

RESIDENTIAL CLIENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long will it take to design and build my house?

Design typically takes from 6 months up to a year to complete depending on the size and complexity. Getting a building permit can take up to 4 months. You should allow about a year for the construction period.

Do I need to hire an architect for my house?

No. Houses fall under Part 9 of the Alberta Building Code and do not require an architect.

Why should I hire an architectural firm?

A new house is one of the most personal and expensive endeavours you are likely to complete in your lifetime. Architects and interior designers are qualified to design and to provide advice, including technical and aesthetic judgment, on the built environment. We add value to building projects by ensuring their design and layout is functional, their construction is durable and energy-efficient, and their look and visual impact provides a positive experience and increased market value to owners and users.

Ask yourself:

- Do I want someone who can act on my behalf in ensuring the builder is doing their job and can advocate for me if they are not?
- Do I want a design that is unique to me, my family and my site or would I be satisfied with a design that meets my needs but has a generic form?
- Do I want creative and personalized solutions?
- Do I want a comprehensive set of construction documents which resolve details in advance of construction rather than during?

What's the difference between hiring a builder or an architectural firm?

Builders typically offer design services as part of the construction services in a design/build agreement. They will work with you to come up with a design which they will then build. A reputable builder will have a clear contract that you will review and sign prior to beginning any work. The design services are generally not provided by a registered architect.

An architectural firm provides design services but not construction services. The contract documents (or blueprints) produced by an architectural firm generally exhibit a higher level of detail than those of a builder. Details are fully resolved in order to be carefully described in the drawings. The final drawing set will include detailed drawings + descriptions of millwork (cabinetry), finishes (types, locations + extents), ceiling plans, soffits, trim, typical window + wall conditions etc. A full service contract with an architectural firm also includes construction administration. In this phase, your architect will act as your advocate on site ensuring that the house is being built as designed, responding to the myriad issues that develop during construction, and ensuring that your interests are represented and met.

What's the difference between an architect, an interior designer and a decorator?

An architect is a person registered, licensed or otherwise authorized to use the title "architect" and to practice architecture in a province or territory. In Alberta, the title of architect may only be used by a registered member of the Alberta Association of Architects. The most basic definition of an architect is a professional who is qualified to design and provide advice - both aesthetic and technical - on built objects in our public and private landscapes. An architect must have completed a bachelor or master's degree in

architecture from an accredited university, completed a required number of years of documented experience and passed one or more professional exams prior to being licensed by their provincial or territorial board.

The term “interior designer” has no restrictions on its use. In Alberta, the terms Licensed Interior Designer (under the Architect's Association) or Registered Interior Designer (under the Interior Designers of Alberta) are for exclusive use of individuals who have proven through "education, experience and examination" to be professionals. Interior designers focus on functional + aesthetic solutions to interior spaces. They are concerned with general and detailed planning, spatial arrangements, health and safety issues, detailing and technical considerations (for example lighting and acoustics) as well as the aesthetics of a space.

Interior decorators focus on surface treatment (i.e. wallpaper, paint, floor finishes), placement of fixed details (moldings) and furnishings that can easily be added to an existing space. An interior decorator’s scope of work would include things such as colour, materials and furniture selection; and typically only work in residential environments.

How do you get me from wanting a house to having a house?

We break it down into logical stages. A house evolves through these stages from preliminary design where we identify your goals and requirements through to the house construction. Shelterbelt is a collaborative studio where all members of our office are involved throughout the design process. At early meetings we encourage our clients to bring images and ideas of houses they like in order to identify goals and aspirations. During the course of the design evolution we have frequent meetings with our clients to review design progress, discuss changes and explain concepts. During construction we are on site to review progress and available to answer questions that arise from the builder.

What are the stages of design?

We follow the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada definitions of project phases:

1. Pre-agreement
2. Schematic Design
3. Design Development
4. Construction Documents
5. Bidding + Negotiation
6. Contract Administration
7. Post-construction

What can I expect to receive from my architect?

Schematic Design	Hand sketches, bylaw analysis, preliminary computer drawings including plans and 3D models
Design Development	Rough card models, developed computer drawings including 3D, plans, sections.
Construction Documents	Permit submission drawings (elevations, block face context, site plan, floor plans) and detailed contract documents: including millwork (cabinetry), schedules (wall/floor/roof assemblies, windows, doors, finishes), interior elevations etc.
Construction Administration	Site visits to confirm conformance to design documents, clarify construction documents as required for contractor.

What do architectural services cost?

Fees are dependent upon the project. For residential projects we charge an hourly rate during schematic design and a percentage of construction cost fee for the remaining work. The total fee amount increases with the construction cost reflecting the additional work required for larger projects. Generally, a larger house will equate to a larger cost of construction. Please contact us to book a complementary preliminary 1 hour consultation to discuss your project specifics.

How do I select a contractor?

We are able to recommend builders that we have successfully worked with on past residential projects. We suggest our clients meet with contractors to establish a comfort level. Contractors may be engaged by either a traditional bid process whereby they are invited to competitively bid on the construction documents or a single contractor is engaged by the client during design development to provide construction management services. We recommend talking to a contractor as early in the process as possible in order to benefit from their contribution to the collaborative process.