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## **Remodeling with an architect. Why? How?**

Working with an architect, some homeowners feel, can be expensive, unnecessary, and even intimidating.

But especially in times of inflation, the right architect can be a homeowner's best friend. His or her knowledge of energy use, building materials, and labor costs can save more than enough money to cover the fee, and an original, well designed project one that is strong, functional, and responsive to its site is a daily joy as well as a good investment.

Architects offer a variety of services; they may agree to do anything from minimal consulting to total design, contract development, and construction overseeing. Naturally, you pay accordingly.

### **Choosing an architect**

There is no pat procedure. Ask people whose design judgement you trust for recommendations. Watch newspapers and home service publications like *Sunset* for work you like, taking note of design credits.

Not all architects choose to be members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), but you can write or call the local AIA for a list of architects suitable for your type of project. Then telephone several firms and describe the work you have in mind. If they seem interested, ask for a brochure or arrange an interview. Even if they aren't interested or available, they may be willing to recommend another firm that will suit your needs.

If you receive brochures, evaluate the firm's design approaches and capabilities. Then interview the architect, asking questions about experience with your type of building, time availability, working procedures, and fees. In larger firms, be sure to talk to the individual who would be handling the project.

At these early meetings, you will have to determine not only if you like the architect's design abilities, but also if you can get along with him or her during what may be a long and stressful process.

Seattle homeowners Marion and Michael Fukuma advise, “Choose an architect that you feel is approachable, one who doesn’t make you feel he or she is the architect and that you need to be in awe. On the other hand, be fair. You can drive an architect (as well as his fee) up the wall by constantly changing your mind.”

It’s a mistake, however, to base your choice primarily on the fee, which is a minor percentage of the total construction cost and is often outweighed by the architect’s background, expertise, ability to communicate, and the chemistry that exists between you.

When you’ve narrowed your choices, ask one or two architects to take you to homes they have done in the past. Look them over carefully. Ask the owners how satisfied they are. By this time in your search, you should know whether you do need an architect’s services (your interviews may suggest you need only a general contractor).

A visit to the site ... then learning your needs, lifestyle, budget

To develop a plan for your house or major remodel, the architect needs to know your site, your lifestyle, your needs, your dreams, and of course, your budget. This may involve a good deal of research.

First, the architect inspects the lot or existing building. Then by talking and working with you, sometimes assisted by a detailed questionnaire, the architect develops a “program,” a framework reflecting your particular needs.

This is a time of intense communication, and the more open and observant you are, the more input your architect will have to work with. You and your family might make a list of likes and dislikes about your present house, being specific about how it meets or fails to satisfy your daily needs.

Your architect will want to know who will be using the house, what activities are likely to occur inside and out (and how often), eating habits and cooking styles, sleeping and bathing habits, privacy needs. You’ll discuss work and display area, storage space, automobiles, pets, arid maintenance, as well as transitions, focal points, sun angles, views, and levels of formality. You’ll consider family growth or change and how the house should respond through time. If you have strong preferences for colors or materials, tell your architect.

On a more emotional level, you’ll explore the feelings you’d like to create with the space (comforting, playful, intimate, grand) and any images you’d like to create in spirit (Swedish farmhouse, Italian villa, space bubble).

You’ll also tell the architect how much money you have to spend, what your priorities are in using it, and how firm the budget is (be honest). Check with bankers, contractors, and others involved in building finances so you can develop a realistic base figure.

## **Remodeling - investing in your home**

It pays to examine the financial side of home remodeling. The rules and guidelines which can help you balance the aesthetic considerations in home remodeling with the economic ones remain pretty much the same. Most important: Don't over improve.

If you're remodeling for your own comfort and enjoyment, you don't have to worry about what you spend, but if you're doing it as an investment, you want to make sure you don't out price other houses in your neighborhood.

There is a new emphasis on architectural design in home renovation. Not only must the individual project be well thought out and executed, but it has to fit in with the rest of the house. Many houses were erected quickly without much regard for architectural appeal.

Keeping these guidelines in mind, here's a look at some new trends in the most popular remodeling projects and a rundown on the kinds of returns you can expect to get.

### **Room Addition**

Building a 15' X 25,' room addition is costly close to \$30,000 on average and has a relatively modest recovery rate-about 70 percent if you sell within two years. But if you like your present location and simply need more space, you're often better off adding a room or even an entire second floor than buying a larger house. To get the best return on resale, make sure the addition blends in with the layout and architectural character of the house. Also, a multipurpose room addition that can be used as a family room, den or guest bedroom, for instance, will do better than one whose use is restricted to a single purpose such as a gym or workshop.

Popular features now being found in room additions include fireplaces, skylights, cathedral ceilings with exposed beams, and built in cabinetry for video, and audio equipment.

### **Remodeled Kitchen**

The kitchen can have more impact on the market value of your house than any other single room.

If the kitchen is new and well done you almost hear a sigh of relief from buyers. If it's in bad shape or been remodeled on the cheap, you can practically hear them subtracting the cost of redoing it from their bid.

The trend today is toward opening up the kitchen to the living areas and bringing in natural light via skylights, greenhouse or clerestory windows. Sleek, Eurostyle cabinetry made of either neutral wood or high quality laminates are still all the rage, as are counter tops of granite, marble or durable man made marble look alike such as Corian and Avonite.

Many renovators are also going to the top of the line in appliances like Sub-Zero refrigerators whose doors accommodate panels to match your cabinets and JennAir ovens that feature range top broiling with down draft exhaust.

All this has raised the cost of kitchen renovation to \$19,500 on average, while some contractors report doing kitchen make-overs for what a complete house sells for - \$100,000 and up. While the returns on this investment are high 75 percent to 90 percent of the project's cost you're better off from an investing standpoint opting for a medium cost renovation than an ultra expensive one. But if a state of the art kitchen is your goal and you're planning to stay in your home for quite a few years, this is definitely the room to enjoy a splurge.

### **Remodeled Bath**

With a 1 bath house a hard sell in today's housing market, adding a second full bathroom to a house that has just one is one of the best remodeling investments you can make. Getting all your money back at resale is almost guaranteed and you can often recoup as much as 130 percent of the cost-typically between \$5,600 and \$12,900. Remodeling an existing bathroom is comparable in cost \$4,500 to \$11,500 but doesn't pay off quite as well, recouping about 80 percent of your investment.

Opulence is the catchword in bath remodeling today. Whirlpool tubs, separate tubs and shower stalls, skylights and huge windows, imported ceramic tile on walls and floor, color coordinated fixtures all have become practically commonplace in the American bath during the past five years and, as a consequence, have driven up the cost of the average remodeled bath 80 percent.

If your bathroom is small or you think you'll sell your house within the next two years, opt for good quality standard items instead of expensive whirlpools and Italian marble tiles.

If however, you plan on remaining in your house or enjoy indulging yourself, then feel free to turn your '50s bathroom into an 2000s sybaritic pleasure chamber.

## Dollars and Sense of Home Improvements

PROJECT	COST (\$)	RETURN (%)
Replacement doors, windows	7000-18,000	70-75
New siding with insulating board	4400-6800	75-100
Room addition	23,000-30,000	70-72
Major kitchen renovation	10,000-30,000	75-90
Minor kitchen remodeling	4800-9600	90-95
Adding a full bathroom	5600-12,900	120-130
Remodeled Bath	4550-11,500	70-80
Wood deck	3300-7700	75-80
Fireplace	2600-4000	140
Swimming pool	14,000-31,000	30-35 in cold climates 65-80 in Sun Belt

### Suggested Readings:

How to Build a House With an Architect  
by John Milnes Baker J.B. Lippincott Co., 1977.

Mr. Blandings Builds His Dreamhouse  
by Eric Hodgins, Simon & Shuster, 1946.  
Text reprinted from:

Sunset Magazine, 1982, Lane Publishing Co.  
Popular Mechanics, 1988.



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