



Exploding Myths: The Truth about What Architects Do

Myth #1: Architects help make decisions. After talking with an architect, many people are surprised at their own definite ideas about what they want in a house.

Architects help homeowners think about how a building functions. They can design a house that is flexible enough to grow with a young couple who work now but expect children later. Architects can design an inexpensive, energy-efficient, fully accessible home for retired people on a fixed income. They can show how a house built for a single family can be remodeled into a house for a group of single working people.

Myth #2: The architect is the one building professional has the training and experience to guide homeowners through the entire building process.

An architect serves as the owner's agent. As head of a team of specialists (engineers, landscape architects, contractors, etc.), an architect's first obligation is to look out for the homeowner's interests. Architects' drawings and construction documents tell the contractor precisely what to build and set down exact requirements. They help homeowners get bids for construction based on those same requirements. And, architects follow the contractor's work to make sure there are no surprises, making sure the homeowner gets what they want.

Myth #3: Architects' fees are not just added on top of project costs.

They can save the homeowner money in many ways. Architects can oversee a homeowner's budget and negotiate to get the best materials and workmanship at a good price. More importantly, an architect's design can greatly reduce energy and maintenance costs, which add up to many times the purchase price of a home over the years. They can turn a difficult lot into a successful building site. They can spend time planning and developing a homeowner's ideas fully to avoid costly refinements after construction is underway. They can make sure bids for construction are based on exactly what the homeowner wanted and expected to get the best price. They can find do-it-yourself parts of the project for a homeowner or show the homeowner how to act as their own contractor.

Myth #4: The best answer to the question of what do architects do is open ended.

Architects do renovation, energy analysis, site selection, interiors, cost analysis, construction and/or construction management. In designing a project, architects can add a porch, a skylight or design a complete house. They can adapt an old building to a new use and keep its character. Architects can provide cost estimates. They can make a building safe for occupancy. They can fit a building to a difficult site. Architects can find skillful craftspeople or they can enlarge a house and eliminate the need to move.