



Working with an Architect

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*Katz Architecture
Project Management*

*305 7th Avenue, 20th Floor
New York, NY 10001*

*www.katzarch.com
212.353.1080*



by **ULA BOCHINSKA**
Senior Architect

From first design sketch on the proverbial napkin to the last brush of paint on the finished walls, a construction project is as exciting as it is complex. It is a lengthy process with lots of players involved. Working with a competent, knowledgeable architect can save many headaches, as well as time and money. Here is what to expect on the exhilarating journey from design to project completion, and what the architect's role is in each of the phases.

PRE-DESIGN

It is worth engaging the architect early on, before your building site is selected. The architect can provide an evaluation of the project's feasibility, including zoning and code analysis, architectural survey of existing conditions and review of the client's programmatic requirements.

In this phase, the architect will also assist the client in selecting required consultants such as a mechanical engineer, structural engineer or code consultant. It is advisable to engage consultants that have previously completed successful projects with the architect, but it is not a requirement. In case of new consultants, the architect will perform due diligence by checking the consultant's background and references.



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SCHEMATIC DESIGN

This phase is arguably the most fun. With pen to paper, a vision starts taking shape. During this phase the client and architect work together to define the layout, bulk and materials of the project. A lot of research is performed, as well as a lot of sketches and drawings to effectively communicate ideas. After a handful of meetings, phone calls and e-mails, several schemes emerge. Finally, one of the schemes is selected and further developed.



DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The design is approved, and it is time to introduce new members to the team. The structural engineer, mechanical engineer and other consultants receive plans of the project and start adding their portions of the design to the puzzle: structural elements, ductwork and equipment, piping and wiring. The architect now needs to make sure that all those elements work together and do not compromise the overall aesthetic and functionality of the original design. This phase also entails identifying more specific materials, components, finishes and fixtures. The architect again works closely with the client during this process.

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CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

During this phase three tasks will be accomplished: a drawing set issued for review by the local building department and associated agencies, a drawing set issued for pricing and a final construction set. While the drawings are being reviewed by the local building department and priced, the architect continues work. The documents need to be brought to a level that allows the project to be built. Pertinent construction details like dimensions and specifications are added, and additional drawings created. For example, a design development set may show the quantity and approximate locations of light fixtures, while the construction set shows their specific locations.



BIDDING / NEGOTIATION

The most common method of awarding a contract for construction is through a bidding process with several potential contractors. Less often, a contractor may be chosen early on, yet they still need to price the project and budget negotiations often take place. On larger projects, a construction manager may be employed instead of a general contractor. Whatever the case may be, the architect is involved, walking the contractors through the site and design, answering questions, and making sure prices include exactly what is asked for in the drawings. The architect will make recommendations on how to save costs if the project is over budget. Finally, he or she will navigate the client through drafting the final contract between owner and contractor.

CONSTRUCTION

With the permits in place and contractor on board, the construction can begin. This is typically the longest phase. How challeng-

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ing this phase is depends on the skills and competency of the contractor, among other factors. Here is what is certain: there will be problems. Problems on a construction site are virtually unavoidable. However, a good contractor and architect will be able to address any difficulties quickly and effectively.

During construction, the architect participates in weekly meetings and site visits. The architect also reviews various samples presented by the contractor to ensure that what was called for on the drawings is what is being installed. Moreover, the architect's team will review the contractor's payment requests making certain that what is being charged for is completed.



POST-CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

Construction is over, but the architect may still be involved during the close-out of the project. Various services such as providing an as-built drawing set, reviewing final payment documents submitted by the contractor, or obtaining sign-offs from

the local building department are only a few services that architects may provide during this stage.

As you can see, an architect remains intimately involved throughout all phases of a project. Therefore, hiring an experienced professional with excellent communication skills is crucial in making the process run as smoothly as possible. Our team at Katz Architecture has over 20 years of experience delivering successful projects to satisfied clients. Contact us today for an assessment of your planned venture!

About the Author

Ula Bochinska earned her Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Planning degree from the University of Technology in Warsaw, Poland in 2001 and has been practicing in NYC since 2002.

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

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info@katzarch.com