



Designing Homes - Building Relationships

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Thank you for your interest in BDS Architecture! We are glad you have taken the time to meet with us and hope this is the first step towards a great relationship we build your project from! We are always available to help!

This packet is intended to help you become familiar with BDS Architecture and our process. There is a bunch of information that we hope you find helpful. There is also some information that we can use to get more familiar with you and your project. Please feel free to read through it at your convenience. There will not be a test at the end, don't worry!

First, a quick word about myself and our company...

I am Brad Saelens and I enjoy all aspects of Architecture. I became interested in being an Architect when I was in junior high school. My family was building a new home, and I was at the home every day helping. I soaked in all the knowledge I possibly could and still look at that experience as the most valuable in my architectural career. That was in 1994, and I have taken those life lessons and built them into a career. In high school I was lucky enough to take drafting and home design courses. I also had an internship with a local civil engineering firm. I went to college at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I focused on my architectural studies and finished a 5 year degree program in a little over 4 years. Leaving UIC with a Bachelors of Arts in Architecture degree, I went and worked for a custom home builder.

At the home builder I was able to draft and design custom homes, but I was also able to be involved in all aspects of the building process. I love the ability to create a custom home plan from scratch and follow it every day as it is being built. It taught me two important lessons. First, to work with a contractor to get my design built as it was intended. Many architects and contractors see things differently. I try to bridge that gap and create a team approach. There are always changes and errors that only come to light during construction, no matter how much work everyone involved has put in. Rather than blame each other, I focus on getting problems solved in a way that works for everyone. The goal is always to have the homeowner move into a house that they love! Secondly, my work on actual construction sites taught me to take a practical, common sense approach to each project. There are so many different parts that have to go together to create even the smallest of projects. I try to think of all these moving parts and bring them together in the most functional way possible. While I still stay true to the value of architecture, I know that designing something that is overly complicated usually is also over budget and can lead to costly errors on the job site. There is a delicate balance to find, and my experience has helped me create functional architecture which brings my clients a great value and high level of service.

After working with the home builder for a number of years, I went on to work at architectural firms in Illinois and California and set a goal of getting my architects license. Generally speaking, to become licensed in architecture you need 3 things. First a degree in architecture, second 5-7 years of training under a licensed architect, and third to take a pass many very tough exams (in my case 7 exams). Many people relate it to passing the bar exam for a lawyer. I don't ever plan to do that, it was already challenging enough! The architecture firms were both residential and commercial, and covered all aspects of the architectural process.

I took it all in and came out with a continued passion for residential design. It has always been more personal and driven by a clients hopes and dreams, not by the checkbook of some big corporation! I started taking my exams in early 2013 and finished them in 2014. I passed each exam on my first try (each one only has about a 60% pass rate), and received my license in October of 2014! It took me 20 years from that jobsite of my family home to get my license. It was a long and extremely educational journey, fueled mostly by my passion to create a great home! It's a journey that I hope to continue with your project!



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With BDS Architecture you will get...

Licensed Architect –

I will oversee all aspects of your project, and personally work on most or all of the documents that are produced.

Great Communication –

A quick response to all emails, phone calls, etc. usually within 2 hours. Most importantly, we listen to you and your ideas, and help them along. We also meet on evenings and weekends, if needed!

Personal Service –

We are not looking to create the next great architectural project, just the best project for you. You might not be our only client at the time, but we will make sure you feel like you are!

Budget Respect –

We want to have your project built, not just designed. To do this, it needs to be in your budget. A good Architect will save you money on your project and provide value to each client through the process.

Field Experience –

We know how contractors work, and we work with contractors to solve problems. This saves time, money, and frustration!

What we expect from you as a client...

Honesty –

It sounds simple, but we need you to tell us what you want and what your budget is. It makes sure we can do our job right. If you don't like something we designed, just tell us! We will not take it personally, and it will all lead to a better project!

Communication –

Give us all the information you can. It's part of our job to pull it all together for your project. Send pictures, mark up our drawings, and have everyone involved be a part of the process.

High Expectations –

Set the bar high and let us reach for it. You are probably spending a large amount of money on your project and you should only expect the best.

Flexibility –

This is a process that has twists and turns along the way. Some ideas work out, some do not. The goal is to get to the finish line with the best possible result for you and your situation.



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Why hire BDS Architecture (or any Architect)?

The role of an Architect can vary with every project, and each project is different. Most projects will benefit from having an Architect involved in the process. Any time you are adding new rooms, working with plumbing or structure, or just want something that has been well thought out to fit your needs, you should be looking for an Architect first.

It is true that Architects mainly work only on paper. Most do not build your project or hire contractors to work on building it. The truth is, your Architect has already built it in their own head. If you hire BDS Architecture we will have built it, taken it apart, built it again better, taken it apart, built it again...you get the picture! The point is, this is all done in our head. The cost for this for the client is zero! A good Architect can save you money on a project by doing their job very well. The better and more efficient a design gets in the Architect's head, the less it will cost to build. You do not have to actually build each space, decide you don't like it, tear it down and build it again. Changes do happen even with the best designs, but the less you have to make, the more money you will save.

The Architect's job is to get this design from their head onto paper so you can see it and understand it. There are many tools we use to get this done and each project is different. Some clients can easily understand a design by looking at it. Some need more help to understand the drawings. We will make sure that the information for your project is understood by you and you feel as good about the design as we do!

What is an Architect?

An Architect is a licensed professional. Each state has different licensing requirements, but all involve schooling and work experience. Almost all require extensive testing on all aspects of architecture. These tests focus on what is called "Life, Safety, and Welfare", but cover everything (if you want a long story, ask your Architect about this!).

Your Architect should, first and foremost, protect the people who will be in the space they are creating. They should be able to mix this safety into your project to create a space that meets your needs without even noticing the safety. All Architects and contractors will follow the building codes required for your project. Most contractors will just follow the codes, but a good Architect will follow the codes and create a beautiful design around them.

Role of an Architect:

This is a hard job to define, mainly because each project is unique. Take for example...you are designing a basement bathroom. Your Architect will help create a space that is comfortable to be in, has good lighting, and works well with your existing basement. They will produce documents for the permit and the contractor. These will probably be 1-2 pages, with basic information to get you the space you need. As for the timeframe, roughly 1-2 weeks.



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Now take a completely new home. Your Architect will become your best friend. You will probably have their phone number stored in your phone and will email them almost daily! This process is much more intimate. Your Architect will need to know all about what you need in this home, what styles you like, how many people are going to live here, do you entertain family or guests, etc. The more information you give them, the better. I encourage my clients to email me all the images they find that they like for their new home. It is my job to find their style and taste, and then create a beautiful design just for them. If you are building a home, it is your dream home! I make sure that this is shown in your design! This is just the beginning of the process...and the timeframe can vary greatly. See the next section for more information.

These are just the ends for the "Role of an Architect" spectrum. There are hundreds of projects that fall between these. It is important to know from your first meeting with any potential Architect what their role will be in the process. It helps define your project, budget, timeframe, and expectations.

An Architect will always bring creativity and experience to a design. I feel that many people do not have the ability to see the big picture on larger design projects. For example, many clients send me pictures of every room they want in their new home. They usually send me multiple pictures for each room (I encourage this!). It is my job to pull the elements from those pictures that work well with each other and create the room as a whole. Then I pull the rooms together to create the house as a whole. You don't want a modern kitchen because you liked the cabinets, next to a Gothic dining room because you liked the light fixture, next to a log cabin living room because you liked the fireplace.

So you hired an Architect (hopefully BDS Architecture!)

So now you can see the value an Architect will bring to your project. Now what!? Architect's usually break down their services into different phases so that it is easier to understand and explains the process in which we work. Some projects or clients may only need certain parts of the Architect's work and each contract should be tailored to the specifics of the project.

Schematic Design Phase:

The Architect will gather knowledge about your project, your budget, and your ideas. This should always involve a visit by you and your Architect to the site where your project will be built. The Architect will gather as much information as possible and come up with a "program". The program is a list of items/ideas/goals for the project. For a new home this would be the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the total amount of rooms needed, do you need a formal living and dining room, do you need a big or small kitchen, do you like the open floor plan concept, what style do you like, etc. The Architect will begin getting these ideas down on paper in the form of floor plans (which show the layout of your space), and elevations (which show how it will look standing up). These plans are just the beginning. They will change frequently to make sure that your Architect is working towards your exact needs. This is all about communication between you and your Architect. You worked together and were able to get the basics of your project down on paper. They look very rough and need some beautification...



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Design Development Phase:

Everything is basically there, but it is not yet a smooth beautiful space for you to enjoy. This phase will smooth out all the rough edges. The Architect will make sure everything starts working together. They will make sure the relationships between spaces are well thought out and make everything "flow" just as you need it to. This is the phase where the Architect's true touch of the design comes out. There will not be a lot of input needed from you during this phase, but your Architect should meet with you to review everything as needed. The meetings should make sure that your goals are still being met. Many of the changes will be smaller (maybe not even noticed by the client), but there may still be some bigger changes too. The Architect may not feel right about a space or its relationship to the others and may discuss changes. It's all part of the process (build it in our head, tear it down and build it better). At the end of this phase you should have a clear picture of what your project is going to look like. You should see everything you want to see, and everything you set out in your program has been addressed. It should look beautiful...even better than you had pictured it! These can be presented to you in regular drawings of paper, or in 3D drawings which allow you to really view and interact with your project.

Construction Document Phase:

Unfortunately, this phase takes those beautiful images from the Design Development phase and messes them all up! Don't worry, they will still be beautiful when built. This phase adds all the information that the contractor needs to build your project just as you and your Architect have worked so hard to show. This adds all the dimensions and details, all the notes and code requirements. This phase ensures that your space is well built and will keep you safe. None of it is fun and pretty like the rest of the work we have done...but it is a very necessary evil. This is also where many of those important details that I learned by building and tearing apart your project will come out. I will make sure the contractor knows just how to build each space so that there are less changes that need to happen in the field. This saves you time, money, and headache! When this phase is complete, you should have a complete set of documents from which you can build your project. You can take them to any contractor and get a price to build your project. You can also get a permit for your project through your local municipality. Many projects end here, but there are additional items that your Architect can provide.

Bidding Phase:

Now that you have your beautiful plans (buried somewhere under all those notes, dimensions, and details), you need a contractor to give you a price to build it all. For simple projects, this is pretty straight forward...give them the plans, they give you a price. For more complex projects (like a new home) the contractors will have questions. Your Architect knows these plans and your project better than anyone, so why not let the Architect answer these questions? The Architect will make sure that the answers work with your vision of the space, work with your budget, and work with the building code. Once all the questions are answered, you will get the contractors price. The problem is that no two proposals are alike. Your Architect can help you make sure that your bids are an "apples to apples" comparison. You don't want to select a bid based on a low price, only to find out that they didn't include everything you wanted in your project. Finally, you can make a decision to move forward with a contractor and start your project!



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***As a side note...I, personally, feel it is important to get the contractor involved in the process earlier than the bidding phase. As an Architect, I have a basic knowledge of construction costs and schedules. The contractor works this every day. If your budget is set and the project will be close to it, I would recommend having a contractor involved earlier to get a better idea of the cost.

Additionally, there are varying levels of finishes on any project. For a bathroom as an example...you can select an \$80 toilet or a \$500 toilet. Same with the sink, cabinets, and lights. Then there is tile. It can cost \$5 per square foot or \$150. If you have a bathroom full of tile, that's a big difference. A contractor can give you a price and show you examples of the "level of finish" you can expect at that price. This will help you and your Architect stay on budget for the project.

Construction Administration:

This phase occurs while the project is under construction. The Architect works for the owner (you!) and makes sure that the contractor is not cutting corners or changing the plans. The Architect is not the boss, but simply looking out for the owners project. The contractor and inspectors are still responsible for compliance with the building code and safety procedures. There usually is a agreed upon number of visits (weekly, monthly, etc.) which can involve the Architect, contractor, and the owner as required. The Architect can review any changes to the project that the contractor or owner has. Sometimes a material is not available, or has changed price and is no longer helping the budget, for example. Or, maybe the owner doesn't like the location of a window or light fixture. The Architect can also check the progress of the work and advise the owner to assist with payouts for the contractor. Overall, this service helps the owner get what they have paid for in the bidding phase.

Architect's Fees:

Every Architect loves what they do, but the reality is that we need to have something to pay the bills! There are various ways that Architect's handle this.

The most common is a fixed fee. You discuss your project with an Architect and they give you a price to design and draw what you have agreed upon. This fee doesn't change unless the project changes. This allows you to know what you are paying for the Architect and what you will be getting in return. In this type of contract, there is typically a fee schedule for any changes. I will always discuss any fee changes with my clients before proceeding with the work. No surprise fees at the end!

Another option is the hourly fee. In this setup the Architect will charge you a fee for each hour they work on your project. This hourly rate is agreed upon in advance, and many of these contracts will have a maximum fee amount. This way you know the maximum amount you may owe the Architect for their work.



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A third options is a percentage of the project cost. For example, your addition to you home is going to cost \$150,000. The Architect charges you a fee of 8% of construction costs. Therefore the fee would be \$12,000. This method works well when the project costs are pretty well fixed. I typically try to avoid these contracts as an Architect because I don't want you as a client thinking that I am increasing the cost of a project to get a higher fee. If I need to increase the cost, it is for improving the project.

The plans that an Architect creates are property of the Architect unless agreed upon otherwise. They are the intellectual property of the Architect, and protected by copyright law. By having a contract with the Architect, the Architect agrees to give you a "one-time right" to use the plan for your project. This allows you to build and use the plans for your project, but not give them to your neighbor to use for their home. You wouldn't want them to have your home anyway! If I am doing my job, your home is designed for you! It has your style, your layout, and your family in mind.

One additional item regarding fees...It is common that people who are doing an addition to their existing home think that the costs will be lower. This is usually not the case. The reason is that when you are building something brand new, there are no existing conditions that you have to consider. There is no existing building to measure, there is no existing structure to hold up during construction, there is no existing look to the space that you have to design for. You simple design only to your clients needs, not having to worry about what is already there. With an addition or remodel, you are constantly merging old and new. This takes more thought, more time, and usually more money. Some Architects enjoy this challenge (I do!) but others will only do new construction for these reasons.

In Conclusion...

So I hope that you can see the value that BDS Architecture (and nobody else of course :-)) would bring to the design table for your next project! Hopefully you also gained some useful insight along the way (and were not too bored!). I wrote this because I have been asked my times for some or all of the information above. Sometimes its by clients who simply want to understand what they are getting, sometimes by friends and family who don't understand why I work until midnight so often. I am passionate about my work and my projects. I have been working at this for years and there is always something new and exciting. Sometimes it is the small, personal, projects that are the most exciting. As a small architectural firm, we do not take on a ton of projects in the year. We strive to give each project our undivided attention, and want you to believe that it is our only work we have going on. Most of all, we want you to walk into your new space and finally see the vision we have created in our head some many times over, just for you. You are the person who lives with it, we want that to be enjoyable. Show it off to your friends and family, let them tell you how great it looks. When you are ready for your next project, we'll be right here ready to dream it up with you.