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HOUSES

ANNUAL ISSUE

Remodeling Secrets Revealed

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by improving
your home
rather than
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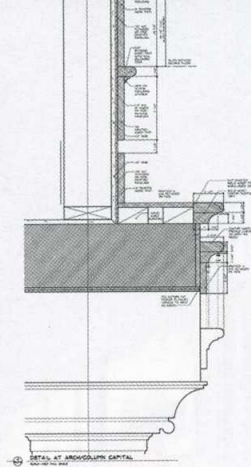
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How to Afford an Architect

Proven ways to save the design team's time and your money



BY DUO DICKINSON

When David and Nancy Stein came to see me about designing a house, their biggest concern, like most clients', was cost. Their house had just burned down, and they had to rebuild. They would be reusing most of the original foundation, and they had a builder, Clark Sellars, lined up. But they wanted to know whether they could hire me to design the new house and still stay within their budget.

The Steins' budget was limited strictly to the insurance check. If the project came in over budget, they wouldn't have the money to pay for it. Given their insurance settlement and the house's footprint, they could afford about \$115 per sq. ft., including design and structural-engineering fees. Although I knew completing the project on this budget was possible, I wouldn't be able to provide a full scope of architectural services. The Steins, however, were willing to roll up their sleeves and become actively involved in the design process.

Because this extra work required the clients' time, this approach might not be for everybody. All told, my firm's design fee was about 5% of the total construction cost. This figure is extremely low, even for the strictly limited work that we did. The Steins' experience, therefore, is a

case study of the ways involved, conscientious homeowners can reduce an architect's fees.

Design options and detailed drawings are expensive

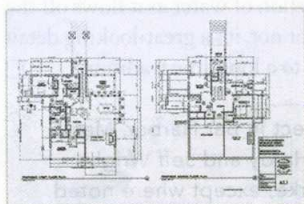
Architects most often charge some form of a fixed fee, either a certain percentage of construction costs, a dollar amount per square foot, or a lump sum. Regardless of the mechanics of billing, a client really is paying for the architect's time. If you can plead your case to an open-minded architect and explain that you will diligently limit his or her time and take on added responsibility, there is a good chance you can weave the cost of a creative, innovative, and (you hope) beautiful design into your budget.

My own firm charges all fees on an hourly basis, but we offer two different service levels: a full-service option and a consultant option. Under the full-service option, my firm serves as the architects of record and provides a full scope of architectural services,

including weekly site visits during construction. In this scenario, we typically present five or six different design options to the client and react to his or her feedback. Once the client and I have come up with a consensus design, my firm draws a complete set of construction and



Modest budgets demand straightforward shapes and spaces. Part of an architect's job is to design a house that can be built on budget. For these cost-cutting clients, that meant simple framing (a basic roof shape) and simple materials (clapboards, T-111 siding, and asphalt roof shingles).



Involved, conscientious homeowners

can reduce an architect's fees.

