

THE ROLE OF AN ARCHITECT

By: Darren China, R.A.

Many see an architect as someone who “draws plans” or makes “blue prints”. For me this misconception conjures up memories of interning during architecture school long before I was actually an architect. There I was relegated to the print room in the back of the office where I was overwhelmed by the toxic fumes of the ammonia needed to generate blue prints. These blue prints were being made so as to create multiple copies of the drawn plans which were originally placed on mylar sheets...in pencil. Luckily the blue print machine has now gone away with the ditto machine.

I find that generally this notion is brought about by that rolled up set of drawings architects can be found carrying around. Often this is because the plans for a project are the tangible item seen by those who have never utilized the expertise and services of an architect. In reality an architect is someone who is a creative problem solver who using his or her design expertise can arrive at a successful solution. An architect works closely with their client to help them in visualizing their completed home, building, office, apartment, etc. He/she will act as an advisor and resource in making decisions with regard to flow, continuity, materials, scale, constructability, etc. of the space. The architect's role is to understand his/her clients' needs, interests, building site, budget, and lifestyle and then having gathered this information create an overall design concept that will be aesthetically pleasing as well as functional and code compliant.

So when do the drawings start? In actuality they are occurring simultaneously to all of the information gathering and research necessary to bring about a successful project. The architect will generate drawings of varying levels of detail so as to help the client understand what the end results' look and feel will be like. From these drawings and discussions ideas can be explored and decisions made. Often an architect will coordinate various other consultants such as engineers and vendors while researching various materials and construction methods. Once all this drawing, coordinating and researching is done a highly detailed set of drawings and written specifications will be created. These will be shared with a number of contractors so that they may accurately price the project and then eventually build it.

Though the architect has handed over his roll of drawings, his role in getting the project actually built is not done. The architect now assists the client in selecting the correct contractor to execute that which has been discussed, decided upon and drawn. And once the builder is selected the architect will act as the liaison between the contractor and client. He/she will speak the language of construction with the contractor and help to guide their client through the process of taking the plans to built reality.

Though an architect can be found generating plans this is only one part of his/her responsibilities. It is only one piece of the puzzle. And thanks to computers and large format copiers no body has to breathe ammonia fumes any longer.

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