

What to expect when working with an architect

Spoiler alert: It can make the entire process of a home remodel, addition or reconstruction easier.

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SO, YOU WANT TO CHANGE UP YOUR HOME, and you plan to work with an architect. What now?

First, know that not every project requires an architect. Use one if you're nervous about making building choices on your own or you don't know exactly what you want to change.

The cost of working with an architect can be intimidating. However, an architect with cost-effective design solutions might save you money in the long run. Architects help with the design of the home. If you're planning to move walls or add different features and don't think you can make those decisions on your own, the added expense will be worth it to ensure your ideal remodel or addition is properly actualized.



(TOP) THE FULL-SCALE, MID-CENTURY REMODEL OF THIS 1950S-ERA HOME INCLUDED RAISING THE ROOF, ALONG WITH AN ADDITION AND A PORCH. THE HOME'S NEW LOOK IS DESIGNED TO FIT IN WITH THE 1950S RANCH HOMES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. (PHOTO BY LEONID FURMANSKY)

(OPPOSITE) STUDIO STEINBOMER DESIGNED THIS MID-CENTURY MODERN HOME IN CENTRAL AUSTIN WITH THE MAIN GOAL OF ACHIEVING AN UNINTERRUPTED FLOW BETWEEN THE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES.

Find the Best Fit

If you've determined that an architect's help is necessary, find one that's the right fit for you and your project. Research and ask potential architects about their recent designs or projects. Find out whether they have a set "menu" or are full service. Come up with a brief idea of what you're looking for, both for the design and from the architect.

Some architects have set menus, via which you'll get a certain number of hours, meetings, drawings, etc. Others, such as the architects at Studio Steinbomer in Austin, Texas, are full service, meaning they work with you from start to finish.

"We tell people it's a short-term 'marriage,'" explains Amy Bramwell, principal architect at Studio Steinbomer. "We're connected at the hip for a couple of years."

Invest in an architect with whom you are comfortable and who you trust will be worth your money. Come to your initial meeting with questions, ideas, concerns, etc. You and the architect will lay out the goals of the project. Goals can range from style to preservation plans to structural ideas and even sustainability.

The Design Phase

"The beginning is the fun part," points out Jed Duhon, principal architect at Studio Steinbomer. "It's fun for the clients when we're in schematic design and we explore all the options."

During this phase, in order to get a sense of a client's style, the Studio Steinbomer team has them make a wish list of everything they'd like and also bring images of other projects that inspire them.

The team then starts creating conceptual designs, brainstorming different options with their clients. This is when your architect will take your ideas and create a design that's logistical and doable, considering your budget and the home's site.

"It becomes this back-and-forth design process. They have an idea, but we bring our experience to it," Duhon says. "We start merging reality with their dreams."



(RIGHT) THIS HOME'S REMODEL WAS DESIGNED WITH THE INTENT OF UPDATING, EXPANDING AND RESTORING ITS ORIGINAL 1950S MODERNIST CHARM.

Five Tips for Selecting Your Architect

- 1. Full service versus set menu.** Based on your needs and how hands-on you want your architect to be, decide whether you want an architect who is full service or has a set menu. Knowing what you want from your architect will help guide you in the selection process.
- 2. Select someone with whom you are comfortable.** "If you're selecting someone to work with, you should be comfortable with telling them what you do and don't like about the design," Ben Pruett, Studio Steinbomer's director of marketing, advises. "If you feel intimidated by the person you're working with, and you can't really communicate, it can continue back and snowball and turn into an unhappy result."
- 3. Ask for a sample drawing set.** Looking at sample drawing sets from an architect's previous work can tell you a lot about them. For instance, it can tell you their design style or how many services you're getting. "If the drawing set has four pages in it—versus 20 pages—you're getting more services," Duhon explains. "Those are professional drawings that take time, but you're getting more services for which other architects' fees might be higher."
- 4. Get references.** References let you know whether the architect is trustworthy, easy to work with, is worth the fee, etc.
- 5. Find out who designed projects you like.** Is there a house in your town with which you're obsessed? Ask the owners who designed or worked on their home. Keep tabs on the houses you love, and make a list of the architects who designed them. If there's any overlap, that's even better.



(ABOVE) SITTING ALONGSIDE A MID CENTURY MODERN HOUSE, THIS MULTIPURPOSE PAVILION SERVES AS A POOL HOUSE, OFFICE, GALLERY, RETREAT AND GUEST HOUSE. IT FEATURES A CONCRETE DECK THAT SEAMLESSLY TRANSITIONS TO THE POOL.
(BELOW) ARTWORK LINES THE TWO MAIN WALLS OF THIS MULTIFUNCTION PAVILION. WINDOWS WRAP AROUND THE TOP OF THE PAVILION, VISUALLY SEPARATING THE WALLS FROM THE ROOF.



(ABOVE, LEFT) AN OVERHANGING METAL ROOF WAS ADDED TO THE REMODEL OF THIS 1950S HOME TO PROTECT ITS INTERIOR. NATURAL LIGHT ILLUMINATES THE HOME THROUGH THE GIANT, NORTH-FACING WINDOWS. (PHOTO BY LEONID FURMANSKY)
(ABOVE, RIGHT) THIS OPEN-CONCEPT STAIRCASE FITS PERFECTLY WITH THE GOAL OF CREATING A CONTINUOUS FLOW BETWEEN THE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES. THE LARGE, PATTERNED WINDOWS ALLOW FOR A CHECKERBOARD OF NATURAL LIGHTING TO FLOW INTO THE BREAKFAST NOOK.
(LEFT) THIS MOARI ICEHOUSE BLENDS INTO ITS ENVIRONMENT ON THE OUTSIDE. HOWEVER, ON THE INSIDE, IT HOLDS THE OWNER'S EXTENSIVE COLLECTION OF TIKI CULTURAL MATERIALS. THE STUDIO STEINBOMER TEAM DESIGNED A UNIQUE STRUCTURE THAT ALSO ADHERES TO ITS NEIGHBORHOOD'S DESIGN GUIDELINES. (PHOTO BY ANDREA CALO)

Construction Begins

After the designs and drawings are in place, the construction phase begins. Not every architect will take you through to construction, which is why establishing early on how far they'll work with you is important.

Construction restrictions and city ordinances vary, so make sure your project is doable at your site. Some full-service architects, such as the experts at Studio Steinbomer, help their clients get construction documents and help coordinate documents for the bank.

If your architect is full service, but you haven't chosen a contractor yet, they might help in the selection process. Once construction starts, the contractor and architect will collaborate to make sure your vision comes to fruition. ☺