

How to Hire an ARCHITECT



HOME ARCHITECTS[®]

How to Hire an ARCHITECT

© Copyright 2013, Home Architect, PLLC, All Rights Reserved Worldwide

First online publishing December 2013 from the USA, on the HOME ARCHITECTS ® website.

HOME ARCHITECTS ® is the registered trademark of Home Architect, PLLC.

Contact information:

Rand@HomeArchitects.com

1 . 828 . 269 . 9026

www.HomeArchitects.com

How to Hire an ARCHITECT

Table of Contents

Preface

Lesson 1: HIRE YOUR ARCHITECT FIRST

Lesson 2: LICENSE

Lesson 3: WEBSITE

Lesson 4: LOOK FOR YOUR PERFECT ARCHITECT, NOT YOUR PERFECT PLAN

Lesson 5: LOCAL OR THE BEST?

Lesson 6: SPECIALIST OR GENERALIST?

Lesson 7: HOW TO APPROACH AN ARCHITECT

Lesson 8: QUESTIONS TO ASK AN ARCHITECT

Lesson 9: REPEATED CONTACT

Lesson 10: MEET WITH THE ARCHITECT IN PERSON

Lesson 11: SPREADSHEET RANKING EVALUATION

Lesson 12: MAKE YOUR CHOICE: HIRE THE ARCHITECT

How to Hire an ARCHITECT

Preface

You notice that the title of this little e-book is about hiring an ARCHITECT. Not just any sort of “Designer.” And there’s no such thing as a “sort of Architect.” You either are or are not an Architect. American slang has been filled during the last decade with all sorts of titles borrowing the word Architect and that’s a shame. There is only one real type of Architect: an Architect designs homes and buildings. An American Architect is licensed by at least one state in the USA. To be a real “professional” in the design world you need to have a license and anyone proclaiming themselves to be a “design professional” needs to be licensed by a State in order to fulfill the essence of that term.

The Architect is the professional leading the design effort of a building project: he or she oversees the creation of the design documents that depict the physically built improvements for the client’s property. The Architect coordinates everyone else involved with the design to insure that your project is properly designed.

The background of an Architect usually involves having earned a professional architectural degree from an NAAB (National Architectural Accrediting Board) accredited major University course of instruction, often culminating in a Master of Architecture degree. Then an Architect-to-be interns for about a decade, working for real, licensed Architects, learning from them in an apprentice role. Then the trainee must study for and pass a grueling multiple day ARE (Architectural Record Exam), administered by the NCARB (National Council of Architectural Registration Boards). Then the applicant must apply for and obtain an architectural license from a State Board of Architecture. Then the applicant becomes an Architect. Then the new Architect must take CEUs (Continuing Education Units) every year for the rest of their professional lives and maintain the highest standards of their profession to remain a practicing Architect. After about 10 years, some Architects earn the ability to become NCARB Certified, much the same as a medical doctor becomes Board Certified.

How to Hire an ARCHITECT

LESSON 1: HIRE YOUR ARCHITECT FIRST

Hire the Architect first.

(See HOME ARCHITECTS® “How to Hire a General Contractor” in this series.) This first chapter is largely reproduced from that e-book.

What's first? Chicken or the egg? Cart or the horse? Well, in the architectural and construction world, things are clearer than that. Architect or General Contractor? Design or construction?

How can you build anything worthwhile if you don't have a design to guide you? Either paper sets of drawings & specifications or electronic documents or both: with detailed dimensions, locations, instructions for assembly, material type & qualities, layouts and other information? Okay: obvious answer: you can't. Otherwise you have a bunch of guys stomping around aimlessly, randomly gesturing about where things should be placed and arguing about it and making a mess of things.

Of course: you first need a DESIGN before you can build it. So the next question is: “who is the most skilled professional educated, trained, experienced and licensed to provide architectural designs?”

Answer: an Architect.

Seems obvious, once you sit down and think about it, doesn't it? And in addition to being in the proper, logical sequence, your Architect knows how to qualify your interested General Contractors who will bid your project and your Architect can help you plan future phases, so that what you build first properly coordinates and fits together with future improvements. That takes a lot of brain power, technical planning and precise computerized documents. These are just a few of the capabilities your Architect brings to bear on your project, starting at the beginning, to get things moving in the right direction. Having that expertise in your corner will give you the warm fuzzies.

Therefore: your Architect will help you hire your General Contractor.

Your Architect is your first consultant, to help guide you through this interesting process.

Why? Because the process is very complex and the inexperienced (probably you) will be confronted with all manner of issues to deal with and you simply won't be prepared to handle them correctly unless you have the advice and counsel of an experienced Architect. Don't proceed without your Architect.

You may think, for instance, if you are contemplating a residential project, “It's only a house...” Well, most architectural organizations and others (like ArCH, AIA and even Wikipedia) all agree that the design and construction of a residence is one of the most complex building types today. Why?

Because there is more happening per square foot in a house than any other building type, including hospitals, office buildings, high-rise structures, mercantile facilities or schools.

You will need the guidance your Architect can provide. Make it easy on yourself: engage your Architect first.

Then, have your Architect design & detail the project. You will then have CDs (Construction Documents) that the bidding GCs can use to price the project and then permit and build it on your land.

The best licensed General Contractors will recommend that you hire an Architect to design your project; those are the sorts of wise GCs that you want to consider using to build your home or building.

To compare: would you even remotely consider buying your next vehicle from some unlicensed mechanics down the street from you, who work out of their garage, throwing together a vehicle for you, then you driving that vehicle, with your family, across the Country at a high rate of speed? Of course not. Then why would you even want to consider having unqualified people providing questionable documents defining the design of your proposed house? Your house is where you may live the rest of your life with your loved ones. Your house has to resist high winds, heavy rainfalls, snow, ice, burning sun and other environmental forces (just ask the people whose houses blew down in Hurricanes Sandy, Katrina, Andrew and others). Your energy efficiency will be better in an Architect-design house. Your house health will be better in an Architect-designed house (Architects know how to specify materials with less toxic off-gassing and related health improvements). Your durability will be better in an Architect-designed house. Your Architect's fee will be offset by the savings you enjoy, year after year in your Architect-designed house. Your resale aesthetics will be

better in an Architect design house. Your views will be framed better in an Architect designed house. And on and on.

Get a professional. Hire an Architect first. Have your Architect design your house. That's what they do for a living. Let your builder build. That's what they're good at doing. Have each of your professionals do for you what they are best at doing.

LESSON 2: LICENSE

Hire only a licensed Architect.

Make sure that your Architect is licensed in at least one state in the USA. That's what gives them the right to call themselves an Architect. Ask to see their license or at the very least quote their license number to you. Some Architects are licensed in multiple states (for instance, Rand Soellner, Senior Staff of Architect of HOME ARCHITECTS®, who includes his license numbers and states of licensure on his firm's website and on his letterhead and on every email signoff, and on his business cards and brochures). A real professional does this automatically, because they are proud of their licensure and because some states require this disclosure.

LESSON 3: WEBSITE

Check out the Architect's website.

WHAT TO TYPE INTO GOOGLE TO FIND YOUR ARCHITECT

An Architect's website is a strong indication of the majority of the work they are presently doing. In other words: if you are looking for an Architect to design a University classroom building, you probably won't find that ability on an Architect's website that portrays restaurants (but you may: look closely). So, if you are looking for a residential Architect to design your home, make sure you are looking at websites that you find by typing "**Home Architects**" into Google or other browser. Those that are at the top of the list are probably strong in the design of houses.

The Architect's website: is it all dash and dazzle? Nothing but pretty big pictures and nothing else? Is there anything there that answers questions you have and that illustrates your Architect as being a knowledgeable source of important information in the industry, or is he/she just throwing the photos at you? Look for Architects that have BOTH: beauty AND substance in their work. They have to show you more than just captivating imagery. They have to teach you something that you didn't know and it needs to be important to the success and durability of your project. Do you see books there on the Architect's website that they have authored, setting them apart as a leader of knowledge in their specialty? Do you see offers of free information about various subjects of possible interest to clients (you)? Some say "less is more," but sometimes less is just less. You want an Architect that is a useful source of information about your project type.

SIZE

Next, what size of home do you want? Many clients of the HOME ARCHITECTS ® are looking for around 2,300 HSF (Heated Square Feet) to over 6,000 HSF, with many in between: 3,500 to 4,900. Many people these days are wanting to downsize, so the “sweet spot” of 2,250 HSF to 3,600 HSF seems to appeal to them. Look for Architects that create houses of this size and that have examples of these on their website. If you want a SFR (Single Family Residence) you probably don't want to be looking at a tract housing Architect or a high-rise Architect of condominiums. Some Architects specialize in home architecture so look for those on their websites.

APPEARANCE

Next, what about the appearance? Don't worry about labels. Just look for work of the Architect on their website that appeals the most to you. Review their website in depth. Don't worry about what you call the look you like. Chances are, if you like the appearance of the built homes of a particular Architect, you will probably enjoy what the Architect creates for you.

FLOOR PLANNING

If you're like many people, you want every square foot (and square inch) to count. People these days don't want wasted circulation space squandered on things like hallways or inappropriate sizing of the various spaces in a house design. People want their home optimized, with a feeling of spaciousness. Most people want what is called Open Plan Home Design, which is a technique employed by some Architects where several spaces are combined together to result in a larger overall space that makes the occupants feel a sense of greater volume. Often, the Living, Dining and Kitchen are combined in this fashion, such as in the work of the HOME ARCHITECTS ® (see image below).



The famous Falcon Cliff Lodge, designed by HOME ARCHITECTS ® illustrates the Open Plan Home Design concept masterfully here, with the Living, Dining and Kitchen combined and all having a spectacular view. © Copyright 2005-2013 Home Architect, PLLC, All Rights Reserved Worldwide.

So, look for layouts that work with this type of layout, if that's what you are looking for. Some firms may not publish their actual floor plans, but may sometimes have schematic floor plan diagrams with multi-colors to illustrate the various spaces of the house.

Don't try to find the "perfect house" for you online. It doesn't exist. Rather, look for the perfect Architect to design a YOUR house. Read on to discover why...

LESSON 4: LOOK FOR YOUR PERFECT ARCHITECT, NOT YOUR PERFECT "PLAN"

This is a search to find your Architect, not an imaginary "perfect plan."

If you are like many people, you have the notion that, if you look long enough and hard enough, staying up until 4AM each day, that you can find an existing "plan" for free that fits you and your land perfectly. Well, here's some news: THAT DOESN'T EXIST.

Why? Because you and your family are unique. One a kind. And add to that your land, with its unique characteristics: the views in particular directions, legal building setbacks (established by your County Planning & Zoning Department), septic requirements, well setbacks, existing trees (some of which you may wish to preserve), the street location and neighboring exposures, solar alignment, topography (slope of the ground), geology (bedrock under the ground, easements and a host of other features).

And finding a postage-stamp sized “plan” online does not mean that you have what it takes to build the project. Take that down to your local building department and talk to your building official. He or she will likely glance at your little printout and laugh out loud, then inform you that you need a Site Plan, Floor Plans (detailed, with dimensions and notes), Roof Plan, Exterior Elevations of all sides of the house, Building Section(s), Wall Section(s) with thermal “R” values indicated, structural connections and footings, identification of all materials and their strengths (commonly handled in specifications), structural engineering/framing and other items.

Trying to find a pre-existing set of architectural documents that precisely fits your Lifestyle (the way you want to live , which is largely delineated in the floor plans) and the complex site characteristics is just about impossible. You want a 3 car garage, not a single carport. You want a large Kitchen with a large island, facing to the living area. You want a sewing room. You want 4 bedrooms, not 2 or 3. You want a closer proximity to the Powder Room from the Kitchen (because you’re thinking that might be convenient for your use, as well as for guests) and on and on.

So: stop looking for your perfect plan. “It ain’t out there,” as some people say. Rather: LOOK FOR YOUR PERFECT ARCHITECT. Look for the guy or gal that will listen to what you want, research your property’s characteristics,

then blend them together to create a custom home, tailored to fit your needs, just like a custom suit or dress: optimized to fit you, with plenty of breathing room for comfort, yet nothing wasteful, and in the style befitting the imagery that appeals to you.

LESSON 5: LOCAL OR THE BEST?

Do you want the Architect that is the best at their specialty or will a local one do?

This is sort of like reacting to the fact that General Motors is based in Detroit, Michigan and saying: “Hey, these guys are making their cars 1,000 miles away from me, I think we better use Moe’s Garage, here in town, to build our next vehicle.” Sounds kind of nutty, doesn’t it? Of course you want the best vehicle makers in the world to be your source for your next car or SUV. Why? Because you want the vehicle to be safe & dependable. And how is this achieved? By having the best automotive specialist engineers in the Country designing the vehicles.

Now let’s follow through with this comparison for your home. Your house is likely going to cost MUCH more than your next vehicle (likely from 10 to 100x the cost), so why shouldn’t you want the most talented home architects in the Country designing your next house? Why: so your home will be safe & dependable and healthy & more energy efficient than what you might obtain from strictly local sources. And how is this achieved? By

having the best home specialist architects in the Country designing your house.

And your house could be stronger (just ask the people whose houses blew down in Hurricane Sandy, Katrina, Andrew and others about having a stronger house, if they are still alive). Will local skills practicing in a small area have as broad a perspective and as much knowledge as a national specialist practice firm that sees an expanded variety of forces acting on homes across the nation and world? And how about the cutting edge research of a specialist firm? Firms that directly contact the EPA in Washington, D.C. (like the HOME ARCHITECTS ®), and make discoveries about formaldehyde emissions in building materials so that your house will be a healthier place in which to live and raise a family, particularly if anyone in your household has asthma or other breathing issues. And what about research with power companies about the most energy efficient lighting available to result in better lighting for only 20% of the cost to power them (compared with conventional lighting per major power company research), resulting in savings in your checkbook every month, when you have a house created by such a specialist Architect. And what about the specialist firm's leading insulation research that results in 22% more insulation in your roof/attic than the insulation now being used in most locales (because those that don't specialize probably aren't familiar with the availability of cheap and better "R" value insulation)? Note: ask any mechanical engineer where the main heat loss and gain is on a house. They will tell you: the roof.

Which is just one more reason why you may wish to consider engaging the best specialist to design your home/project than another that just happens to be based in your town. But the choice is yours. Do what makes you feel the most comfortable for the safety, health and dependability level you want for your next project.

What about the convenience factor of a local firm for personal meetings? You are absolutely correct. However, in these Internet days, video teleconferencing is free (see this article:

<http://www.homearchitects.com/skype-communications-on-architect-website>

(if the link above doesn't work in PDF form, just copy and paste the Internet page address above onto your browser).

And there are actually advantages over in-person meetings, such as: the Architect can make revisions and updates to computerized documents, like Floor Plans, while sharing his screen with his Clients during a video conference.

What about for construction site visits? Well, there is an advantage to a local firm in terms of mileage. However, not all Clients wish to pay the Architect to conduct on-site observations during construction, so if they do not wish to do this, there really is no advantage to a local firm. And, in this digital age, the Contractor and Client can e-mail digital photos and even digital videos of tours of the under-construction project, sent to a national firm in another location, bringing them the up close and personal visual information they need to conduct a remote observation of the project. And if the remote-viewing Architect wants more information about something, he or she can request that the Contractor provide additional digital photos of certain area, up close, including on roofs, at the top of scaffolding and other locations where no Architect would necessarily want to personally walk, even if they were there in person. So: involving the Contractor in obtaining digital photos could be viewed as an actual advantage to the remote-viewing company. And national firms will come to your property, whenever you wish. You will compensate them, and you will also compensate local firms to do the same thing.

Bottom line: historically, people have had a bias for local firms, however, gradually this preference is giving way to the electronic age and its robust abilities, allowing you to take advantage of the advanced skills and long

experience of a specialist firm, no matter where their home office might happen to be located. The choice is yours.

LESSON 6: SPECIALIST OR GENERALIST

Selecting a firm with a general background or a specialty.

“Help me, man, I need a brain operation right now!” said Sam, clearly agitated, his hands and arms trembling, fright sweat abundant on his brow.

Bob, the fruit stocker at the local supermarket stopped stacking his pile of cantaloupes, wiped his hands on his stained white apron, frowned, then turned his head and made eye contact with Sam, while wondering what was going on. Bob cleared his throat and said: “Er... Sam, I don't know how to do that. Don't you think you ought to go to a doctor? One that specializes in...what's it called: Newrollogie?”

Sam breathed heavily and stamped his feet, impatient to begin his much-needed operation to correct his occasional blindness in the occipital lobe of his brain. “But Bob, I know you. You are right here in town. The closest neurosurgeon is a hundred miles from here, over at Duke University.” Sam reached into his pocket and brought out a sweaty wad of \$1 bills. “I have some money; I can pay you...”

Bob's eyes glazed over, watching the bills move around in his customer's fist. Bob raised his head, looked in several directions, up and down the aisles, then hunched his shoulders, moved closer to Sam and whispered: “Tell you what, Sam. I'm going on break in about 5 minutes. You see that door over there?” Bob pointed to a swinging pair of doors in the back of the store, near the meat racks. “Go through those doors and wait for me back there. I'll see you in a little while...”

Far fetched? Of course. But it sets the stage for thinking about how valuable the services can be of a professional specialist. Even a General Practitioner physician, would never even consider doing such a thing as portrayed in the little drama above. He would recommend a specialist, to help the patient obtain the proper skilled services to hopefully result in the best possible outcome.

However, in architecture, things are more blurred. General architectural firms designs all sorts of things: restaurants, high schools, hospitals, even houses. But: you have heard the expression: “Jack of all trades but master of none?” That can be the case. Architecture is a very complicated profession. These days, things are more complicated than ever. Do you really want a pizzeria Architect designing your high school project? Your office building Architect designing your supermarket?

It takes a lifetime to master even one, narrow specialty (like residential design). The design of a house is extremely complex. There is more going on per square foot in a house than in high rise office buildings, educational facilities and even most hospital environments. Mastering the design of houses, particularly in challenging mountain environments takes even more focus of attention and experience, over decades, to learn how to properly solve the issues, detail & specify the project properly and to know how to judge the site issues.

However, you may have a local that you trust. Bob may be your guy. Do what makes you the most comfortable. However, not all Architects are created equal and not all Architects are as good at what they do as some specialists may be. Investigate. Look at their websites. Ask them questions. You will begin to develop a sense of what they normally do and what they are best at doing. Hard to believe: that not all Architects are the same? Think about it: an Architect that spends 40 hours a week

designing pizzerias, or one that spends 80 hours a week designing houses? Whom do you imagine will be better at designing restaurants and who will be best at designing houses?

Some people might just think: "Hey, I think local firms will be cheaper." And in some contexts, that may be true. True in terms of their billed mileage, perhaps. However, possibly not so true in amount of dollars saved over the lifetime of the house created. How so? Because the specialist firm will likely design-in features that save more energy, keep you healthier and have less maintenance over the decades to come. Only you can determine the value of such characteristics.

Did you know that there is an entire separate specialty construction code for houses? It's called the IRC (International Residential Code). It is currently about a thousand pages long. According to the International Code Congress (ICC), all states in the USA have adopted this code. This means that if your house project is in the USA, it will have to comply with these requirements. People unfamiliar with the IRC will have a hard time meeting the regulations: they are very complicated.

And did you know that houses and other buildings also have to comply with the IECC (International Energy Conservation Code)? Architects specializing in the design of houses know this and design to meet or exceed these codes. Experienced firms exceed code. Why? Because minimum code does not a good house make. The destruction of the latest hurricanes stand as testimony to this. The smart firms learn from this devastation and reinforce their designs to be stronger. You may be interested in this subject, so here are some references for you:

<http://www.homearchitects.com/codes-and-residential-design>

<http://www.homearchitects.com/windows-and-minimum-code>

<http://www.homearchitects.com/windows-and-minimum-code>

<http://www.homearchitects.com/good-residential-architecture-keeps-you-alive>

(If any of the links above don't function in PDF mode, just copy and paste them, one at a time into your Internet browser, to see each article).

LESSON 7: HOW TO APPROACH AN ARCHITECT

First contact: reaching out to your possible Architect.

Architects are people, just like you. They are in business to serve people like you. They welcome your contact. The best way to contact them is to either send them an e-mail, using their e-mail address that they provide on their website, or give them a phone call. Say something like: "I was looking online for an Architect to design my house (or other project type) and I saw yours and I liked what I saw..." That's a great way to start.



"I like it when people phone me," said Rand Soellner, Senior Staff Architect of HOME ARCHITECTS®, "That lets me know that people are serious about finding an Architect and I enjoy the social interaction. It is interesting to hear about their land and their hopes and dreams for their project. The fact that they called me, makes me proud; that they saw and read something on our company website that made enough of a positive impression to have them contact me. I do everything possible to provide the information that potential clients need to result in my firm becoming their Architect. We want to design their project. That's

my main purpose in life: to create wonderful homes, buildings and places that people can enjoy for the rest of their lives.”

Once you have established contact, perhaps by phone, DO follow-up with an e-mail to the Architect. That allows you both to be electronically connected and after that, the Architect is able to send you links to locations on their website that can provide you with more information to allow you to make good choices.

LESSON 8: QUESTIONS TO ASK AN ARCHITECT

You have questions. Ask them.

Here’s a great list of questions to ask the Architect that you are considering using:

1. LICENSED: Are you a licensed Architect? Please share with me your license number(s).
2. LOCATION: My project is located in _____ (city/county/state/country). Would you be interested in designing a project for that location?
3. APPROACH/METHOD: Can you briefly summarize your typical approach to a project in terms of what phases of work you perform and what comes after what, in sequence?

4. SIZE: I envision my project (if a house) as being perhaps 2,500 HSF (Heated Square Feet) to maybe 3,500 HSF (or whatever size you desire). Can you send me links to previous examples of your designs for that size of (house/project)?
5. STRENGTHS: What are your strong points as an Architect and as a person?
6. WEAKNESSES: What are your weak points as an Architect and as a person? (That's going to be a tough one for any person!)
7. EDUCATION: Do you have a Master of Arts in Architecture in Architecture degree from an NAAB accredited Major University? If so, from what university?
8. BUILDING SYSTEM EXPERIENCE: Do you have any experience working with building systems in my project area?
9. EXPERIENCE: About how many millions or billions of dollars' worth of construction have you been involved with during your career? About how many projects of the type I am considering have you designed?
10. AWARDS/PUBLICATIONS: Have you won an awards or been featured in any publications, or written any books as an Architect? If so, can you send me links to those, or links to the publishers, so that I can order them? Is the subject matter that of the type of project (such as a house) that I am proposing?
11. ENERGY CONSERVATION: What are your views on energy conservation for my type of project? Do your designs, details and specifications save energy? If so, please give me several examples of how you do that so that my future energy bills will be less than normal. Also, what are the typical "R" values that you have for your Roof, walls and floors in your designs? What do you do to protect large

areas of glass? Have you won any energy conservation awards? If so, was this for a house (or whatever your project type is).

12. REFERENCES: Do you have a list of references from clients, engineers and other people that you might be able to e-mail me so that I can contact them, either by phone or e-mail to verify your abilities?
13. LENGTH OF TIME IN PRACTICE: How long have you been practicing architecture as a licensed Architect? (hint: you are looking for 25+ years: with Architects, they get better with age: they have more experience, and in architecture, experience counts for everything. The best Architects are over 60 years old).
14. PASSION: Tell me what excites you about what you do.
15. COORDINATION: what methods do you have for coordinating with me during a project? Also, can you do video conferences at no cost to me, during which you can share your screen with me and let me see modifications you are making right before my eyes? You do e-mail, and monitor that daily, don't you? You do have a cell phone? Will you allow me to contact you 365 days a year, between the hours of 9AM to 9PM, including on weekends, when it is convenient for me?
16. SPECIALIZATION: What sort of project(s) do you specialize in? I am looking for a single family custom home Architect (or whatever you are looking for); is that primarily what you do?
17. SITE WALK: are you willing to meet me at my property and walk it with me and then issue me a report of your findings? Of course, I am willing to pay you a modest fee to do this.
18. TEAM MANAGER: Are you willing to manage my entire team on this project?

19. FINDING A CONTRACTOR: will you help me find the General Contractor for my project?
20. BIDDING: are you willing to manage the Bidding process for me?
21. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION: Are you a member of a professional organization of Architects that specifically focuses on home design (if that is your project type) by licensed Architects, like ArCH: Architects Creating Homes?
22. FEES: How do you charge for what you do? Hourly, percentage of your estimate of the cost of construction or...? And what is your typical rate for this type of work?
23. CONSTRUCTION COSTS PER SQUARE FOOT: I realize that the Construction Cost is what is determined by what the General Contractor decides to charge me for what I want, however, can you share with me your perceptions of a range of the costs per square foot of various levels of quality of projects of my type?
24. AVAILABILITY: Are you available to begin my project sometime during the month of _____(you fill in)? How busy are you right now and how would my project fit in to your schedule?
25. TECHNOLOGY: Do you produce your projects on computer? I like the accuracy that gives to a project. Also, can you issue your in-progress documents and final documents in the form of PDFs for easy electronic distribution?
26. ENGINEERING: Will you help me find licensed engineers in my area to handles things like the Structural Engineering?
27. BUILT EXAMPLES: Do you have any existing built homes (or other types of your project) that I might be able to visit and walk around and perhaps through? (this should typically be possible, if you want

to travel to these locations, however, much depends on the availability of the owners and whether or not they are in residence).

28. Are you familiar with the IRC (International Residential Code) latest edition? What year is the latest edition? Please give me an example of just one of the IRC requirements, please. And are you familiar with the latest edition of the IECC (International Energy Conservation Code)? Can you cite just one of the "R" requirements for any part of a house, for the roof, wall or floor for an example environmental zone, say for instance, Zone 4?

Some of these questions are "softballs", meaning that any competent Architect can answer them. Others are tough. Either the Architect has the experience or capabilities or he/she doesn't. The answers you receive to these questions will go a long way to telling you who is the right professional for you.

LESSON 9: REPEATED CONTACT

Get comfortable.

The average number of contacts that result in a Client signing an agreement with an Architect is 5. You are likely going to need to contact this guy or gal five times before you feel comfortable enough to sign on the dotted line. Your intended Architect should never pressure you to do anything, especially in the way of signing an agreement. They should give you a copy of their agreement and review it with you, then they should leave you to make up your own mind in your own good time.

Your preferred Architect should willingly and cheerfully provide you with whatever information about their background and abilities and knowledge of their profession as you may request. They will Not, however, begin giving you drawings or performing services for free up-front. That is not the sign of a good company and you shouldn't ever ask for such a thing, including your Architect driving or flying places without compensation, including to your property. You pay to play.

Fair game for repeated contact prior to signing the Architect's agreement:

1. Links on the Architect's website about the type of project you are proposing, illustrating the Architect's familiarity and competence in that project type.
2. General discussions about your geology and soils and ground slope (nothing specific).
3. General discussions about the remoteness of your project location and this impact on future bidding that your Architect would manage for you.
4. Scheduling of your timeline and how the Architect's work integrates with this.
5. Any questions about the Architect's abilities as it relates to your project type.
6. Explanations about points on the Architects form of agreement (although don't expect those to be altered: chances are the Architect has developed that with the input of legal counsel).
7. Fee discussions.
8. Work product discussions.
9. Travel discussions (to and from your property/location).
10. Scheduling of communications, such as phone calls and video conferences.
11. What needs to happen to start the Architect's services (usually signing of the Architect's terms of service agreement and issuance of an initial payment).

12. Sending back and forth of things that excite you about your project (but for gosh sakes, try not to e-mail 10MB images: that can crash and burn over the Internet and clog up other people's e-mails. Learn how to use DropBox or other cloud server, if possible to facilitate the transfer of links rather than the actual transfer of large files).

LESSON 10: MEET WITH THE ARCHITECT IN PERSON

Get to know them.

There is nothing like seeing someone in person, sitting down and getting to know them. Most prospective clients want to do this before they become actual Clients. As human beings, we highly prize our ability to look people straight in the eye and ask questions and gage the responses of someone with whom we will be joined at the hip for several months, or longer, depending on the project.

You should feel comfortable with your intended Architect. Do they seem truthful and forthright? Do they have a sense of humor (but not to excess)? Do they seem like serious, responsible professionals? Do you see their degrees and licenses on the walls of their office? Are they pleasant and courteous? Do they seem to appreciate your business? Do they leave "gaps" in the conversation to allow you to speak and express yourself? Do they have good listening skills? Do they take notes? Do they seem like someone with whom you would entrust your well-being? Are they responsive to your inquires? Are their discussions "on-point," focused on you and your project and how they will serve you?

And last but not least: do you like them?

Now then, exactly where do you intend to meet with your Architect in person? If you travel to them, you could meet them in their home or office (many Architects have a home office). Or, you could engage the Architect to walk your land with you. Of course, you need to pay the Architect to travel to your land to meet with you and walk your property. This is called a "Preliminary Site Analysis". Most Architects will do this for a modest upfront fee, often paid in advance, to compensate them for their time and costs of travel. This is a great ice-breaker and ends up giving you valuable information, based on the observations of your Architect. This is a great way to meet the Architect you most prefer.

LESSON 11: SPREADSHEET RANKING EVALUATION

Open up Excel and assign some points to help rank your finalists.

Open up a spreadsheet. In the top row, list the various architectural firms that you are considering hiring to design your project.

Going down the first column, list the various categories of issues, with assignment of point ranges such as:

Are they a real Architect? (yes=100, no=0).

Website: Do they appear to be specialists in what I want and do they provide valuable information? (yes=100, no=0, in between: you decide).

Local (within 50 miles=50 points, more than 100 miles=35 points, more than 500 miles=25 points, more than 1,000 miles=15 points).

Best at what they do (yes=100, no=25 or in between).

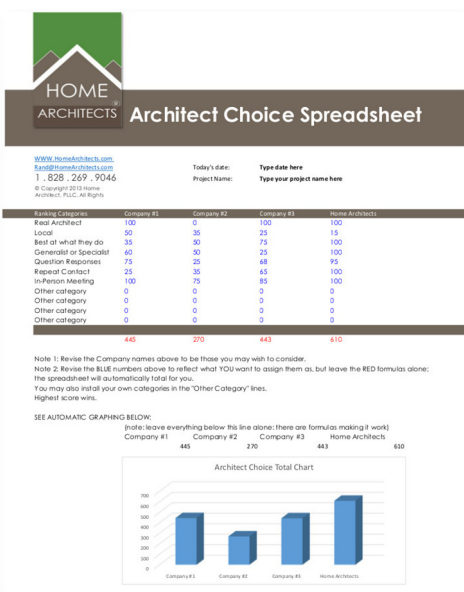
Generalist or Specialist? (Specialist=100, Generalist=25, somewhere in between= 25 to 75 as you determine).

Question Responses (answered the list of questions posed in this book well=100, poorly=25, in between=25 to 75 as you deem appropriate).

Repeat Contact (Answered your questions like a friend: they were nice and helpful and provided valuable information pleasantly=100, not so nice=0, in between=0-75 as you deem appropriate).

In-Person Meeting (Likable, believable, trustworthy, forthright, capable=100, unpleasant, rude, lack of knowledge=0, in between=25 to 75 as you deem appropriate).

Only you can assign the points that you feel represent the firms that you are considering. Don't forget to use the summation formula at the bottoms of the columns below each firm. That looks like this: Σ .



Go through your spreadsheet, assigning the points as you feel are warranted. You will see the totals begin to appear under the columns, telling you the score for each firm. If you know how to engage the graphing feature of Excel, go ahead and do that. You will then see who ranks with the most points and who with the least. Your top scoring firm should be a very good choice for you. It should like a lot like the spreadsheet you see here.

Here is a link to this spreadsheet electronic evaluation form, already filled out for you:

www.homearchitects.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/12-14-2013-Spreadsheet-for-selecting-Architect-1.xls

This link will probably not work in this PDF form. If not, copy and paste the link above onto an MS Word open page. Make sure it is all on one line. Then press Enter at the end of the link on you Word page, then click on the link. The spreadsheet should then download the fully functional spreadsheet and save onto your hard drive and use (we have “saved as” an Excel 97-2003 Workbook format, to allow users with older versions to be able to open it). All you need to do is to enter the names of the companies you are considering and assign the points under each category, then let the chips fall where they may.

LESSON 12: MAKE YOUR CHOICE: HIRE THE ARCHITECT

Sign the agreement and move forward.

Now you are at the point when you need to decide if your project is real or not. There is nothing more exhilarating than hiring the Architect to design your project: you are advancing your project! It is becoming real! You have started the Adventure!

Sign your Architect's agreement, after you have reviewed and understood and agree to it, keeping a copy for your files. Provide the requested initial payment to get things going. Your Architect and you can become great friends. Trust him or her to give you wise counsel and listen. Make sure that

you have funds to pay the Architect for their services as they move forward.



Enjoy the experience. Seeing your lifestyle programming designed into plans and integrated with your land is like nothing else on Earth. This is a happy time!