

AIA Iowa

A Chapter of The American
Institute of Architects

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Selecting an Architect

You may select an architect for the same reasons you select any other responsible professional: commitment, experience and expertise. By hiring an architect to design a project, you will realize the unique contribution an architect makes to the creation of architecture.

An architect should have a broad knowledge of design and construction, and can work with you on a variety of projects, from remodeling your house to building an office tower. An architect should also work through your ideas from beginning to end, analyzing costs and completion time.

An architectural firm may be composed of a single practitioner, a partnership or a corporation. Firms also come in a variety of sizes, but size may not be as important as the firm's capabilities. Some firms have interior designers, engineers and other consultants on staff; others rely on collaborations with independent firms.

When you select an architect, you should consider not only the individual elements of a firm's composition, but their collective impact on a firm's ability to perform the work required. By finding an architect that understands your goals, you will enhance your project. It is important that you select an architect with whom you feel both compatible and comfortable, and with whom you are able to communicate. You should also understand the role the architect plays in your design team, and the skills and responsibilities they have in the design process.

The first step to take when selecting an architect is to decide your goals and vision for the project. Ask yourself what functions will be fulfilled with the new project. Make a list of the ideas you have, your budget, the project's planned location and your time frame. Ask for recommendations from friends, relatives and colleagues who have worked with an architect, and have had successful and rewarding experiences.

Next, compile a list of possible firms for your project (AIA Iowa publishes this Directory each year as a guide, listing architectural firms across the state). Use it to begin narrowing the field. Select the firms that meet your requirements. After you have compiled a short list, call each architect and schedule an appointment for an interview.

During the interview, an architectural firm should describe their philosophy of design, the firm's method of work and, where applicable, areas of specialization. Ask for a list of former clients and recent projects, and discuss the architect's fee. You should also discuss your goals and ideas with the architect. Ask specific questions, such as:

- How are your abilities best suited to the needs of my project?
- What methods do you use to monitor costs and schedule?
- What approach will you take in resolving my particular problems?
- Which members of your firm will handle this job?

Finally, and perhaps most simply, you should look around. A thoughtful, well conceived building is always an architect's best form of reference. An architect has the education, training, experience and vision to take you through design and construction from beginning to end. Good design adds to the beauty and life span of your building, but it will also work to enhance your community and enrich your life.