



INTRODUCTION

At Katz, we have more than 10 years of experience working as building architects alongside property managers, co-op and condo boards in order to ensure they're prepared for everything from master planning to hiccups during routine renovations. Nonetheless, we always get this question:

What exactly does a building architect do?

We interviewed our founder, David Katz, to get an answer and learn more about the importance of having an architectural steward to look after a building's longevity.



David Katz

Principal / Founder

As founder of Katz Architecture, David has more than 30 years of experience in the fields of architecture and design. Over this time, he has contributed to a wide range of residential, commercial, retail, institutional, urban design and preservation projects throughout the United States and abroad. His work has appeared in multiple publications including House Beautiful, Building Design + Construction, New York Spaces, the New York Post and the New York Times.

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Q&A

Q: What are the typical responsibilities of a building architect in a co-op or condo property?

A: The primary responsibility of a building architect is to protect and increase a building's value. We achieve this through capital improvement planning, preservation and or renovation of common areas, routine maintenance of the building infrastructure and review of proposed work by building residents.

Q: Who is a building architect hired by, and who do they answer to?

A: Every co-op or condo is collectively owned. In co-ops people own shares of the building and in condos they own their individual units. In both cases, a monthly maintenance is collected to run the building and create savings for building improvements and unforeseen expenses. The fiduciary responsibility to the residents falls upon an elected board of directors, most often in assistance with an outside management company. As a building architect, I am hired by, and work directly with, the board and management company for the good of the building as a whole.

Q: What interests you in doing this kind of work?

A: Years ago, when I first graduated architecture school, I remember interviewing with a guy who worked on façade restorations. On his desk was an old steel beam he had pulled from one of the prominent high rise buildings he was working on. It looked like it was held together by its own rust. You could have put your finger through it. Over the years, as I gained experience with older construction I continued to develop this interest in how buildings age and what needs to be done to protect them and keep them healthy.

Sidewalk vault repair before and after. ▶



Q: Does the building architect decide what work a building needs to do?

A: Building boards usually have an idea of what work they need to do, but they will work with a building architect to help them prioritize. If a building is run properly, they have a certain amount of savings to be used for unforeseen emergencies and general building maintenance. This is in addition to aesthetic improvements such as lobby renovation or new amenities such as a gym or roof deck. A capital improvement plan helps to lay out a prioritized timeline of what work should be done when, along with a cost projection. This way the board can better prepare financially and prioritize work.

Q: You mentioned you review proposed work by residents. What does that mean?

A: Both condominium owners and co-op shareholders are allowed to modify their apartments. But before they do, they must submit a set of drawings or written scope of work to the board and management for approval. A building architect makes sure

Before and after of a facade repair and door replacement for a 1923 Landmark District building. ▶



the changes to an individual apartment won't negatively impact the building in any way. We review the documents and work with the resident's design professional on the job to offer comments that address the rules and regulations of the individual building.

Q: Okay, so once all that is approved your job is done?

A: Not quite. Once these plans are reviewed and approved, we usually remain involved during the construction process to make sure the work presented is what is actually built and to look out for anything of concern that may be found during the demolition process, like mold in the walls, damaged wiring, or leaks. This is New York City and you have buildings that have been occupied for more than a hundred years in some cases. There are plenty of problematic things you can find hidden in the walls and ceilings that you had no clue about.

Q: What are some other examples of projects you would do as a Building Architect?

A: My office has been involved in all sorts of projects for our buildings from basic building repairs to roof replacements, lobby renovations and building expansions. Beyond just individual apartments, buildings themselves contain a lot of spaces that need to be maintained. There are outside windows, hallways, a lobby, a roof, and in some cases recreational rooms, gyms, and pools. The building architect is often brought in to maintain all these aspects of a building.

**Roof replacement
before and after. ▶**



For example, let's say a building's windows are in need of replacement. A building architect can develop a master window plan and obtain the necessary approvals for this work. Recently we were brought in to assist with the repair of a sidewalk vault, which in addition to simple sidewalk replacement, involved structural, mechanical, sprinkler, waterproofing and façade work. This was in a designated landmark district and approvals were required from the Department of Buildings, the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Department of Transportation. Having an



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**DANGEROUS
CONDITION.**
Terra cotta plank
ceiling punched
for piping without
being reinforced. ▶

experienced building architect by your side to help navigate all this comes in handy.

Q: How do you build relationships with building managers and property owners? Why are they important?

A: When you work on a building for a number of years, you get to know the ins and outs of the structure, the people who make up the building, and the style. If I get a call from one of my buildings about a proposed renovation, I'm familiar with the plans and I can quickly determine what needs to be done in order for things to go smooth.



We have some older loft buildings, particularly in the Flatiron District, that have terra cotta plank floors, which was a common building technology for commercial buildings of the time period. During a renovation it's not uncommon for people to want to punch through the ceiling to bring utilities down without realizing punching through a Terracotta plank is different than punching through concrete slab. With concrete, the structure will hold. With terracotta, you can really compromise the structure if it is not reinforced properly. That's just one example.

Luckily, we've been blessed to build longstanding relationships with buildings like Donna Karan's Urban Zen and the police building at 240 Centre Street. While we take on case by case work, too, we enjoy these partnerships and helping owners and tenants ensure their building is healthy and sustainable.

Q: What knowledge or expertise does an experienced building architect need to have?

A: A strong technical knowledge of building structure, an awareness of local architectural history and a thorough understanding of all the rules and regulations governing individual buildings. A solid design background and aesthetic sense is important too, particularly when it comes to renovation. At the end of the day, the spaces we inhabit — in addition to being beautiful — must provide structural stability and shelter from the elements.

Katz Architecture works as a partner to clients, building managers, design professionals, and city agencies to ensure the ongoing integrity of our built environment.

NEXT STEPS

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