

# How to Hire An Architect

FOR YOUR CUSTOM HOME

*Understand the steps, avoid the pitfalls*

# Introduction to creating your dream home

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IF YOU HAVE NEVER HIRED AN ARCHITECT BEFORE you may be wondering where to start. We created this guide after seeing how often clients become overwhelmed by the design and construction process. The process can seem complex and frightening at first. You may be wondering: “How do I find the right architect for my project? How much are architects’ fees? And most importantly, what are the key critical steps I need to take to ensure that I hire the architect that is the perfect match for my project?” **The following steps will answer your questions.**

## Finding your architect

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*Nothing is more exciting than creating or renovating your home, and nothing will affect the success of your project more than finding the right architect.*

THE ARCHITECT DETERMINES THE DESIGN AND FUNCTION of a building, and will play a significant role in the financial and emotional costs involved during the process.

- Like many other fields, **word of mouth** is a great way to look for an architect. **Ask friends and colleagues** for referrals.
- If there is there a particular home you admire, **a knock on the door** can yield an introduction to your project’s potential architect.
- General contractors, interior design studios and other trade-related personnel would also be able to furnish some referrals.
- **Web based searches** can also be invaluable in helping you to find an architect whose work resonates with you.
- Be sure to **visit web sites of your candidates**. Look at their previous work.
- Get a feel for what is **their design style** and language – is it about blending in the neighborhood, is it environmentally sound designs or is it about making a big statement?

Then, start a conversation. Make an appointment for a consultation. Meeting face to face will help you decide if it is a good fit.

# Narrowing the search

*Even though the architect might have an attractive portfolio and good references you will still want to make sure their design process and approach is right for you and your project.*

- **Let them know which aspects of your project are most important to you**, and ask how they will be incorporated into a process.
- **Look for an architect with a signature style that is in step with your desired building style.** Architects often have specific design styles- Spanish, Colonial revival, Ultra-modern, French country, to name a few. Though most architects are able to adapt their signature style to what you want, **think twice about hiring an architect with a neoclassical signature style to create a modern house.**
- Create a catalog of examples of the look you want; these can be torn from catalogs, magazines or the Internet.
- Keep in mind that environmentally friendly, sustainable **“green” designs and construction can be applied to any style.** Discuss with your architect how much you value “green” design.
- An online search is a good way to research architects. A popular resource for getting a feel for your style, as well as searching for local architects, is the website [houzz.com](http://houzz.com).

The screenshot shows the Houzz website interface. At the top, there's a search bar with "Architects & Building Designers" entered. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for PHOTOS, FIND PROS, SHOP, KITCHEN, BATH, BEDROOM, LIVING, OUTDOOR, LIGHTING, DECOR, STORIES, and ADVICE. The main content area is titled "Designers" and includes a brief description of the role of an architect. Below this, there's a search filter for "Architects & Building Designers" in "Philadelphia, PA" within "25 miles". The results are sorted by "Best Match" and show a list of design firms. The first result is "Period Architecture Ltd." with a 36-star rating and a photo of a large house. The second is "Moto Designshop" with an 11-star rating and a photo of a modern building. The third is "Archer & Buchanan Architecture, Ltd." with a 40-star rating and a photo of an interior space. The fourth is "k YODER design, LLC" with an 8-star rating and a photo of a bathroom. Each result includes the firm's name, address, phone number, and a brief description of their services.

## Meet your project architect

**Signing a contract with an architect representing an architectural firm does not necessarily mean that person will be your project architect.** Actually, other than single-architect owned operations, it is common that the person managing your project might not be the principal. Be sure to meet the project architect before making any final decisions. Being able to communicate freely and openly with your project architect is vital to the success of your project. You should share a clear understanding of the project with your architect and feel completely comfortable.

An interview with the architect and a visit to their office will give you great insight into their practice. You want to be convinced that the choice of architect will lead to the best experience for you.

## 3-D modeling: Don't build your home without it

ARCHITECTS UNDERSTAND HOW elevations and floor plans translate into actual buildings; clients may not. **A 3-D model is the best way to view how the exterior and interior of your new project will look when built.** Software today allows design reviewing from multiple angles and room walkthroughs. Being able to work in 3-D helps clients get better involved in the design process and they enjoy the viewing experience and “walking” through the space before it is built, as well as visualizing how materials will look in the overall house and in specific rooms. They are happier in the end when the finished project looks like they imagined.

- Don't hesitate to ask for a 3-D model before the commencement of your project but recognize the size of your project. (If is a mudroom, bathroom, or dining room, a 3D model may not always be necessary)
- Keep in mind that 3D modeling is time consuming for which you may have to pay extra.





## The full service architectural firm

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CONCEPTUAL RENDERINGS AND BLUEPRINTS ARE NOT THE ONLY SERVICES architectural and planning firms provide. Ask what range of services your architect offers. Ask about benefits of specific services to you and their corresponding costs. If a firm doesn't offer a requested service, they may be able to refer a firm that does. This might include interior architectural design such as kitchens, baths and finishes.

Below is a glimpse into some of the services an architectural firm may provide:

- Project Feasibility Studies
- Master Planning
- Evaluation Of Potential Building Sites
- Architectural Design
- Computer Renderings
- 3 Dimensional Computer Visualization
- Comprehensive Construction drawings, specifications, product schedules. These are what are submitted to local municipalities for approval, and the detailed plans that the contractor will follow.
- Interior Architectural Design:
  - *Kitchen and bathrooms design, fixture and finish selections*
  - *Flooring and wall finish selections*
  - *Custom cabinetry*
  - *Lighting design and fixture selection*
- Sustainable design
- Contractor selection, cost estimates, comparative bid analysis
- Furniture, Furnishings & Equipment Specifications
- Construction Administration, Site Inspection Services
- Construction Punch List and follow up.

## Figuring out the fee investment

*Choosing the right architect can save you added expense, both now and in the future, through good and efficient design.*

THINK OF THE ARCHITECT'S FEE AS AN INVESTMENT RATHER THAN A COST. When compared to the overall cost of construction, mortgage interest, bank financing costs and interest charges, maintenance, furniture and fittings, engineering fees, surveyor's fees, and geotechnical engineering fees, to name a few, the architect's fee is less than one percent of the project cost over its life. It is important to get the right perspective on costs and investment from the start.

Fees may be calculated several ways. Fixed fees and hourly rates may be used, but more typically the fee is calculated as a percentage of the project costs.

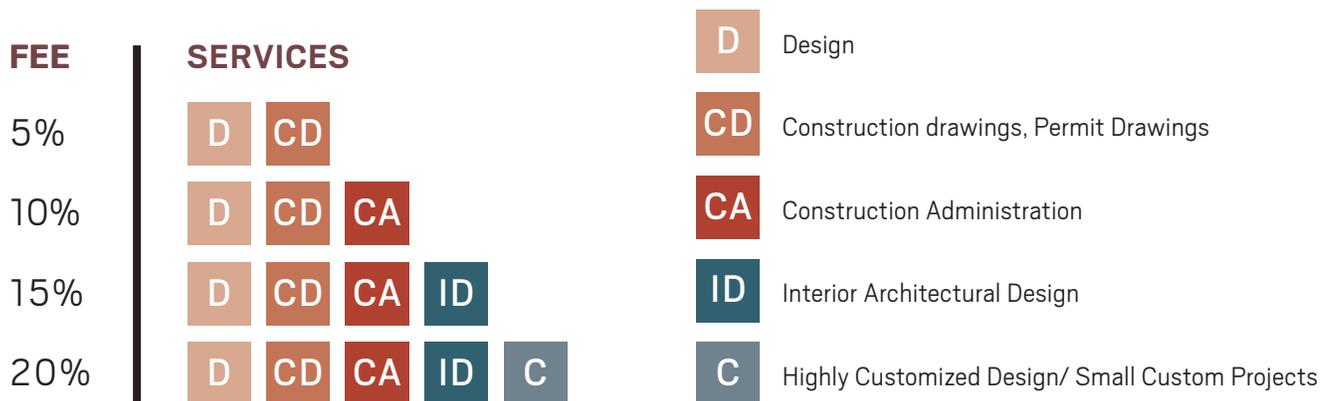
Depending on the actual services provided by the architect, and/or selected by the client, **the rate could range from 5 to 20 percent of construction costs** (see the chart on the next page). Bear in mind however, that at this early stage it is very difficult to accurately determine the final project cost. Some key points:

- During this initial period before an detailed estimate of the final project cost is possible, the architect may charge an hourly fee or retainer.
- That retainer or hourly fee may be credited towards the total architectural fee once it has been determined.
- Monthly billing or a cash flow method is fast becoming the industry standard.

Keep in mind that the architect's fee may apply to all the costs associated with your project. Some examples of project cost include the construction budget as well as consultant fees for environmental impact studies and structural engineering fees. **The most important thing about fees is complete transparency. Insist upon it.**

The architect may incur additional expenses in carrying out the design on behalf of the owner, and it is customary to bill additionally for these expenses. Ask about reimbursable expenses and ask for a list of items the architect will charge for and where there is any mark-up.

## Fees: What to Expect



**THE 5% LEVEL:** anticipate basic design and construction documents that are sufficient to obtain permits and give the contractor just enough guidance to build the basic structure. You will most likely work with the contractor to make detailed selections of the finish building products. Be prepared to pay extra if you want the architect to be involved during construction.

**THE 10% LEVEL:** design is more customized and the construction documents will be more detailed and include more comprehensive specifications, such as detailed window and door specifications, siding, roofing selections, etc. Construction administration may be included, but may have some limitations.

**THE 15% LEVEL:** the architect will help you manage the complete design including the interiors (kitchens, bathrooms, flooring finishes, etc.), making the process easier for you as well as insuring a unified design vision inside and out. You should expect 3D renderings, and more thorough involvement during construction.

**THE 20%-PLUS LEVEL:** fee may apply to smaller projects or where the design is very customized. There are certain processes that must be followed regardless of the size of the project, thus smaller projects don't benefit from economy of scale. A 20 - 25% fee might also be anticipated for detailed, custom projects that are primarily interior renovations, as the time input relative to the construction costs is often greater.

## A final note

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TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH the necessary requirements and make sure you aren't overlooking a crucial factor that could turn your project from success to failure, our firm offers a custom Needs and Options Review where we can identify the specific requirements pertaining to your project and your available options.

- It is a way of doing research and homework about a prospective construction project before getting too far along in the process.
- This becomes the foundation on which everything else can be built. The valuable insights you gain from this first phase can be used by us, or any other architect, and will ultimately produce a better result and design for you.
- It will allow you to explore your goals in a structured format.
- It will give you an opportunity to experience how our firm communicates with our clients, establish a realistic plan for your project and prepare for your further design needs and services.

To read more about this service, and why it is critically important to your project's success, please visit our website or if you're ready to discuss your project, please give us a call. We hope this brochure illuminates the process, and gives you a sense of what to expect.

We would be delighted to hear from you.  
Best wishes,

*Gary Rosard*



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