

Questions To Ask An Architect During Your Selection Process

Before beginning to ask this set of questions, describe for the architect your basic goals, to include where you are in the planning process, approximate scope of the project, a representation of the quality level you'd like to be able to achieve, (possibly with a few images from magazines or books) and your approximate budget. Tell the architect that you realize you are not an expert in what architects do, or what things are likely to cost. Check with them up front to make sure that you are at least in the ballpark with your expectations—i.e. that what you are planning is within the realm of possibility, given your budget. If not, they'll be able to tell you up front, saving both of you a lot of time.

There are a lot of questions here, and sometimes if you go down the list one by one, the interview can become a bit on the formal side. An alternative is to give the architect your list ahead of time, and then let him or her address them at their own pace during your interview. You can then review your list at the end to make sure your questions have been answered.

Either approach works, but the flavor of meeting is quite different. When you ask the questions, you are in control. When the architect is privy to the list ahead of time, he or she is allowed into your agenda, and may be able to talk with you in a more relaxed and straightforward way. This can give you a better read of the potential chemistry between you and them—an extremely important ingredient in any successful project.

And keep in mind that every firm has their own way of doing things. Some will be less expensive, but offer less service. Some will offer a wide variety of services while others will do things only one way. Some will have a favorite style that they work in, while others will work in a variety of styles, depending upon what their clients are looking for. And for this reason, just because you don't like some of the architect's images, doesn't mean they won't be good for you. They may have provided exactly what that particular client was looking for. So be sure to check references before making hasty assessments, based on your own likes and dislikes. However, if you don't like most of the images the architect shows you of his or her past work, you can be fairly certain they aren't a good match for you.

I recommend interviewing no more than four architectural firms or you'll drive yourself mad. Do some pre-selection using the web, and then call to arrange a time to meet those you are interested. It can be really an enjoyable process when you are well organized and have done your homework.

Good luck, and happy home to you!

Warm regards, Sarah Susanka, FAIA

Questionnaire (Abbreviated version):

1. After hearing about our project, does it interest you? If not, could you suggest another firm or firms that might be better suited to our project?
2. Does your firm have time to give us the service we need?
3. What is your firm's design philosophy?
4. What kinds of services do you offer? Is there more than one way to engage your services? And if so what are they?
5. What are the challenges you see in our project?
6. Have you worked before on projects similar to ours?
7. If we were to work with your firm, how would you approach the project?
8. Who will be the project leader if we retain your firm for services?
9. If not the person in the meeting, may we meet this person and see some of his or her work? What are his or her credentials?
10. Will we be meeting directly with the person who is doing the design work?
11. Are there more players on the project team who we won't be meeting with?
12. Does your firm carry liability insurance?
13. May we have a list of past clients that we can contact, who have worked with the person who will be in charge of our project if we decide to proceed?
14. How long do you estimate the design process will take for our project?
15. What would you anticipate the length of the construction process to be for a project of this scale and scope?
16. Would you describe the steps involved in the architectural process?
17. How do you establish fees for a project? Are there different ways in which you structure your fees?
18. Will there be any engineering consultants involved in our project? Are their fees included within your fee?
19. How frequently do you bill, and what are the conditions of payment for work to continue on our project?
20. How do you manage and communicate about money during the process?
21. Is there any cost estimating involved along the way?
22. What can we do to help keep our project on target related to our budget?
23. If the scope of the project changes as it proceeds, will there be additional fees?
24. What should we anticipate as a per square foot cost range?
25. Do you help us to select a builder?
26. What services will you provide during construction for our project?
27. If the project is a remodeling, how would you describe the anticipated degree of disruption in our lives created by the construction process?
28. Are there any other issues we haven't asked about that you'd like to tell us?

Ratings Sheet

Ratings given by past client referrals: (1 = poor through 5 = excellent)

Name:

A. Performance of the firm: 1 2 3 4 5
Performance of the resulting architecture: 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Name:

B. Performance of the firm: 1 2 3 4 5
Performance of the resulting architecture: 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Name:

C. Performance of the firm: 1 2 3 4 5
Performance of the resulting architecture: 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

Our Rating:

Design ability: 1 2 3 4 5
Technical competence: 1 2 3 4 5
Professional service: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall chemistry: 1 2 3 4 5

COMMENTS: