

WATCH OUT — ARCHITECTS BITE!

by David Abeles Pfeffer, Past President
Santa Fe Chapter
American Institute of Architects



An Architect

"You don't need an architect - just tell the builder what you want." "We could have an architect draw it for us, but isn't a draftsman cheaper?" "In the end, we'll probably do it differently from what the architect would draw, so it'll just be a waste of money."

Have you heard these things or said them yourself when contemplating a building project? The problem is: why hire an architect for a project that may be too small or too personal or which you've already pretty much designed for yourself when you can hire the builder directly and save an expense that only the rich can afford anyway?

For us, the architects, the problem is a bit different: do architects bite?

The truth is that architects are highly trained professionals who have a wide variety of skills to bring to the smallest (and largest) of projects and at a cost frequently below what you might expect.

Architects organize a building project for you, analyzing the complex range of things that need attention before you ever contact a builder. They can help you evaluate your budget and your needs; they can design your project with you so that you not only can realize more closely what you really have in mind, but so the plumbing will work and the building department won't prohibit your ideas; and they can recommend and help you find a builder. They can act as your agent before those treacherous city committees and during the building process, act as liaison between you and your builder, reviewing estimates and bills, and inspecting each stage of construction before you pay for it.

Architects, unlike others in the building field, are generalists whose job is to see the forest as well as the trees. Unlike the engineer who sees the best structural system or the builder who sees the best methods and sequences and unlike the zoning official who says that you must have thirteen more off-street parking places, the architect is trained to bring all these concerns (and many more) together into a coherent, buildable, and affordable whole. And the architect you select is in concert with you esthetic as well as your business sense.

While a generalist, the architect is a technical expert too, able to draw a set of instructions that the building contractor will find indispensable both for accurate cost estimating and for actual construction. Architects aren't limited to painting pretty dreams; they put the pieces of your very complicated puzzle together so that you, your banker, your government, and your builder can understand it.

Architects go through a long training and testing period before becoming licensed. Five or six years of college work are followed by at least three of internship. Only then may the process of applying and being tested for licensure begin, a process which usually takes a couple of years more. By the time an architect is ready to offer his services to you, he has been training for about ten years. Good draftsmen are good at what they do, but they simply don't have the architect's resources.

Yet architects may be simply consulted, just as lawyers or doctors are, on an hourly basis (at a cost which is generally far lower). The full range of services may cost not very much more than what you'd pay a realtor simply to have a building change hands. In the long run, you will more than recoup your architect's fee in avoided headaches, delays, mistakes, and expenses for unforeseen considerations.

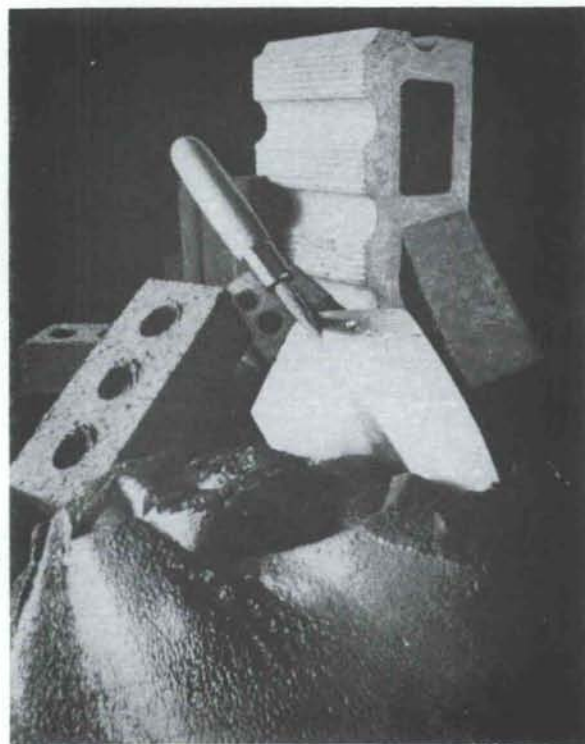
In many cases, the architect has the American Institute of Architects standing behind him. This national professional organization provides invaluable resources such as well-tested contract forms for your relationship to him and to your builder; the latest research on building techniques, such as solar and other alternate energy sources, and one-hundred-and-twenty-five years of experience.

The Santa Fe Chapter of the AIA is an active organization, whose members contribute a great deal of time and expertise to zoning, planning, historic styles, and neighborhood issues - negotiating, arbitrating, writing, suggesting, representing, and debating; they continue to be leaders in their field. The chapter sponsors a Public Forum series at the Armory for the Arts, bringing before the public issues vital to Santa Fe's planning and character. *DAP*

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