

Selecting an Architect

Tuvia Poliskin RA
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Whether you're a property owner, business owner or homeowner, you've decided to initiate the process of having your project purposely designed for what you're looking to accomplish. How do you decide which architect is the right fit for you.

WHERE DO YOU FIND AN ARCHITECT?

The best way to find the architect that will suit your needs, is by seeking out potential candidates whose portfolio of work conveys qualities you value and want your project to embody. Make inquiries through family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and if you see a house or building you admire, either knock on the door and ask the occupant 'who was the architect' or contact the city to find out who was the architect of record.

The majority of an architect's work come via referrals. Through a referral, you've established a vetted introduction between you and the architect. A good referral can give you confidence in the architect's abilities and professionalism. You may also want to check with other reliable sources such as the local American Institute of Architects (AIA) office, internet sites or local design magazines. Once you compile a short list of potential architects, you can commence your selection due diligence by evaluating an architect based on a matrix of factors to consider. The following should be of assistance in your evaluation and then decision which architect is best suited to foster your aspiration into reality.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE AN ARCHITECT

After years of listening to and serving clients who have faced a similar decision, I've generated a list of possible factors to consider when evaluating an architect.

Think of these factors as water filling up a glass. If the glass is full, you have an excellent architect.

Question; how thirsty are you?

Don't be tempted to decide on your architect based on fee alone. The possible savings here is negligible in relation to the overall project costs. In fact, a quality architect can design more for the dollar in construction cost with foresight, knowledge and skill.

FIFTEEN FACTORS to consider:

Assign a scale of 1 to 5 per each factor. Prioritize the factors in the order of what's most important to you. With this matrix you can measure which architect encompasses the breath of factors you require. The architect's total score will be a preview into what you can expect from their overall performance. The matrix will assist you in making a comparable evaluation of the short list of architect's and then selecting your architect of choice from a quantitative analysis based on your preferred value system.

- **Needs:** does the architect listen to and clearly understand your needs, desires and objectives?
- **Vision:** is the architect in synch with your vision, aesthetic and taste?
- **Value:** does the architect understand what is important to you and add value through their creativity, skill and experience?
- **Knowledge:** does the architect have experience with your project type, along with the planning, building requirements and municipal processes? If not, does their past work demonstrate their capacity to be successful?
- **Limitations:** does the architect acknowledge and embrace the project parameters such as; budget, time and code restrictions?
- **Possibilities:** does the architect expand your thinking of what is possible and obtainable within the limitations?

- **Skills:** does the architect possess the graphic skills necessary to illustrate the design sufficiently for you to visualize and the technical skills for others to execute?
- **Process:** does the architect have a thoughtful and efficient design process that is inclusive of your participation?
- **Management:** is the architect well organized and able to adhere to a project schedule outlining the design process with critical milestones?
- **Resources:** does the architect have the infrastructure to manage and execute your project successfully?
- **Communication:** is the architect articulate in verbal and written form as well as easily accessible and responsive in a timely manner?
- **Personable:** does the architect have a trustworthy and respectable disposition and will be able to work well with you and others to achieve a successful project?
- **Referrals:** what did past clients have to say about the architect? (see list of questions)
- **Fee:** is the architect's fee reasonable for the specified services and will deliver what they said they will?
- **Alignment:** is the architect have your best interest in mind while serving the good of the project?

REFERRALS: QUESTIONS TO ASK

Note: You should ask architect(s) for contact information of their last three clients. The architect will provide referrals, but they might not be the most recent.

- How did you learn about the architect?
- What was the architect's scope of work?
- Have there been any significant issues with the design since its completion?
- What was your experience working with the architect?
- Did the architect resolve your needs, desires and objectives?
- Did the design meet or exceed your expectations?
- Did the design process progress according to the original schedule?
- Did the architect show you options?
- Was the architect able to clearly articulate the reasons for each design decision with associated pros and cons?
- Did the architect solicit your input?
- Did the architect give you enough lead-time to make decisions
- Was the architect easy to reach and communicate with?
- Did the architect work well with the contractor and others?
- Did the design meet your projected construction budget?
- Did the architect understand the municipal agencies requirements and processes?
- Did the architect understand the building systems & building codes?
- Did the architect manage the project well?
- Were there additional fees? If so, what were they for?
- Was the architect clear about what is considered "additional services" in the contract?
- Was the invoicing clear, accurate, and according to contract?

- Is there anything you would change about how the architect conducts their practice?
- Would you be able to visit the project to experience the architect's design?
- Would you hire the architect again?

WHY SELECT A SPECIFIC ARCHITECT?

In the end, how do you determine if the architect is a good fit?

You should feel confident that your architect has your best interest in mind, is in alignment with your needs, desires and objectives and most importantly, that you **trust** their **vision, skill** and **judgment**. Keep in mind, your architect acts as a conduit for your vision to be realized and is in service to you and your project.

Architect Factor Matrix	Architect A	Architect B	Architect C
Needs	3	5	4
Vision	3	5	4
Value	3	5	4
Knowledge	4	5	5
Limitations	4	3	4
Possibilities	3	4	5
Skills	5	5	5
Process	4	4	5
Management	3	4	5
Resources	3	5	5
Communication	4	4	5
Personable	5	3	5
Referrals	3	4	5
Fee	5	3	4
Alignment	3	4	5
	55	63	70

About

Tuvia Poliskin is a practicing architect in Washington, California and Indiana with 30 years experience in AEC Industry. He has taught and written on subjects ranging from Principles and Elements of Design, Building Systems, Building Code and Professional Practice.

Notes: