates, take a look at their previous works. Visit their websites, read their stories, and get a \ feel for their overall vibe. Does it feel like a fit?

Can you see yourself working with them? Viewing their portfolio gives you a sense of the firm's design concepts and characteristics. If you see something you like, make a note.

Step 3: Phone Call

When you have a short list of candidates for your project, gather your vision and ideas together into some key points so it's easy for you to communicate with your potential Architect. Before they commit to your project, they will want to know some key items:

- Type of Construction: Is this a new project or an existing home renovation/addition?
- Style/Architecture: How would you like to feel in your new space?
- Area/Square Footage: What is the approximate area of your new space?
- Budget: How much are you willing to spend?
- Schedule: When do you expect work to be completed?

Step 4: Meeting

Now that you've chosen a candidate, set up a meeting with them. This is an important step, as you will get to know each other better and determine if your personalities are a good match. You want to be comfortable with your Architect, as they will be with you through the duration of your project.

During this meeting, take the time to verify your key details. Remember, this is a long-term relationship. A clear and honest conversation at the beginning will help you both enter the relationship with the best understanding of each other and the project. Together, you will paint a vision, come up with a budget, a style, and any spatial requirements. You should take away your next steps and have a point of contact at





The Next Steps

It's easy to feel lost when you want to start a new home project. Now that you've read the resources we've provided, you should have a clearer understanding of the process, as well as some handy tips and tricks for finding help. We've plotted your roadmap, now it's time to begin your new home adventure.

If you're looking for an Architect, let's get in touch. We can help you better understand the processes and explain the requirements for getting your project on track. We make sure nothing is overlooked.

Foundations are the most important part of any structure, and we want to help build your knowledge into a solid foundation for your project. Knowing and understanding the dynamics of a building project will give you the foundation needed to turn it into a success. We can help save your time and money with an initial Needs and Options Analysis, which enables you to begin exploring your project with us. This session can help you get a feel for your project's requirements or any potential roadblocks. At the end of the Needs and Options Analysis, you should have a rough estimate of timelines, budget, and cost for your project.

If you would like to read more about our Needs and Options Analysis, please explore our website. And if you're ready to chat, please feel free to give us a call. Best wishes for your next successful project!

Tomasz Sztuk (pronounced Tom-ASH)

Architect, AAA, MRAIC, M.Arch
info@sztukarchitecture.com

Suite 100, 402 - 11 Avenue SE
Calgary, AB T2G 0Y

