

ACS ARCHITECT Design Process Q + A

The goal of this Q + A is to help demystify working with architects. It is affordable, fun and yields a result that is customized to what a client wants and needs from their building.

What does an architect do and what is the “design process”?

There are 5 phases in the traditional design process. Architects can be consulted for **any combination** of these or for **all** of these.

A full-service contract usually means working with an architect for the **5 Phase Process** - from the most preliminary sketches all the way through to the completion of construction.

What are the 5 phases of the Design Process?

Phase 1 – Schematic Design:

This is the very start of the project - the phase where the architect gets to really know the client's needs and wishes for their building. The building site and its parameters are also carefully studied.

The schematic design process is a good example of “give and take”. Most architects will generate several options/ideas for the client to choose from as a starting point. In turn, the client gives feedback about what they do or don't want in their building.

As the client/architect team progresses in this “give and take”, early hand drawn sketches evolve into three dimensional CAD sketches or small working models to help the client visualize. Clients are then able to virtually “walk-through” and explore different schemes for their building.

Arielle C. Schechter, AIA provides 3D drawings and CAD animated walk-throughs free of charge throughout the design process starting with this phase.

Changes made by the client during the schematic design phase are expected and 100% okay! I believe the more feedback, the better.

The schematic design is continually refined until a final schematic emerges. Preliminary costs are determined to see if cuts needs to be made. If the client signs off on the final schematic design, the next phase starts.

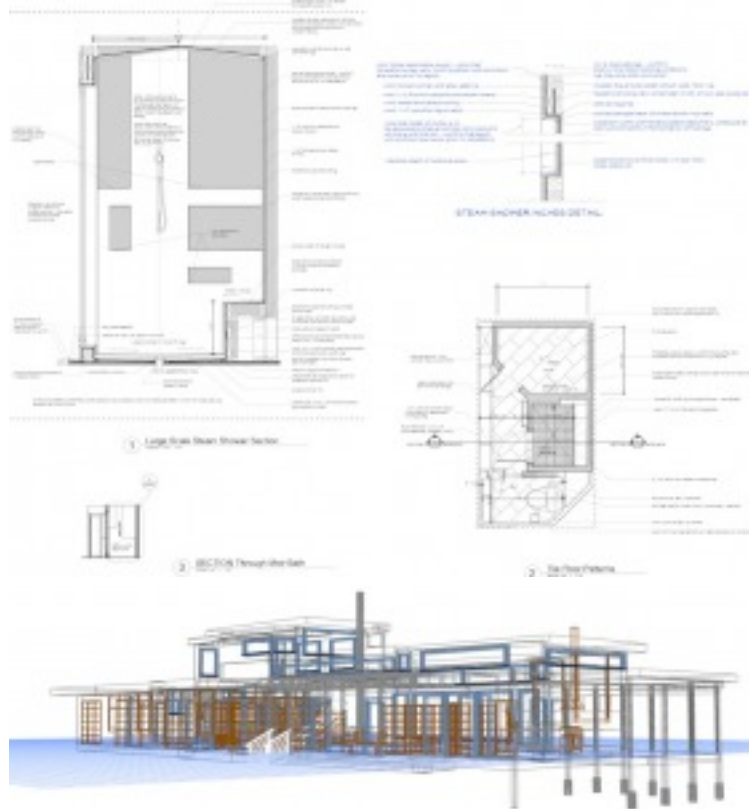
Phase 2 - Design Development:

Design development means the chosen plan is further refined. Material selections, fixtures and components are selected so that the architect will be able to produce the actual drawings that the structure is built from.

After the next phase (Phase 3 - Construction Documents) starts, major changes may be difficult (though not impossible). This is why it is important for clients to make any changes now—during Phases 1 and 2.

Phase 3 - Construction Documents:

Construction Documents are a set of technical drawings and written specifications that a contractor uses to apply for permits and build the structure. Depending on the complexity of the project, this phase can take several months.



Phase 4 - Bidding and Negotiation

At this point the client usually selects one of **two bidding options**, both having different advantages and disadvantages:

- 1). Bidding the project with multiple bidders and selecting the lowest bid.

2). Working with one pre-selected builder who will also serve as an advisor throughout the design process, advising where costs may be trimmed as it is being designed.

Phase 5 - Contract Administration

This is the exciting phase where the clients get to see their own custom house become a reality!

The architect usually provides about one site observation visit per week until the certificate of occupancy is granted to the owner. More site observations are provided as needed.

How much does working with an architect cost?

There are *two* main ways that architects usually calculate their fees:

1). Fixed-Fee Basis:

A fixed-fee is a flat fee that is negotiated between the client and the architect. It is often calculated based on the client's budget and the estimated cost of the construction. The fee may vary based on the level of complexity and detailing the client asks for.

Compare an architect's fee to a realtor's cost for selling a house. A realtor will charge around 5% of the sale price of a house. The architect's base fee may not be much more than this, yet includes hundreds more hours of work than normally needed for a realtor to sell a house.

Also, working with an architect almost always increases the value of your project exponentially!

2). Hourly Rate:

A second option is to work with an architect on an hourly-rate basis.

Please note that a fixed-fee basis is almost always less expensive for the client. This is analogous to "salary" vs. "hourly pay" in any job.

A salaried person may work from 40-100 hrs. per week, but the pay will not change. If someone is on hourly basis, they can bill for the 100 hours! Most architects put in those long salary type hours, so you will get more than your money's worth with a fixed-fee basis.

How long does it take to design a house?

This depends on the client's working "style" and how big a hurry the client is in.

Usually the time one spends in schematic and design development will pay off in terms of having a house that is really well thought out.

The design process is fun, exciting and interesting! Most clients are energized by exploring different design options because it helps one hone in on what is really important to you and rule out the extraneous. The availability of 3-D CAD walk-through drawings makes the process even easier for the client to visualize their project.

What is the difference between working with an architect versus working with a builder (without architect)?

Working with an architect almost always adds value to a home's worth. "Worth" can be measured in two ways: tangible worth, such as what you will get in resale value; and intangible worth, i.e. spaces are designed to be the way YOU want them—so you will enjoy them more. You are not forced to accept a cookie cutter design. If you examine real estate listings, the words "designed by an architect" are always included as a selling point.

You will have many more options in material choices in an architect designed home, as well as the access to a huge palette of materials.

You will get more ideas for layout and site optimization than you would with a pre-designed plan that was not customized for your needs and building site.

You will be able to focus on the spaces that are important to YOU. For instance, ever notice those 25' high foyers in some cookie-cutter plan houses? Do you really need that? Does it feel right? Usually not. So why put the money there? An architect can guide you on where your building dollars are best spent to achieve the feeling you want in your home.

Is there any essential advice you would offer a client when planning a budget for a home?

I always advise clients that there are 3 main variables in any building:

1). Cost (budget)

2). Quality (materials and construction)

3). Scope (size)

A client may choose to control and direct any *TWO* of these. But this means that the 3rd option will “float”, or rise and fall based on the other two selected.

I urge clients to pick and choose their two control items carefully, because the 3rd item will not be in their control.

I work long hours. Are you available to meet evenings or weekends?

As a courtesy to my clients who work standard work weeks (as most do), I am able to schedule night and weekend appointments at no extra charge (with sufficient notice).

I have more questions...

Please feel free to contact me anytime via email or phone. I love to talk about design.

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