



Questions to Ask

Before You Hire an Architect

By Michael D. Smith · Author of the Amazon Bestselling Book How to Avoid Home Remodeling Hell · Licensed Architect, CA & TN

Hiring the right architect is one of the most important decisions you'll make for your home project. The questions below will help you find someone whose process, communication style, and values match what you need. Bring this list to every architect interview.

FEES & BUDGET

- Do you charge a fixed fee, or can your fee change as the project evolves? (Insist on a fixed fee.)
- What does your fee include? Ask specifically about structural engineering and energy calculations.
- What is your fee range for a project like mine?
- What permit and planning fees should I budget for — on top of your fee?
- Will I need a design review? What does that add in time and cost?
- Should I set aside a contingency? How much do you recommend?

THE DESIGN PROCESS

- Walk me through your process from our first meeting to permit submittal.
- How many design options will you show me before we settle on a direction?
- How long will the design phase take for a project like mine?
- What happens if I want to make changes after we've started — time and cost impact?
- At what point is it too late (or too expensive) to make major changes?
- Will I need a design review? Have you handled that before?

PERMITS & APPROVALS

- Do I need a building permit for what I'm planning?
- How long does permitting typically take in my area?
- Will you handle the permit submittal, or is that my responsibility?
- What fees should I expect from the building department?

THE CONTRACTOR RELATIONSHIP



- Can you recommend contractors you've worked with and trust?
- How do you typically work with the contractor during construction?
- Will you attend site meetings? How often?
- What happens if there's a disagreement between you and the contractor on site?

COMMUNICATION & AVAILABILITY

- How do you prefer to communicate — in person, email, phone, or video call?
- How often will we meet during the design phase?
- How will I see the progress of my drawings between meetings?
- What's your typical response time for questions or concerns?
- Who is my main point of contact — you directly, or someone on your staff?

EXPERIENCE & FIT

- Are you licensed in my state? (Required for permitted work.)
- Have you done projects similar to mine in size and type?
- Can you provide references from past clients with similar projects?
- What is your design philosophy — do you drive the design, or follow the client's lead?
- What do you think makes a project go well — and what causes projects to go wrong?

PRO TIPS — From *How to Avoid Home Remodeling Hell*

- Budget 90% of what you can spend — keep 10% back for surprises during construction.
- The best source for a qualified contractor is usually your architect.
- Weekly site meetings at the start of construction are a must — don't skip them.
- It's much cheaper to change a line on a drawing than to move a real wall.
- A good architect will save you more than they charge. Build right the first time.

Ready to Talk About Your Project?

Michael Smith has been helping homeowners navigate this process for over 35 years.
A free initial consultation costs you nothing — and could save you thousands.

423.277.0187 · msaarchitects-inc.com · mike@msaarchitects-inc.com



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