

YOUR
GUIDE TO
RESIDENTIAL
DESIGN
SPECIALISTS

AND
KEY
TO
DESIGN
EXCELLENCE



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF BUILDING DESIGN



JIM PITTS



AHMANN DESIGN



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WHY YOU SHOULD USE A PROFESSIONAL BUILDING DESIGNER

Building a home represents the greatest financial investment most people will make in a lifetime and few envision how complex the process is until they are entangled in a jungle of restrictive covenants, building codes, zoning ordinances, design options, vendor and contractor choices and so on. Yet, most states do not have a licensing requirement for residential building designers. When a new home or addition is in your future, a specialist in the discipline of residential design is your best choice to guide you through the design/building experience. Accordingly, it makes sense to secure design services from a qualified, experienced source, a professional member of the American Institute of Building Design (AIBD®).

Since 1950, AIBD® has provided building designers with educational resources, and has developed nationwide design standards and a code of ethics for the building design profession. Today, AIBD® is a nationally recognized association with professional and associate members in 46 states and throughout Canada. Its chartered state societies are active in their respective legislative arenas and work to promote public awareness of the building design profession.

AIBD® is also meeting the challenge of the future by educating members about new and improved building materials and innovative technologies that will impact how we live in the future. In response to the ever-changing needs of the design profession and to ensure greater credibility to the public, the AIBD® Board of Directors established the

National Council of Building Designer Certification (NCBDC), and has charged its leadership with overseeing the Designer Certification Program. For those who have chosen the profession of building design, there is no greater evidence of competency than achieving the status of Certified Professional Building Designer (CPBD). Application for this credential is available to building designers, both professional members of the AIBD® and non-AIBD® members who qualify.

Alternately, the credential of Professional Building Designer is the highest classification level, which a professional member of the AIBD® can attain. To qualify, an individual must first possess a minimum of five years of educational and professional design experience. As with the CPBD credential, a Professional Building Designer must subscribe to a scrupulous code of professional ethics. Equally significant, both require a commitment to professional development through a continuing education policy.

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN SPECIALISTS

Everyone enjoys talking about a new home or addition they're planning, and most people have definite ideas about what they like. But there's much more to designing a living environment than simply arranging rooms. The first step to successful design begins with the ability to listen to a client. A building designer will visualize space within a proposed design, then explore that space with the client to make sure it meets the desired expectations. Not only are there aesthetic issues; form, scale and balance; but also, structural design and code requirements which the building designer must consider.

As a design evolves, a building designer will make you aware of innovative products and materials that may be appropriate for your home. They can accompany you on visits to manufacturer showrooms, offering advice on how to stay within a budget by exploring alternate design solutions, if necessary. Some building designers offer a variety of services beyond planning and design. Project administration is one example. And if engineering or interior design services are required, a building designer may coordinate those services, too.

It's easy to see how a residential design specialist can be your best ally as you set out to make your dream of a new home or addition become a reality. The following pages should help you more clearly understand the process of choosing and working with a professional member of AIBD®.



Frank Betz • Corporate Member

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT BUILDING DESIGNER?

You need more living space and have decided it's time to get serious about a second-level addition. Or perhaps you've purchased a lot with an eye toward building your dream home in the near future. As you sit back and consider the scope of the project, you're besieged with a flood of questions. A professional member of AIBD® can guide you through this maze. They are specialists in the discipline of residential building design. From planning and design, through construction, to eventual occupancy, a Professional Building Designer can help your dreams become reality in ways you never thought possible.

No two construction projects are wholly alike. The same is true for building designers. Each has their own approach to design; a unique signature style, if you will, and a preferred method of operation. Some will limit their practice strictly to planning and design, while others may offer construction administration services, as well. So, how do you determine which building designer is right for your project?

GETTING STARTED

Finding the appropriate building designer for your project is not a difficult task. The steps are similar to those you'd take in locating any qualified professional. First, you'll need to compile a list of potential candidates. Start by asking friends, relatives and business associates if they've worked with any building designers in the past, and ask for referrals. Word of mouth referrals are still one of the best sources

for finding a capable building designer. Check the yellow pages in your telephone directory under “Building Designer” or “Residential Designer” for designers in your area, too.

Many residential contractors and design/build firms will have a relationship with a building designer and may be able to offer recommendations. Visits to local model homes or weekend drives through local neighborhoods may yield possible candidates. Keep an eye out for homes that are similar in design to what you have in mind. Searching the web for designers is another way to find an appropriate design professional as many have websites that showcase their work and services. The best way to compile a list of potential building designers for your project is by visiting AIBD®’s website at www.AIBD.org to search our online directory listing of building designers by state. Of course, you can call the national offices of AIBD® at 800-366-2423. AIBD® can provide you with a list of names and phone numbers of professional members in your general area, or direct you to the AIBD® chapter in your state, which can provide that information.





The Sater Group • Florida Society Member

SELECTING YOUR DESIGNER

Now you're ready for the next step; a phone inquiry to each name on your list. Keep a pad of paper handy to take notes. Introduce yourself, then describe the project you have in mind; a new home, addition, or renovation. The point of each call is to construct a summary profile of the individual or firm. Be specific with your questions. Ask the designer about his or her previous experience in designing various styles of residential projects. Ask if they're interested in your project, and if so, when they'll be available to do the work.

Many building designers offer an informational brochure or letter-of-introduction which they mail to prospective clients. Read through any material you're provided carefully. This is a great supplement to your initial phone conversation and can help in determining if a building designer's capabilities are in line with your expectations. Ask for a list of client references and check them out.

Realistically, you should cut your list down to a manageable two-to-three building designers. When that's been done, you're ready to call and schedule an in-depth interview to learn more about each candidate.

THE INTERVIEW

Perhaps the most awkward time during your search for a compatible building designer is the interview meeting. Your housing needs, goals, finances and dreams will be the focus of this candid discussion. Equally important, it's essential to learn sufficient background

information about an individual or firm before you engage their services. The building designer is attempting to do the same thing: to evaluate you as a potential client. Consider that a project can typically last upwards of nine months. Obviously, both parties need to decide if they can work together comfortably for the duration.

Each interview will require at least an hour of your time, sometimes longer if the “chemistry” is right. Many building designers do not charge for the initial interview meeting, but this is not always the case. Ask if there will be a charge before scheduling an appointment.

Building designers will often provide a presentation video or portfolio at the interview meeting. Such portfolios can include a collection of letters from satisfied clients; sketches and photos of completed projects; newspaper stories citing a building designer’s civic involvement; or magazine articles featuring an extraordinary design. Viewing a well prepared video, portfolio or brochure can tell much about the accomplishments of an individual or firm and the pride they take in their work. Plus, they make for a great conversation starter, should you spot a familiar home or a design that interests you.

The building designer you choose must be able to “plug” into your vision and prepare a creative design solution by fitting structure to the architectural style you prefer. Any photos or magazine clippings you’ve collected that help in defining your goals are valuable tools. Keep them handy for reference. One glance may



illustrate a desired “look” or room layout more accurately than a rambling explanation. It’s easy to get stumped with building jargon as you may not have clearly stated a point or understood a response. Ask for clarification where appropriate.

As each building designer makes his or her presentation, ask yourself if you can “work” with them; do your personalities mesh? Do you feel the individual is right for your project; is he or she receptive to your ideas? These are critical questions in selecting a compatible building designer. Keep in mind; there are literally hundreds of decisions to be made in developing the drawings and specifications for your project. Each will ultimately impact your day-to-day satisfaction with the finished project. You’ll rely chiefly on a building designer’s technical expertise, creative skills and professional judgment to translate your wish list into a reality. The right individual will help you get the most for your construction dollars.

COMPENSATION

There is no hard-and-fast rule as to how building designers will charge for their services. This is often confusing for first-time clients. Fees can be established in any number of ways, taking into account a variety of factors specific to the project in question. Some designers will agree to a cost-per-square foot basis for preparing schematics and working drawings; some will charge a fee that represents a percentage of the overall construction costs; still others work for a stipulated hourly rate, plus expenses.

Often, building designers are amenable to tailoring their services to suit your needs or construction budget. Any successful working relationship begins with a clear, well-documented mutual understanding. Your written agreement with a building designer should indicate:

- a) The scope of the proposed work;
- b) The amount of the projected construction budget;
- c) The specific services you expect to be provided, linked to a basic fee structure (i.e., design services at an established hourly or per square foot rate; meeting or supervision hourly rates; etc.);
- d) A structured payment schedule with stipulated dollar amounts or percentages.

Some Professional Building Designers use standard contract forms endorsed by AIBD®. Others may use a customized agreement. In either case, read the agreement before accepting it to verify that the language is compatible with your expectations.



THE DESIGN TEAM

Often times, a client planning new home construction or a major addition would like to participate in the creative process. Discuss your desire to get involved beforehand. Your designer can then implement a “team” concept to expedite portions of the decision-making process. Cabinets, finishing hardware, material and color selections are but a few choices that will have to be made. Clients can visit showrooms and gather samples and swatches, color chips and brochures, and then meet with their building designer to discuss ideas and coordinate a strategy.

Whether you’re considering an addition to your current residence or planning the home of your dreams, a professional member of AIBD® can help you create that special place called home.

YOUR ROLE ON THE DESIGN TEAM

Hiring a professional member of AIBD® was your best decision thus far, but work on your new home or addition has only just begun. As the project owner, you’ll play an important role in reviewing and approving design proposals and revisions. The materials selection process is equally important; cabinets, carpets, doors, plumbing fixtures, hardware, windows and much more. Don’t be overwhelmed. Your Professional Building Designer is there for advice and will guide you each step of the way if needed.

Perhaps the most telling time spent with a building designer is in the first few meetings. Your needs, budget, taste, life-style and goals will be discussed in depth. The information garnered from these conversations will become the source inspiration from which a building designer will prepare preliminary design sketches. So, it's a good idea for you, and others who will live with you, to do some "homework" first.

DESIGN IDEAS AND OBJECTIVES

To help better communicate your ideas and goals to a building designer, consider preparing a scrapbook. It's fun and everyone in the family can contribute to their own chapter. Collect newspaper clippings, magazine articles, product brochures, paint chips, photos; anything that will illustrate a desired "look" or convey information about a design detail that strikes your fancy. Collect any existing information, too: a site plan of the property; deed restrictions; or in the case of an addition or renovation, an existing blueprint of the structure.

Begin collecting and organizing scrapbook items months in advance of when you plan to first meet with your building designer. A scrapbook saves you from having to accurately recall design particulars from memory and will "jump start" the design process. More importantly, an experienced building designer can immediately determine if your design expectations are consistent with your construction budget.

PRIORITIZING YOUR WISHLIST

As you fill the pages of your scrapbook, consider the things you like most about your current residence, and things you wish to be different in your new home. Create two lists to record your thoughts, "new" and "old". "New" will list conditions and things you want or need in your new home; "Old" will list conditions and things about your current home which you like that can remain the same.

FINE TUNING YOUR "WISH LIST"

The next step is to prioritize the items in both lists by order of importance. Of course, items can be reordered any number of times before you're satisfied. Fine-tuning a wish list with a spouse or family members will delineate your project goals more effectively.

You can benefit from this exercise in other ways, too. Assuming you must deviate from your original program goals due to a budget cap, items at the bottom of the "New" list can be earmarked as



discretionary items. This should result in the least negative impact on your preferred design.

Alternately, these items can offer direction in planning a future phase of construction, when funds become available. For example, structural provisions can be made during initial construction to accommodate a family room addition or second level bedrooms; utilities can be run and capped off where they'll be easily accessible for future tie-ins. Such planning now translates into reduced demolition and teardown expenses when the next phase of construction eventually begins.

Consider the following questions as you prepare your scrapbook and lists, and make a note of anything else you feel is important to your project goals:

What style of home appeals to you? Do all rooms have to be on one level?

- Do you need more closet space; a bigger kitchen; a private study?
- Do you want an oversized garage; a workshop; a sewing room?
- Do you need extra space for large family gatherings?
- Does a low-maintenance exterior fit your busy lifestyle?
- Does your business require a home office?
- How important are the outdoor spaces? Would you like an expansive rear deck or a relaxing front porch?
- Do you want custom hardwood molding, cabinetry, and other millwork?

Helping their clients to solidify design objectives is serious work for Professional Building Designers. But you and your family are important members of the design team, too. Together, your scrapbook and comments will define the design-task to your expectations. And that ultimately translates into years of enjoyment from a living environment you helped to create!

WORKING WITH YOUR BUILDING DESIGNER

You've found the right building designer for your project. What happens next?

Brainstorming sessions to discuss your goals and project wish list; translating that wish list into spaces, which suit the needs and expectations of family members who will use them; integrating these goals with a construction allowance that corresponds with your budget. This planning process is known as developing a "program"; an outline of construction objectives, tailored to your specific project.

ESTABLISHING A PROGRAM AND BUDGET

A building designer will ask many questions during the initial stage of planning a new home or addition. Keep an open mind as you work together. Discussions may lead to creative design proposals which you never thought possible or, perhaps, considered beyond your construction budget.

Of course, any project must be designed to comply with applicable building codes and regulations within a given community. But ordinary living spaces are not the result of restrictive building codes. A professional member of AIBD® offers an experienced, educated eye to solving unique design dilemmas, incorporating the best applicable technologies in his or her design solutions. Staying within an established budget can be one of the most frustrating aspects of construction. Just about everyone has heard from a friend or relative that their new home or addition cost substantially more than they first expected. Obviously, this can happen when some portion of the construction materials or labor has been underestimated, or perhaps overlooked altogether. But other times people assume an "if you're going to build it, build it right" position, and they make the decision to overspend their budget, fully aware of the extra financial burden they're assuming.

Frankly, there are so many variables involved in construction that preliminary estimates are rarely 100% accurate considering that estimates must be recalculated after each design revision. Knowing



this, building designers may establish a contingency amount for each line item in the proposed construction budget. By doing this, the client is made aware of potential cost overruns during design development, and can render informed decisions accordingly. After budgetary decisions are finalized, a building designer can work to secure the most value from available construction dollars.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Working with a Professional Building Designer, your dreams and ideas are transformed into a refined set of construction documents that accurately reflect the scope of the project. This step-by-step process is outlined below:

- A) **Establish Goals and Prepare a Program:** The building designer and client meet to discuss and outline the client's expectations, needs, and construction budget.
- B) **Preliminary Design Phase:** The building designer will present rough sketches of floor plans, site plans and usually, exterior elevation studies for the client's review and approval. The time needed to work through this phase depends on the complexity of the proposed design. At the request of a client, exterior and interior perspective renderings can be prepared, or even a scale study model of the design. The goal here is for a client to fully understand a proposed design and to make any possible alterations.



Jim Pitts • Arizona Society Member

- C) Design Development Phase: Scaled drawings are created and revised as necessary; specifications are outlined. The client sees the project pull together as the design evolves. Now's the time to address any lingering questions you may have relating to the layout, size or function of the space.
- D) Construction Document Phase: Final drawings and specifications are prepared for client approval. Door, window and cabinet selections have been made; detailed drawings of floor, wall and ceiling treatments are prepared. It's at this point that budgets must be carefully monitored. Carpet, tile, hardwood, plumbing and electrical fixtures, cabinets, moldings, etc. are all available in a wide price/quality range. It's important that the building designer supplies detailed specifications for specific construction products/brands that will be used to keep the construction budget intact and to ensure that quality materials are used.
- E) The Bidding Process: Some building designers may offer services to oversee the bidding process. First, this involves the preparation of bidding instructions, a set of guidelines to contractors, the intent of which is to secure an "apples-for-apples" quote within an allotted time from each bidder. Next, a select group of potential contractors are given an opportunity to bid on your project. Each is issued a complete set of drawings, specifications and bid instructions. Unfortunately, things can get confusing from this point on. Clients can find themselves in a sea of unintelligible jargon

as each contractor attempts to woo them into their camp. And furthermore, a low bid doesn't necessarily mean a contractor is best suited to do the job. Making sense out of all this is where a Professional Building Designer can prove to be your best ally. As an experienced construction counselor, a designer's comments and recommendations will better prepare you to select the best contractor for the job.

- F) **Construction Phase:** Many building designers also provide project administration services for their clients during construction. Project administration typically involves monitoring the work in progress, approving contractor shop drawings, and coordinating specialty consultants such as engineers or interior designers/decorators in general, acting as their client's agent during construction.

The contractor awarded the bid is in charge of construction and accordingly, is responsible for the work, which includes accountability for workmanship and materials. A building designer providing project administration services will observe the contractor's methods and progress and report back to his or her client.

Additionally, when the client receives a request for payment from the contractor, the building designer may be dispatched to inspect the work before a check is issued. They may certify that work has been completed as indicated on the requisition for payment; that any conditions spelled out in the contract documents relating to this





particular payment have been satisfied; and that a progress payment can be released to the contractor.

ADVANCEMENT OF BUILDING DESIGN

The journey to your “dream home” can take an unfortunate wrong turn if drawings are less than thorough and specifications are left in limbo. Contractors routinely refer to construction documents to justify an action, or lack of action. Any resulting squabble can bring construction to a screeching halt while high-priced attorneys iron-out a settlement. A Professional Building Designer tries to avert such

conflicts before work begins: first, by exploring design solutions with their client on paper, and then by meeting with contractors bidding on the project to answer any questions regarding a specification or drawing detail.

Be it a new home, addition or renovation, thorough planning and good design go hand in hand. The “American Institute of Building Design” exists for that reason. We strive to promote national unity in the design profession; to improve design educational standards and methods; and to increase public awareness of the building design profession. Why not secure the services of a qualified, experienced specialist for your next building project: a Certified or Professional Building Designer who is a member of the “American Institute of Building Design”.

The AIBD® designation following a building designer’s name is an important credential to note. It’s a testament to an individual’s professional certification and commitment to design excellence and adherence to a discriminating professional code of ethics.



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