

## working with design professionals

### Why Hire a Design Professional

While not every project legally requires the participation of a registered design professional, an Architect can provide a broad range of services that increase the finished value and make the renovation process easier.

- **Skills and Knowledge** - Through education and practice, architects learn the ins and outs of the renovation process. An architect can help you make sure that things get done how and when they need to be done as well as ensure that applicable building and historic codes are followed.
- **Time Commitment** - An architect can assist you through decision-making processes and save you time in permitting, contractor selection, and construction administration.
- **Technology and Experience** - Today, computer aided drafting can greatly speed the design process. Many architects take advantage of CAD technology to produce complete and accurate construction documents.
- **Design Talent and Idea Source** - Architects are spatially-oriented people. They became architects because they love creating interesting and unique spaces.

Architects that focus on renovation do so because they believe that adaptive reuse of our existing building stock is key to rebuilding and maintaining a vibrant urban core.

### Selecting a Design Professional

In no particular order, here are some key things to look for as you select an architect for your renovation project. You should decide on the relative priority of these issues before interviewing architects.

- **Experience with your project type** – For example, architects that focus on new commercial development may not have the specific expertise to take on a gut rehab
- **References/Portfolio** – Get suggestions from people who have been through the process before. Most architects will have a “portfolio” of projects they have participated in – feel free to ask to see it.
- **Experience In Your Location** – Different neighborhoods have different historic codes and requirements.
- **Cost and Budget** – As with any service, the lowest cost option is not necessarily the best. Make sure you are comparing apples to apples when considering the services provided by two different firms. Incomplete construction documents can end up costing more in the long run if contractors are not clear on the scope of the project.
- **Personality and Working Relationship** – Do you get along with the architect? How much involvement do you want in the project?
- **Design Sensibility** – Look at the architect’s previous work and determine if your tastes match the architect’s. How well does the architect listen to what your thoughts and concerns are?
- **Is the Office In the City** – Architects that live and work in the city are more likely to share your commitment to rebuilding that led you to do a rehab in the first place.

Fees for professional design services have a huge range. The methods of determining fees usually fall into two main groups: percentage of construction cost and hourly. Architects whose fees are figured as a percentage of construction cost will typically fall in the 4% to 8% range. The problem with this type of fee structure is that there is a small, though not insignificant disincentive for the architect to promote cost effective design solutions. Though the architect will bill progressively through the project, it is unlikely that there will be a "refund" at the end of construction.

The hourly rate structure, however, provides little incentive for the architect to complete the drawings in a timely manner. A good compromise is the "hourly-not-to-exceed" rate structure. The architect estimates the amount of time it will take to complete the drawings and provides the client with a "cap" on the fees. This way the Client has a good sense of how much design will cost, and is still protected from unexpected design fees.

### **Design Services**

Design services are typically broken down into the following phases: predesign, schematic design, design development, and construction documents. These phases, while somewhat fluid, proceed in a relatively straight line. Larger decisions and issues that affect the project as a whole are dealt with in the initial phases and grow increasingly detailed as it progresses.

#### Predesign

The predesign phase is where the designer gets an overall picture of the project, both physically (through existing conditions drawings) and conceptually (through program development, schedule and budget). In order to prepare the existing conditions drawings, the designer must measure the building and input the data into a computer drafting program (few designers still work solely by hand). A program outlines the requirements of the project – what spaces will be needed and how they should “feel”, how the building will be used and by whom.

At the end of this phase the designer has a set of drawings in that give an accurate picture of the building as it exists and a program that both parties can refer to throughout the project to assure it is progressing as planned. The program can be (and often is) fine tuned during the schematic design phase without a large effect on the scope of architectural design work.

### Schematic Design

The schematic design phase is essentially a translation of the program into drawing format. Ideas and thoughts expressed in the program are put down on paper. Scheduled progress meetings ensure that the project truly represents what the client wants. Generally, the designer prepares sketches to show several potential solutions to the program and the client selects one, combines several, and/or requests specific changes.

It is important that the larger decisions made at this stage are final because backtracking after the design development has started can mean wasted time for both the designer and the client. Also during this phase, the coordination with the appropriate government entities (Plan Review and Cultural Resources if necessary) is initiated to make sure the scheme meets their requirements.

### Design Development

Design development is typically the phase where much of the work in the project is done. It is during this phase that the approved schematic design is made to work precisely in the existing building and is entered into AutoCAD or another computer aided drafting program. The issues that are dealt with in this phase include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Structural integrity and engineering
- Room finishes
- Heating/cooling layouts
- Life safety (fire separation, egress, etc.)
- Electrical and plumbing layouts
- Accessibility (if applicable)
- Initial construction details

### Construction Documents

Once the design development drawings are approved, the additional required detail is added to become construction documents. A full set of construction documents generally contains floor plans with dimensions, building elevations, details, and sections through the building at a level of specificity required for permits to be issued and work to be bid and performed by contractors.

The construction documents may also contain a “specifications” sheet. The specifications spell out minimum quality requirements for building materials, methods of installation, and certain code requirements that must be followed. For large projects, the specifications are usually written in a separate bound booklet.

By this point, all necessary groups are aware of the project scope and the permits can generally be obtained in a short amount of time.



### Additional Services

Architects will also perform a broad range of additional services throughout the renovation process. Some of these include:

- **Feasibility Study** – Feasibility studies are usually used to give a client options or help establish direction if a client is unsure of what they want or what is possible to achieve with a project. Architects can perform a wide range of studies for clients that include:
  - What will need to be replaced vs. retained in a deteriorated building What options are available for adding on to an existing structure
  - What type and how many residential units can be put into an existing structure
- **Tax Credit Applications** – Some architects are experienced with the requirements, forms, and processes of application for Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits. Neighborhood Preservation Tax Credits can also help offset the cost of a renovation project.
- **Contractor Selection** – The process of selecting a contractor is as important as selecting your architect. Architects experienced with rehab work can assist with this process and help ensure that the contractor is properly qualified to build your project.
- **Construction Administration** – This component of architectural services typically includes site visits to review the progress and quality of work being done. In addition the architect can verify that work is being performed as indicated and in the Construction Documents.