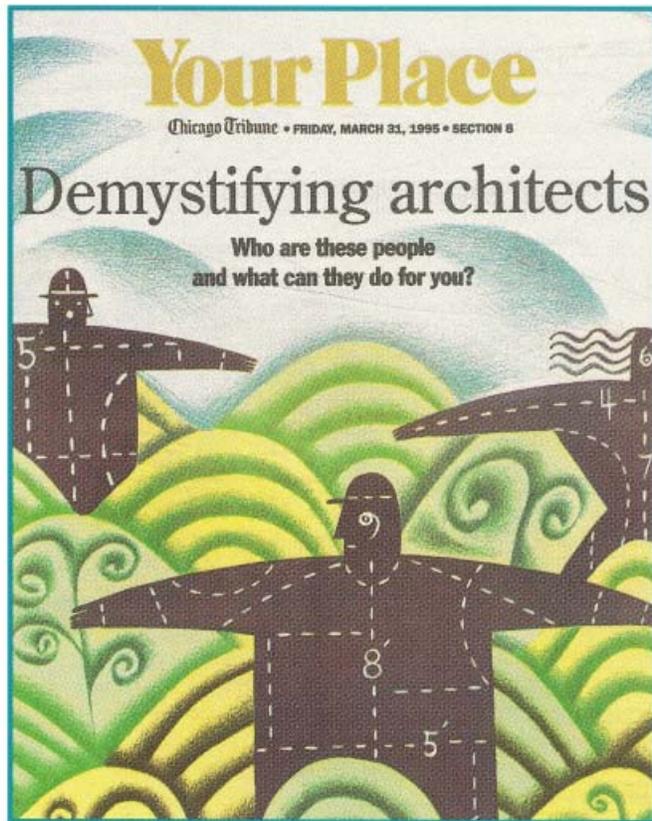


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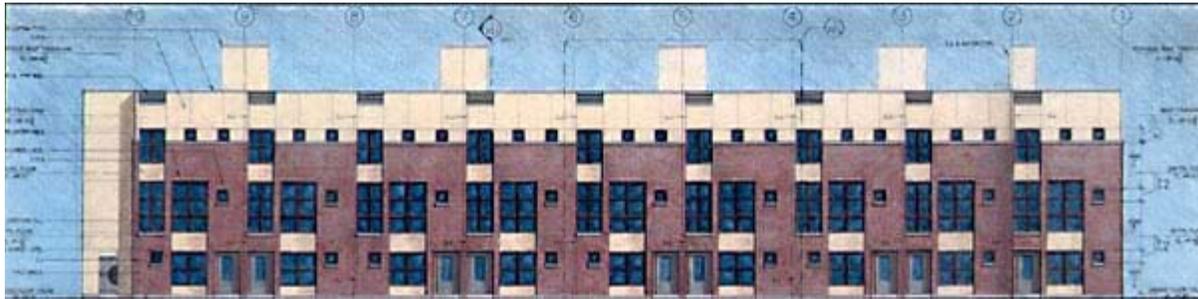
Demystifying Architects (page 1)

Helen J. Anderson - Chicago Tribune March 31, 1995

Thousands of homeowners, faced with the question of whether to move or improve, opt for the latter because they like their location — their neighbors, local schools, retail shops and restaurants, municipal services, and nearby rail and road transportation. They decided to stay put. Before embarking on projects to enhance family comfort, however, many sought the advice of a licensed architect via the “Home improvements” column in the Tribune’s *“Your Place”*. Yet many homeowners who contemplate rearranging interior space or building an addition seem reluctant to consult an architect directly, on their own initiative. Whether they believe their residential project is too small to be of interest, whether they hold architects in awe or perceive them as prima donnas — whatever the reason, people are architect-shy.

Simply put, architects are individuals schooled in the design and construction of buildings who have passed a state-administered examination and are registered to practice. To demystify the architect-client relationship, we’ve asked several registered architects to answer questions regarding their profession and the services a home-owner can expect of them. Finding one seems to be a logical place to start. “The best way to find an architect is through a referral,” says David Seglin of Bauhs Dring Seglin Main, an architectural firm in Chicago’s River North area. “Talk to someone you know who has employed an architect — a friend or someone in your neighborhood who is having work done. Another source is the American Institute of Architects [AIA], which has chapters throughout the nation and offers a wealth of information about architects and the services they provide. The Chicago chapter alone has more than 1,700 members.”

In order to be a full member of AIA, practicing architects in Illinois must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulations in Springfield. The Yellow Pages are not necessarily the best place to find an architect, according to Seglin, who has taught architectural design at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee for the last 10 years. Although there is no statutory prohibition against advertising, the practice is frowned upon by the AIA’s ethics committee. “Talk to a number of architects,” Seglin says, “two, three, even four, depending on the size of your project. The preliminary meeting is a ‘getting to know you’ sort of thing. The single most important factor is establishing a comfort level, a sense of trust between client and architect.” Although Bauhs Dring Seglin Main is based in Chicago, the firm does work throughout the Chicago area, providing an introductory consultation at no charge — a practice that is widespread among architects but not universal.



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There To Listen

Other local architects agree its a good idea for homeowners to interview two or three architects before making a final selection. "Our goal is to design something that's functional, architecturally pleasing and meets local building codes," they say. "The biggest thing in our profession is listening; we don't want to do something the client can't live with. During the initial meeting we ask what changes the prospective client has in mind, and together we tour the house inside and out, paying particular attention to the area of change under consideration. We discuss the potential project from the standpoint of design and cost. Sometimes wish lists are longer than reality dictates." The first meeting typically lasts an hour to an hour and a half, but may go as long as three hours.

Here are some ways homeowners can prepare for the meeting. Write down questions you want to ask the architect, keeping in mind that no question is insignificant. Don't be afraid to enlist the aid of f ce is available only to registered architects, not draftsmen; it covers working drawings, in case something has been omitted or is incorrect. Such errors are unusual, but they can occur. You also can make rough sketches of the changes you have in mind. Clip photos of room settings you admire from newspapers and magazines. Collect catalogs from manufacturers of windows, plumbing fixtures, cabinets, floor coverings, and other products. All of these things will add to your knowledge and help you convey your ideas to the professional planner.

Zoning requirements and building codes have a bearing on the way in which homes may be altered or enlarged. They vary from state to state and municipality to municipality. Sometimes architects check out zoning regulations before the first meeting with the client, sometimes afterwards. It's helpful if the owner is able to provide a plat of survey. If all goes well at the initial meeting and the owner gives a go-ahead to the architect, the latter prepares a proposal outlining details and costs. A proposal should be fairly comprehensive and the services to be provided should be well outlined. Ask the architect to show you a set of drawings so you can see how much or how little detail he has given.



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Money Talk

“A Beginner’s Guide to Architectural Services,” published by the AIA, is non-specific in the matter of how architects charge for their services, perhaps because costs may vary from region to region. “There is no set fee for a particular type of project,” the brochure states. “Whenever you feel it is appropriate, discuss with your architect how he or she would expect to establish the fee on your project.” Actually, for the homeowner considering remodeling, the appropriate time for this discussion should be at the outset of the business relationship. Keep in mind that when an architect estimates construction at \$100 to \$125 per square foot, or higher, according to materials chosen, that figure is for construction only. The architect’s fee and the cost of site surveys and permits are additional.

It’s important to check references. Architects often say that they are only as good as their last project so get references and check them out. You might also ask to see examples of the architect’s work. If you hire an architect, you’ll get a detailed set of plans, and details are essential to the success of a building project. Using these plans, you’ll be able to get competitive bids from general contractors, whereas if you bypass the architect and go directly to a builder, you get only that builder’s price.

What They’ll Do

Although many firms will do “as much or as little” as the client requires, some firms prefer to carry a job from blueprints to completion. “This makes it a team effort between architect and owner-homeowners are not on their own during construction. Our role is to act as the owner’s representative.” In regard to affordability, “That’s when you do really need an architect. Our fees can be covered in the costs that are saved by having an expert do the planning. “Although our methodology is basically the same for every project, every project, large or small, is different. People who are thinking in terms of changing their homes for better living shouldn’t be afraid to consult an architect. We’re here to help them achieve their dreams, not to impose our ideas on them.” Developing floor plans, elevations, specifications and cost estimates are all part of the residential architect’s job. Hand-holding is part of the job, too. “Changing one’s dwelling is a very emotional experience for most people. Dispensing TLC is an important part of this profession.”