

# The Ultimate Guide to Finding the *Right* Architect

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The right architect can make  
a world of difference.



"The most elegant details are the ones  
that appear effortless, natural,  
and resolved"

- Anders Lasater

# Introduction

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**Think about finding the right architect for your project like finding your next pair of shoes.**

When you shop for shoes, you think about which pair is appropriate for your intended use. If you're buying shoes to wear on a job site, you would most likely stay away from heels, and if you are going to buy some shoes for the gym, hopefully you would avoid steel-toe boots.

**Think of choosing the right architect the same way, and ask yourself, "What kind of architect do I need?"**

# Finding the Right Fit

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Like shoes, architects come in all different shapes, sizes and styles. Some will be appropriate for your project, while others will not. In the same way you would decide which kind of shoes are best suited for the occasion, you would decide what kind of architect is best suited for your project.

Do you expect your architect to simply hand you the plans for your house and wish you good luck? Or, do you expect your architect to not only create a thoughtful design, but also shepherd the project through to completion? Furthermore, do you want your architect to help you find the right contractor, interior designer and other professionals?



## Try On A Few

Once you've identified your needs and answered a few more of your questions, it's time to try on a few pairs (so to speak) and see which architect makes you feel comfortable. Here are a few proven ways to find your next architect:

# Referrals

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It is common for architects to receive jobs based on recommendations from past clients, friends and family. Maybe you know of a neighbour or a relative who recently remodeled their home and maybe you liked the work. Reach out and ask who they used for their architect.

# Online Resources

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There are plenty of great websites out there, but the one that we recommend, by far, is Houzz. If you need an architect in Laguna Beach, simply type in “Laguna Beach House” and search under the category “Pros”. The site is a really easy to use and it generates accurate search results.



# Social Media

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There are plenty of architects who use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to display their work and portfolios. It may take a little searching to find the right one for you, but at the very least, these sites offer a way for clients to view prospective architect's past work and style.

Social media can give great insight into the personality of a firm, so search around and look for architects who interact with social media in a way that appeals to your sensibilities.



# The Local AIA Chapter

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The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects can provide resources of all kinds. If you don't know where to start in your pursuit for a qualified architect, begin here.

## **Pro Tip**

Like doctors, architects tend to specialize in particular fields of practice. For instance, one architect might work exclusively on residential projects, while another might work exclusively on commercial projects. Some architects have more of a generalized practice and work on many different kinds of projects simultaneously. The staff at the local AIA chapter should be able to help direct you to some appropriate candidates for your project.



# Ask Some Questions

Once you have identified some suitable candidates, you will want to reach out and ask them some questions.

# 10 Questions to consider:

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## What?

### **1. Can I see some examples of your work?**

### **2. What level of service do you feel would be appropriate for my project?**

## Why to ask?

If possible, ask to see some of their work first-hand. A visit to a recently finished project, or even one that's under construction can reveal a lot about how they work and what kind of product they deliver to their clients. It may also be a good way to meet some past clients and speak to them about their experiences - or meet a contractor who may be appropriate for your project.

Different architects may offer different levels of service to their clients, depending on the particulars of the project, and the client's expectations. For instance, some architects will include periodic site visit during construction in their base fee, while others may charge hourly for that service. Others may include interior design services, such as materials, finishes, and appliance selections. Its a good idea to discuss what level of service you feel you will need to meet your project expectations.

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## What?

### 3. Have you worked on projects like this before?

## Why to ask?

Not all projects are created equal. Similarly, not all architects are skilled at delivering all kinds of projects. It will be important to find an architect who has experience with your particular project type, whether a new home, remodel, or a commercial project. Each type comes with unique challenges, and nothing beats experience.

### 4. What challenges can I expect?

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“By linking people with ideas -- with each other, and with the tools they need to create meaningful spaces -- I feel we are making our buildings better places in which to live and work.”

- Anders Lasater

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## What?

**5. What would your past clients say about you and can I speak to them about their experience with**

**6. Can you help me allocate a budget for the project, including your fees and the construction costs?**

## Why to ask?

There's no better way to understand what your experience will be working with an architect than to speak with someone who's already been in your shoes. Ask to talk with recent clients who have similar projects and learn what their experiences were. As we mentioned earlier, no two projects are ever the same, but hearing how your architect managed the challenges on someone else's project will give you a clear picture of what you can expect them to do for you.

The right architect for your project will be one who can help you understand the various costs for delivering your project - both in terms of the "Soft-Costs", such as professional fees and permit fees, as well as the "Hard Costs", the actual cost of construction for the project. Having that conversation early, and getting clarity of what you should expect your costs to be over the arc of the project will help ensure a smooth path forward through the challenges to come.

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## What?

### **7. Will you be able to recommend some builders who would work for us?**

### **8. How are your fees structured?**

## Why to ask?

There are lots of builders to choose from - but not all builders would be a good choice for your project. A good architect will help you identify what kind of builder would best suit you and the project based on a number of factors including budget, expectations for quality and project management, and experience with your type of project.

Architects typically charge for their services in an a variety of ways suited to the needs of the project and the owner. These may including a Cost-Per-Square-Foot model, a Percentage-of-Construction-Cost model, or a Time-and-Material model. It often depends on the level of service the architect is providing, and some projects may have fees based on all three models according the various phases that project may require. Ask your architect to explain how and why they structure their fees the way they do so that you have confidence that your project is getting the attention it deserves.



“Simply knowing what good details are, what they do, and how they do it can elevate your understanding of architecture a thousand fold.”

- Anders Lasater



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## What?

### **9. What other professionals that I will need to deliver on this project?**

## Why to ask?

Delivering a good building is very much like delivering a healthy baby. A team of doctors and specialists will working in harmony for nine months to help ensure the baby grows properly, and is brought into the world healthy and cared for. Similarly, your project will take a team of professionals, working in harmony with your architect and builder to deliver your project successfully. Depending on the scope of your project these may include other professionals such as a structural engineer, civil engineer, geologist, interior designer, and a landscape architect. Your architect should be able to identify what your specific project will need, and what you can expect those services to cost.

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## What?

### **10. Are you familiar with the entitlement process for the city in which my project is located?**



## Why to ask?

Each city or approval agency has its particular rules, regulations, and way of working when it comes to new development. These are often challenging factors to manage, even for seasoned professionals. That's why it's important to know if the architect you're considering has the experience necessary to help you navigate the often treacherous waters of entitling your project. Ask about other projects they've completed in the area, and learn what challenges they've faced, and you can expect with your own project.

A modern kitchen interior featuring extensive wood paneling on the walls and ceiling. The ceiling has several recessed circular lights. A white countertop runs along the wall, with a built-in coffee machine and a gas cooktop. A white range hood is mounted above the cooktop. Open shelving holds various glassware. A large window with a black frame is visible on the left, offering a view of greenery outside. The floor is a light-colored, polished material.

# Making the Decision

Choosing which architect to work with is one of your most important decisions because it can have lasting influence on the success of your project, from the budget to the execution and everything in between.

# A Good Fit

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After you've had a chance to interview some of your candidates, the right choice should soon become apparent. Just like that awesome pair of shoes, your architect should make you feel comfortable, confident and ready to conquer your next project.

Feel free to contact us, if you think that we would be a good fit for you and your project.

