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Can You Afford Free Sketches?

The following article first appeared in ARCHITECTURE NEW JERSEY, and was later reprinted in ARIZONA ARCHITECT. It is aimed at the architect who sometimes thinks he can afford to provide free sketches. Further it is directed to the client who wants something for nothing!

Few clients can afford free architectural sketches.

No man would go to a few lawyers and as for free "briefs" with the idea that he would choose the lawyer by the brief he liked best. No man would go to a few doctors and ask for free physical exams with the idea that he would follow the advice of the doctor whose diagnosis he preferred. Yet once in a while a potential client gets the idea that an architect can be chosen by asking for free sketches. Why won't it work?

On a major project, meaningful preliminary plans can cost thousands of dollars. Obviously no architect can afford to spend the time to study the potential client's needs in detail for a free sketch; therefore the result would only be a "pretty picture" with little relationship to the actual problem.

The potential client will seldom be trained to spot these deficiencies in a sketch and often be swayed by some clever rendering technique, only to find too late that it was all frosting with no cake.

For these reasons such free sketches are against the Code of Ethics of the American Institute of Architects. Therefore the client who obtains free sketches is at once cancelling from consideration most of the men best qualified to help him. This is particularly important when one considers the amount of money involved in most building programs today.

Finally, a client must depend on his architect to make many decisions for him. A lot of money is involved and it is solely the ethics of the architect on which the client must depend. If a client bases his selection of an architect on his lack of ethics he has only himself to blame when things go wrong. It is a big risk.



How many clients can afford free sketches?