

A Need to Vent

BUILDING BLOCKS

The ABC's of hiring an architect, builder and contractor:
Hobbs president Scott Hobbs teaches us the fundamentals.

What are the roles of the architect and contractor?

"The architect provides the aesthetic intent and the builder provides the cost, schedule and quality implications of implementing that intent. The architect is tasked with working directly with the client to make sure that the floor plans tie in with the interior and aesthetics of the building and are clearly represented in the blueprints. The blueprints then become the official language of the project, allowing the owner, the architect, the contractor, subcontractors and suppliers to talk.

The contractor's job is to actually build the project. He looks at the blueprints and makes sure that it's buildable, then provides pricing and scheduling information and assembles the team of employees, subcontractors and suppliers that will actually create the product. If the architect is the composer of the orchestra, the contractor is the conductor and the musicians are the suppliers."

Who hires whom?

"The owner hires both. The contractor and architect serve separate purposes and both need to work for the owners. Ideally, the builder and architect should challenge each other. The architect is artistic and the builder is practical; mixing the two should make the sum greater than the parts."

This sounds expensive.

"The more complicated the job, the more you should pay for the services. By bringing in an architect, you can frequently come up with ideas that you never could have come up with alone, making it a superior product. You get what you pay for. Although many builders can handle small drawings, I'm surprised at how many no-brainers are improved by architects. Getting those ideas translated into the blueprints is a critical factor in the success of a project."

What's the process for bidding on a project?

"There are two:

1. The architect completes the plans and specifications and the owner then spends roughly two months getting bids from contractors. Then the

contractors make twenty to thirty copies of the blueprints and send them out to subcontractors. Once the contractors get their bids, then they make the bid to the owner.

2. Negotiate a fee with a builder to act on the owner's behalf. The contractor then oversees the bidding of the project and shares the information with both the client and the architect to make sure the budget matches the final design."

What are the current home trends?

"People are continuing to increase the amount of high-quality materials they use on a broad scale. Pricing has gone up to \$400-\$500 a square foot; in some cases that's as much as 500 percent in eight years, but a lot of that comes from the use of higher-quality products and the fact that the cost to build a square foot is notoriously unreliable. For example, no one can agree on what a square foot is: Builders include the exterior square footage (porches, for example), while realtors start counting from interior wall paint."

What's your favorite bang-for-the-buck improvement?

"Updating the kitchen/family room to reflect the needs of the family. In theory, you're doing this to make life better and simpler, so affecting the area where you spend the most time is where you'll get the most value."

What's the biggest preconception about renovation?

"Most customers do not understand that if a contractor or his subcontractors have poor or nonexistent insurance, it can be catastrophic for them. Nobody knows what 'fully insured' means. The levels of misrepresentation are incredible and, at the end of the day, if something happens on the project, the owner is held responsible."

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