

Architect/Designer Interview Questions

We used these questions when meeting with the architect or the designer. The purpose was two-folds: (1) Test the chemistry in the interaction; (2) Learn something we didn't know. The questions you ask your prospective architect or designer will have nuances of your specific project.

	Questions	Probing questions and why
1	Have you worked on a project of a similar scope? Please specify size (both \$ and square footage), style, and homeowner's intended outcome?	We wanted to work with someone that has experience and interest.
2	What are standard green building measures you include in all your projects? Can you give us a list?	Reveal if green building is part of their standard practice or not.
3	Can you show and tell us about the features of past projects in your portfolio?	Some will have project pictures on their website. See if there is a pattern or what they're proud of.
4	Could you provide us with a reference list of your clients whose projects were similar to ours? Can we contact them?	Note how they handle the names and contact info. We appreciated the care they take in checking with the client first.
5	Could you produce a design for \$15K for a build budget of \$250K?	This just happened to be our number at the starting point.
6	What your current project load?	If they're really busy you may not get enough attention.
7	What's been your experience with working along with green building consultants?	Passive House elements need to be integrated into the design upfront, not as an afterthought.
8	What types of project have you turned down or refused to do?	See what ethics and boundaries they have.
9	Could you give an example of a problem that came up in your project and how was resolved?	Reveal problem solving skills.

Homeowner Reference Call Questions

We asked these questions to the homeowners to see what it would be like working with the architect, designer, or the builder. Along the way we learned useful tips we haven't thought about.

	Questions	Probing questions and why
1	Where is the house? Any unique features of the location? Was your project a new construction? Addition? Remodel?	Gauge similarity with our project.
2	When was the project done? How long did it take?	What was the market condition?
3	Why did you choose this architect/builder?	Who else did they consider?
4	What challenges did you face? How were they resolved?	Find out what their problems skills are like.
5	What went smoothly?	What were their strengths?
6	Did the project complete on time, on budget?	Budget and estimate accuracy.
7	How involved were you in the process? (project style)	Homeowner's involvement style.
8	After living in the house for x years how is the quality of materials holding up? How about the quality of workmanship? Energy bills?	Performance.
9	If you were to do this over again what would you do differently? The same? Do you have any advice for us?	Lessons learned and advice.

Checking Contractor's License in California

<https://www2.cslb.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CheckLicenseII/CheckLicense.aspx>

The Contractor's State License Board in California was established in 1929 to license and regulate contractors. Of the approximately 300,000 licensed contractors in the state over one third of them are general building contractors, designated by classification B. The other 42 classifications cover areas such as plumbing, landscaping, concrete, drywall, etc. These license and legal language can be intimidating and initially I didn't understand the importance of bonding and worker's comp insurance. A little Googling told me that construction professionals sometimes misunderstand the purpose of contractor license bonds. When the contractor buys the surety bond insurance and the status on CSLB website shows the bond history of the contractor it means that the construction professional has agreed to work according to certain regulations. This protects the government agencies and consumers from financial losses, it's not coverage for the contractors to protect themselves. The worker's compensation insurance coverage is important for the employees of the contractor because the insurance provides wage replacement and medical benefits to the employee injured on the job. It's important to the contractor because the coverage relinquishes their right to sue their employer for negligence. It's also important for us consumers because when the contractor with employees have worker's compensation insurance the risk of contractor going out of business due to employee injury lawsuit diminishes. We certainly don't want to have the contractor go out of business during our project.