

An **INSIDE LOOK** at the Architectural **PROCESS**

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Let's face it, building a home is an exciting, yet very daunting process. For most, it will be the largest financial investment we make—possibly just once in a lifetime—so it's important to choose the right team to ensure your new home is everything you've dreamed.

Apps like Houzz and Pinterest are wonderful tools as you begin to define the styles and features you like best, but they

cannot substitute for a qualified architect/home designer. Websites sell inexpensive stock plans, but it can be heartbreaking to discover that these are incomplete or designed for a different region and don't meet your state and local codes. Another potential pitfall is purchasing a plan well above your budget. These scenarios could lead to additional money invested in fixing your plans or starting over with a local architect, who will ensure that the plans will meet your needs today and into the future.

Both builder and architect play important roles in any home-building project. It's becoming commonplace to select a builder first, based on recommendations, a parade home tour, or a web search. This can work well, but keep in mind that the builder's

responsibility is to construct the home according to the architect's drawings. Builders often are not involved in the hundreds of hours devoted to designing a home unique to you and how you live. It's much less expensive to make changes on paper than in the field. Conversely, few home designers have the desire or ability to brave Michigan weather on a steep roof in January! Employing an architect who understands your desires will go a long way toward getting you the home you envision, but it also takes a competent professional builder to turn that design into reality.

On higher-budget homes, it's customary to involve an interior designer to help take your home to the next level on the inside, just as architects do for exterior materials and detailing. Both architect and builder should be able to recommend an interior designer who can work well with you and your budget.

Not all architects/home designers take the same approach, so it's important to learn about their individual preferences through research and interviews. This is the best time to "go with your gut." Since you'll spend dozens of hours in discussions, you should enjoy spending time with them.

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Once you've chosen a home designer/architect, there are typically five phases to the process.

1 Schematic Design Phase (40-50 hours): Your architect will likely want to learn how you live, what you like/dislike about your current home, and your preferred style. They can serve as a buffer between family members when opinions differ. Architects are born problem-solvers - just give them a box of Legos and witness their creativity!

2 Design Development Phase (20-25 hours): This is the back-and-forth process to fine tune the initial concept and work through the exterior details. As this concludes the design portion of the project, it's easy to get lost in minutia, so having trust in your architect is key.

3 Construction Document Phase (150-300 hours): During this phase, the designer will add construction details, notes, and dimensions for the builder's "blueprints." Structural engineers are often brought in to consult on any engineering challenges presented by the project.

4 Bid or Negotiation Phase (12-16 hours): If you intend to competitively bid your project, the architect will send the Construction Documents (CDs) to your potential builders. The builders will send the CDs to vendors for quotes that will be used to compose their overall bid. The architect may assist you in analyzing these bids and selecting the best builder for your project. Your bank will require a set of CDs to appraise the home before closing on your loan. You will also need to submit the CDs to obtain a building permit from the governing municipality.

5 Construction Phase (12-24 hours): The architect will work with the builder to ensure that the project is built as specified in the CDs approved by you.

As a general rule, contacting an architect 6-12 months in advance of building gives you a realistic timeframe to design, engineer, and bid your project with multiple builders. In a booming economy, most architects and builders have a wait time, so it's important to plan ahead.

It's easy to get overwhelmed with all the decisions required during the home design process, but with the right team, it can be fun and exciting. One of the most creative architects in the U.S., Tom Kundig, said it best - "People who build their own home tend to be very courageous. These people are curious about life. They're thinking about what it means to live in a house, rather than just buying a commodity and making it work." □

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