

AIA Iowa

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The Architect

Architecture is a tapestry of aims, interests and ideals. For most architects, theirs is a profession of examination, analysis and evaluation, described by most as the process of design. Through this process, an architect creates a successful building that strikes a balance between client interests, the community at large and the demands of nature. In an age of specialization, the architect is required by training and temperament to be a generalist. Because the art of building is not a singular action, an architect must be able to perceive the whole picture, and create a building that is technological, artistic, functional and human.

Each client has a problem to be solved. Each building, while unique in its final creation, has common characteristics: to satisfy a need, to adhere to a schedule and budget, and to fit within the parameters of a site. Any project, regardless of its size and scope, has a significant physical and economic impact on its environment and the surrounding community.

When designing a building, an architect must not only consider the client's interest, but the interests of the public at large. A building that satisfies its client's needs and is suited to its context serves the best interests of both its owner and its neighbors. Each building must also respond to fundamental characteristics of nature. Not only must gravity and topography be accommodated, but the architect also must be aware of the consequences of time. A building is not momentary in its existence, but is experienced well into the future. The process of design typically begins with a statement of program, which is a written description of the client's needs, goals and aspirations for a project. It may be a simple list defining space requirements or it may quantify specific ambitions, but it must ensure a "fit" on the intended site. The program is the basis upon which the value of an architect's performance is judged.

From the program and site overview, the architect prepares a preliminary proposal in the stage typically described as schematic design. These sketches suggest various options and opportunities inherent in the program and site. These are created through a free-flowing exchange of concepts and ideals that clarify the project's fundamental objectives. Only after a preferred strategy is selected does development continue.

Next, the schematic proposal is further examined at the design development stage. Construction materials and methods are selected, planning layouts are refined, and increasingly, estimates of construction cost are projected. In design development, the architect collaborates with consultants, including engineers, landscape architects and graphic designers who contribute their expertise.

Throughout this phase, the architect continually reassesses the initial project objectives, ensuring the proposal conforms to the initial program requirements and preserves the client's interests. The architect must also assess the building within the context of the surrounding community. Only after both architect and client agree that the design fulfills the program objectives are construction documents prepared. Detailed drawings allow a contractor to establish fixed building costs and begin construction. The completed documents are a legal contract compelling the finished building to be constructed in accordance with the client's programmatic, economic and aesthetic intentions. As construction proceeds, the architect becomes an advisor, continuing to evaluate the design's evolution and compliance with intentions through site visits and client consultations.

Most architects consider the design process complete only after the client moves in and becomes accustomed to the surroundings. In this post-evaluative phase, the architect reevaluates whether the project is a balanced work that met the client's needs. Through the process of design and collaboration with an architect, a client will enjoy a successful, satisfying building that fulfills a specific goal while enhancing its community.