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**Architect-Builder
Relations**

*Diana Melichar, AIA
Lake Forest, Ill.*

The architect and the contractor have a common goal: to give the owner a successful built project. It is important to remember, however, that the architect and the contractor approach this common goal from very different viewpoints. The architect acts in the owner's interest, providing services for compensation. The contractor acts in his or her own interest, supplying a specified product or service for a price. Thus, if certain specifications are met, the contractor's contract is satisfied whether or not the contractor's product serves the owner's needs. It is the responsibility of the architect to communicate the owner's needs clearly to the contractor and provide sufficient specifications for the contractor's use.

Just because the architect and contractor approach building projects from different viewpoints doesn't mean that they cannot work together to satisfy the client. Actually, their varied backgrounds and expertise provide the best situation for the owner: quality design and cost-effective construction.

Early on in the architect-building relationship, the architect must define certain ground rules. The best way I have found to define these rules is for the architect to follow consistently the AIA General Conditions of the Contract for Construction. In the conditions,

the roles of the owner, architect, and contractor are clearly defined. I have found that contractors appreciate our consistency with these guidelines. The architect's actions are straightforward for the contractor, and we expect that the contractor respects his or her role as defined by the general conditions as well.

This advice seems so obvious, but so many architects forget to refresh their memories of these general conditions. How many times have they become boilerplate that's added to the beginning of the specification manual? I try to review the general conditions at the beginning of each construction project as a proactive measure.

As an example, recently, we had a contractor who was sending us shop drawings that were not reviewed and tardy relative to construction sequencing. I began reviewing these drawings and I was concerned that the contractor might not review the drawings after I had marked them. I didn't want problems down the road, so I rereviewed the contractor's responsibilities for shop drawing submittals in the general conditions. It clearly stated that the contractor shall review and approve his submittals before sending them to our office. Now our office has a policy that we will reject any submittals that have not previously been reviewed by the contractor.

This shop drawing review becomes a joint responsibility, and a thorough process by both parties. If our firm does not insist that the contractor review shop drawings, we could be liable for construction means and methods issues, thus overstepping our area of knowledge (job site conditions) or expertise (sequencing, etc.).

Mutual respect is vital in the architect-contractor relationship. Our firm has groomed relationships with many construction firms of various sizes throughout the years. We always maintain, however, a professional relationship that respects the agent-vendor roles. When these roles are maintained and nurtured, there is a clear understanding of the responsibilities required for each party. Contractors appreciate our respect for their part of the construction—the sequences, means, and methods as well as providing the best possible price for materials that we have selected for quality and performance.

The Expectation Gap

*Lavae Aldrich, AIA
Seattle*

When I asked a number of architect colleagues what qualities they look for in a building for their own projects, quality of work was mentioned 13th out of 14 characteristics. But when I asked builders what they appreciate in a good architect, they mentioned design quality number 3 of 14 items. These disparate responses to these questions seemed backwards to me. I expected architects, whose *métier* is art and design, to care about quality at least as much as the builder. Perhaps this disparity between what architects and buildings want from a mutual relationship is the source of some of the problems in the relationship.

More than any other characteristic architects, in my modest survey, mentioned honesty. They want the contractor to offer a fair price and stick to it, rather than looking for holes to be filled with change orders. They want open communication. They expect the construction to stay on schedule or be honest about delays and reasons for them. When dreaming about the perfect contractor, architects use words like integrity and reliability.

Although this response is valid, I am surprised that it constitutes the overriding issue from the architect's point of view. It sounds as if architects hold the same prejudice against builders that the general public reserves for attorneys and auto mechanics. Can we as architects expect open communication and team spirit when one member of the team is treated with suspicion? The contractor says the only difference is that the mechanic finally gets paid while the contractor often as not gets used. There is a general distrust and lack of respect in such architect/builder relationships. How can a good relationship emanate from this kind of prejudice?

And indeed architects do care about quality, but they voice it in their own terms. They say they want a builder who makes them look good. They seek a contractor who will build the design as the architect conceived it, who will share the goal with enthusiasm. They want the builder to ask questions before problems arise, and preferably not in the presence of the owner. They want the builder to help protect the client from internal disputes and of course to save money every step of the way. Architects want a builder who can realize their own vision and make their hard work show to its full advantage.

Although the builders I spoke with generally enjoy working with architects, they feel a lack of respect for their talents and hard work. They want to work on projects that excite and challenge them and will yield pride of accomplishment. They're looking to work with talented architects who produce clear and complete drawings and well-thought-out designs. But contractors say there is a presumption by some architects that any builder can implement a good design, without particular skill or craft. They feel they don't get the credit deserved for a successful project, especially when awards are bestowed and articles are published. Their talent often goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

On the other hand, contractors feel they always take the financial responsibility and loss of reputation when things go bad. Several years ago when a jury of design professionals selected the local AIA Home of the Year, the architect claimed the award alone. The contractor who built the house had folded his company because of the losses on that job. The house was beautifully designed and executed, deserving of recognition, but something had gone terribly wrong. The building community asked how a good design could be so hard to build? And further, if the quality of construction sufficiently demonstrates the quality of design, shouldn't the builder deserve some thanks?

Clearly there is a gap in the expectations and goals of architects and builders, the bridging of which could improve relations. If we want builders to make *us* look good, we have to try to make *them* look good. We need to select contractors we trust and then treat them with confidence. We can offer them respect for their talents and skills and share with them the praises for success. As architects we know that improving the image of the profession as a whole will reflect on each practitioner individually. Thus it follows also that improved relations between architects and builders will serve to enhance the building experience for the client and therefore advance the image of the construction industry in the public eye.

Ten Ways to Improve Our Relationship With Contractors

*John Reese, AIA
Carrollton, Tex.*

When I originally set out to do research for this article, I found it difficult to explain to other architects what it was that I was looking for. At first I was afraid it sounded as if I was looking for architects to

gripe or complain about how lousy contractors were at doing their job. But I didn't want to know "what makes architects perfect" or "why contractors are always wrong" because we all know neither of these statements is true. What I wanted to focus on were the solutions to the problems that arise between architects and contractors from the architect's point of view.

First, I outlined some of the problems with contractors that I had experienced in my 15 years of practice and listed ways to resolve them. Next, I conducted phone interviews with five architects that typically have small projects in their offices. I asked them for solutions to their problems with contractors in no specific order. While there was agreement among these architects as to what problems they were having with contractors, there was no problem or solution that showed up on everyone's list. Therefore, the following list is not arranged in any specific order, nor is it to be construed as being complete. I am sure we could all add at least one more point to this list.

1. Contractors don't ask architects enough questions.

This item appeared on all but one architect's list in one form or another. While some architects noted that it can be embarrassing to have your mistakes pointed out, it is even more embarrassing to see them built. Examples of this included: the contractor or his subs not asking for the mounting height of light sconces, the starting point for the layout of floor tile, and the source for special finishes or products. The solution to this lack of communication is for the architect to encourage the contractor to ask any and all questions and not to treat any query as being a stupid question.

2. Contractors use out-of-date and "not for construction" drawings on the job site.

Several architects reported finding sets of construction documents on

the job site that never should have been there. One architect stated that no matter how large he writes "not for construction" on the drawings they still show up on the job site if they are distributed to the contractor. Many times the preliminary drawings that were issued for pricing are the ones that the subcontractor has kept all of his notes on and, therefore, feels most comfortable with. Ways to deal with this problem included limiting the number of preliminary issues and the number of addendums. Fewer issues mean reduced distribution and reproduction costs to the contractor and, therefore, a greater possibility he will get the documents to those who need them. One architect issues all bid and preconstruction documents as blueprints and all contract documents as blacklines and notifies the entire construction team that they are to work only from blackline drawings. Another architect who does many of his drawings on 8½"-by-11" sheets found that the superintendent was not good at record keeping and halfway through the project the superintendent could not recover from his poor habits. The architect bound a complete set of drawings into a binder at his own expense and presented them to the contractor in a friendly fashion. The contractor was genuinely appreciative and the project ran much more smoothly for everyone.

3. Contractors don't give complete sets to subs for bidding or building. Small projects usually have small budgets for reproduction, which leads contractors or their subs to make difficult decisions as to what they print or distribute. Some architects felt that the owner signs a contract with the general contractor only and that the general has a right to judge the risks and rewards associated with limited distribution of documents. Others, including myself, have a note in their drawings requiring all subcontractors to have a complete set of drawings for

bidding the work. I ask anyone who calls with a question during bidding if they have a complete set of documents. If they answer no, I then tell them they should direct their questions to the general contractor for resolution.

4. Contractors and their subs don't visit the site prior to bidding the project.

Some architects found that problems during construction could have been prevented if the subcontractors had visited the site during the bidding period. This most often occurred with remodeling and additions. Architects felt that no amount of drawing could replace a site visit during bidding. Solutions in this area were limited. Asking the general if all his subs had visited the site (as called for in the documents) prior to signing the contract was the only solution offered.

5. Contractors don't read specifications and drawings.

One architect found that on small projects, the contractor often does not read the specifications if they are bound in a volume, so he places them on separate sheets in with the drawings. Another architect stated that on small projects he relies heavily on trade names for specifying products and includes them in the notes on the individual drawings. He has found that contractors are much like architects in that they both prefer pictures over paragraphs. Finally, one architect stated that he was still searching for a way to get the electrical subcontractor and mill worker to look at the electrical and architectural drawings for the placement of display lighting in retail store fixtures. His notes to "refer to electrical" or his consultant's notes to "refer to architectural" didn't always work.

6. Contractors' submittals don't meet the requirements called for in the documents.

Problems in this area varied. Some contractors submit without reviewing

or even stamping their submittals first. Other contractors submit the wrong number of prints and sepia's for shop drawings or submit small paint samples that show the color only and do not show the proposed substrate or texture. Due to the short schedule often associated with small projects, a great hardship can often be dealt to the contractor if the submittals are returned for resubmittal without review due to nonconformance with basic requirements. The best solution is to discuss submittal requirements at the preconstruction meeting and at each construction meeting.

7. Contractors don't keep the owner and architect properly informed. Many times small projects are residential work and the owner is the occupant. This condition requires that the contractor keep the client updated regularly on the status of the work schedule and decisions that need to be made. The architects felt that it was important for them to stress to the contractor that open communication and honesty are the best policy. If the contractor tells the owner or architect that a task will be started or completed on a certain date and it doesn't happen, it is most important that the contractor immediately let the owner know why.

8. Contractors don't understand the role of architects and don't trust them to act as arbitrator in matters between the owner and contractor. Many times small projects have small contractors who do not have extensive experience dealing with architects. Some of these contractors are used to building from the owner's sketches or with no architect available during construction. We have all heard the owner's statement, "I just need enough drawings to get a permit, we'll handle the rest with the contractor." An architect on the job during construction can be a cause of anxiety for the contractor since they feel that we only represent our client

and are interested in protecting ourselves. The solution, according to one architect, is to show the contractor what the role of the architect is (according to AIA documents) during the contractor interview or as early in the process as possible.

9. Contractors or their subs don't have adequate experience to do the job.

Some architects reported instances in which the contractor was selected for a project solely on the basis of his relationship to, or friendship with, the owner. If you know the solution to this problem, I would like to hear from you in a future "Small Project Forum Report". Other architects reported some general contractors occasionally hired subcontractors based only on their low bids in order to get their price within the owner's budget—many of these generals were not as worried with maintaining a client relationship as they were with getting a job to stay in business. The solution to this problem includes conducting contractor interviews and following up on references and critical review of subcontractors and their bids. If something doesn't look right, ask more questions.

10. Contractors don't have adequate on-site supervision.

Small projects do not typically have the budget for full-time supervision by the general contractor. Some architects reported instances where the general contractor had not been to the site in days and in which the subcontractors were trying to run the job without much success. One architect reported that he required the general contractor to determine who was responsible (usually the lead carpenter on residential projects) when he was not around. One architect stated that he required that the contractor to have a phone and fax machine on site and that the superintendent had to make his pager number available to the architect and all of the subs. This architect stated that use of the

owner's phone or a cellular phone were not allowed for the site phone. Where appropriate, the phone company can limit the phone to local calls only.

The architects that I talked to always felt that a good contractor was paramount to the success of any project and, conversely, a poor contractor was a key factor in projects that were unsuccessful or bad. They all stated that they would not hesitate to recommend a good contractor to their fellow architects or, for that matter, let them know when a contractor had failed to perform.

Many of us may have additional topics such as "Contractors make substitutions without notifying the architect," and many of the topics listed above may have additional solutions. If you have any, please share them with the rest of us in a future issue of this report.

[Ed. note: In response to the "Ten Ways to Improve Our Relationship With Contractors" I asked the Associated General Contractors to contribute an article on "Ten Ways to Improve Our Relationship With Architects." At press time, they had not been able to submit the article. If we get one in, we will publish it in a future edition. —Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA]

The Builder Is Your Friend

*Ty Morrison, AIA
Boise, Idaho*

Our firm has specialized in small projects for several years. Many of our projects have been initiated by builders representing clients. Their realization that the unique services of an architect is critical to achieving the client's desire has been the starting point for many successful ventures. This same avenue has provided us with repeat clientele in the form of builders and their original clients. It is always pleasant to tell a fellow architect airing current gripe about a contractor that

you are often able to secure new projects, without active marketing, from that same contractor!

For many of these team-ups, our primary role is the preparation of the plans necessary to obtain a building permit. While the builder often has the burden of dealing with the building department inspectors, they are often the first to admit they do not have the patience or understanding required to succeed at the permit game. The programming is frequently obtained in an initial meeting with the client to determine what will be built. The preliminary design may have been originated by the client in the form of a sketched floor plan or a similar type of project construction document set. Our architectural and engineering team will assess the basic set of data and, if sufficient information exists, proceed into a design development set of drawings and outline specifications.

The contractor and client review the developed design, often in our office and with members of the A/E team present. Modifications and their impact on the project cost and schedule are analyzed. After a decision on the effectiveness of the design is reached, the A/E team begins the construction documents.

At the midpoint of construction document development, the builder, client, and A/E again review the design and its implications. Major changes are not usually encountered. When the building department will accommodate, a preliminary plan check is also conducted. Plans are finalized and packaged for permit review at the end of this phase.

The builder arranges final costs and subcontractors while the plans are in for permit review. Upon issuance of a permit, or the ability to obtain a "desk permit" for the necessary demolition or excavation, construction begins.

It is important to understand in this approach that project cost or schedule usually takes precedence over aesthetic effect. While that may cause many to wince, it seems to be

a cruel fact of contemporary American building. Our approach is to work with the client and the builder to mitigate the negative impact of over-zealous pragmatism. If a specific detail is required for compliance with codes or structural integrity, we make clear that it must be accomplished. On the other hand, if the door we specified has an exceptionally long lead time or cannot be obtained at an anticipated cost, we often will work with the team to find another solution.

It is the ability to work with the builder and the client to achieve their goals that seems to help create a successful project. To stand firm on a position that a room must be a certain color or a specific manufacturer of siding must be used does not generally fit well in this approach. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Sometimes it is our role to inform the builder that a proposed way of construction may be less expensive initially, but will leave the client at greater risk in the future. Often, the builder knows this as well, and uses the architect as reinforcement in making a difficult decision.

Construction change directives are another aspect of improving architect/builder relations that we work at diligently. No one benefits from a slow response to a field condition that requires resolution. While our office takes great pride in the preparation and accuracy of our construction documents, sometimes a freehand sketch is the most expedient way to resolve the conflict and keep the project moving. Whenever possible, we try to draft construction changes accurately in our standard format.

We also assign two members of the firm to each project to insure better accessibility to our office. These individuals will informally keep each other abreast of the project status, with one member assigned the primary role. Even on very small projects, this simple duplication develops builder and client confidence in the architect's

ability to lead in the decision-making process. Internally, this approach also allows our architects-in-training to become involved in the construction process under the instruction of a seasoned professional.

Championing the Microfirm Roundtable: Betty Avary, AIA

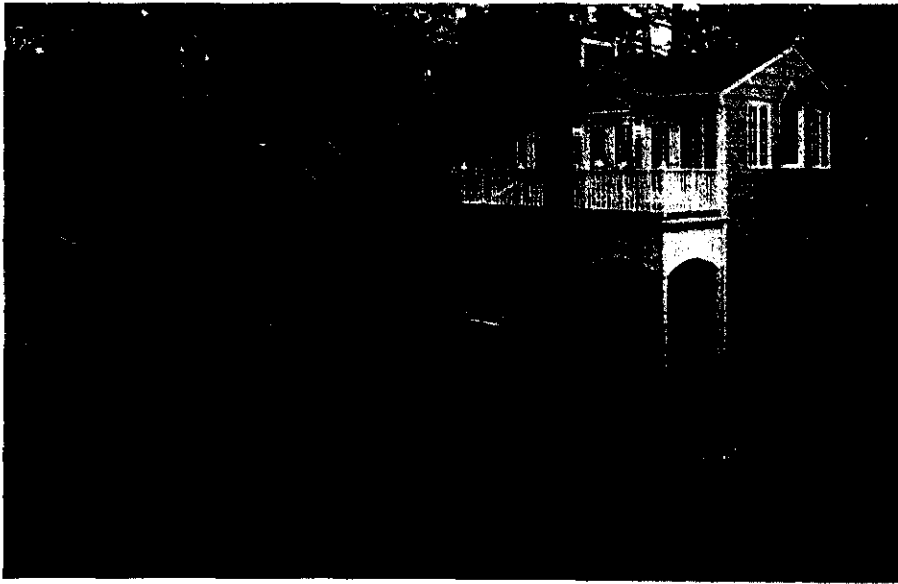
*Hy Applebaum, AIA
Houston*

An enthusiastic champion of the value of the AIA to the small firm, Betty Avary is the founder of the Houston Chapter Microfirm Roundtable. She has advocated and proven to the larger firms of our chapter that the sole practitioner has the talent, experience, and expertise for contract labor, consultation, partnering, and joint venturing. Through the Microfirm Roundtable she has assembled a small-firm directory with pertinent biographic information as a networking reference.

Betty has directed the monthly roundtables and inspired the openness of dialogue where the participants share experiences and knowledge in marketing, risk management, business planning, contracts, fee structuring, and communications. She is lovingly referred to as "Mom" at the roundtables. In recognition of her outstanding accomplishment, David Watkins, outgoing president of the Houston Chapter awarded her the 1995 President's Citation.

I met Betty through my participation in the roundtable, and found that she not only graduated from Texas A & M University at the same time as my eldest son, who is also an architect, but that they were good friends.

Betty is a very dedicated person and I admire her time-management skills and discipline. As a sole practitioner, she is extremely aware that organization time is nonbillable



Residential Design by Betty Avary, AIA Houston

Photo by Mark Scheyer

and makes a conscientious effort to make it worthwhile to her and to the roundtable participants. She is a strong believer that what goes around, comes around. It is this philosophy that drives her openness and sharing attitude. And it is also her belief that architects have a tendency to undervalue their services.

"In an effort to be creative we have a strong tendency to reinvent the wheel in every project we do," she has said. "One of the reasons for the Microfirm Roundtable is to give ourselves the opportunity to communicate openly, avoid duplication of research, and share information so we don't continually reinvent, but improve our designs with each commission."

Her organizational skills have not interfered with her creative efforts, but she does find design to be very spiritually and emotionally taxing without a studio environment. Her efforts were rewarded when her most recent residential design was selected for the 1995 Houston Chapter Home Tour.

"Mom" is a young architect who never realized until recently that she was in a male-dominated profession. As she puts it, "having been raised and trained by male architects, my

male Yang is stronger than my feminine Yin."

Betty has developed a better balance with her Yin by participating in women's networking organizations. She is also a member of a business women's roundtable, where the members act in an advisory capacity as a board of directors for each of the businesses represented. For her, participating in these networking organizations has been a strong foundation for support and a source of new business.

According to Betty, every AIA chapter has a responsibility to provide a service to the small firm and the firms that do small projects. She challenges you to follow the example of the Houston Chapter in organizing a local forum for an open exchange of information and experience like the Microfirm Roundtable and the Small-Project Forum.

A Preconstruction Conference

*Donald Wardlaw, AIA
Oakland*

In the East Bay where I live and work, there are two ongoing venues

for architect-builder exchanges. The first is the Small-Firm Forum, a monthly brown bag at the AIA East Bay office. Begun as the Remodeler's Roundtable, the Small-Firm Forum has evolved into a forum where builders, interior designers, attorneys, structural engineers, and designers are regularly in attendance. There are about 80 or 100 names on our monthly mailing list and of these about half are AIA architects. I suspect that from the vantage point of non-AIA attendees, the East Bay office is not neutral turf, but is a friendly domain. I believe that the AIA members in attendance value the ideas and experiences these others bring to our discussions.

The second venue, the Splinter Group, is a loose and revered ad hoc group originally founded a few years ago by a few builders (most of whom were probably as well-educated as the average architect) to explore issues common to local builders. The Splinter Group now numbers about 150 members of which about 25 are architects. This group meets every six weeks or so for a dinner meeting, presentation, and discussion. These events are typically hosted by different members each time or, in some cases, by small Splinter Group focus groups known as "sliver groups." One such sliver group exists to explore architect-builder relations and is managed by architect Cathy Roha, AIA, Berkeley. This group of about five architects and five builders has held regular monthly discussions, arguments, and food fights all in the interest of exploring opportunities to advance the cause of effective architect-builder relations. This group has surveyed attitudes, hosted interactive Splinter Group meetings, and extensively corresponded. The sliver group has developed a good awareness of some of the fundamental difficulties in the relationship and has considered constructive actions both builders and architects might take.

(continued on page 11)

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Shop Drawings

*Diana Melichar, AIA
Lake Forest, Ill.*

On larger projects, where we have been retained by the client through all phases of design and construction, we request that the contractor provide shop drawings on all trades that require review for design intent. Before construction begins, we prepare for the contractor a list of all shop drawings required. This list is a summary of shop drawings itemized in our specification manual. We then adapt the shop drawing list into our shop drawing lot so we do not forget about any required submission.

Construction Photographs

*John Reese, AIA
Carrollton, Tex.*

I have found a way to keep up with construction progress and avert problems on out-of-town projects where the budget does not allow for weekly or even bimonthly site visits. In the general notes section of the drawings I include a statement requiring the general contractor to take a minimum of 24 job-site photographs at the end of the same day each week (Thursday works best for me). After the general contractor has two prints made of each photograph at a one-hour photo store, he numbers his set and mine and then forwards mine to me via express overnight courier for (Friday) morning arrival. This gives me time to review the photographs with the contractor and then discuss solutions to field problems or ways for him to bring the project back on schedule. It also gives the general contractor and me the weekend to work on any critical areas before the subs show up on Monday.

Establish Common Goals

*Mark Robin, AIA
Nashville*

To build good architect-builder relationships I try, if possible, to get to know the first names of the forces on the small projects on which I am involved. Often, the field people confess that the "white shirts and ties" usually don't acknowledge them. They seem to appreciate my friendliness and enthusiasm for their work. Meanwhile, we are building a teaming relationship. I make sure to express the goals of the project and the individual(s) contribution to reaching these goals. At the same time I confess to being like a grandmother and will be observing their progress for compliance to the project standards. This confession is made in a serious but friendly manner. If there are particular concerns or specific performances that I will attempt to observe, I speak honestly to these issues as early as possible. I believe that this manner gains the respect of the people actually installing the work. Also a team concept is established with an enthusiastic approach to reach acknowledged goals.

Partnering With the General Contractor

*Hy Applebaum, AIA
Houston*

Whenever I start the construction-administration phase of a project, I hold a pre-preconstruction meeting with the general contractor and the GC's key people and follow up with a proper preconstruction meeting with these same people, the main subs, and the client. The first meeting is to establish guidelines and primary objectives of the design. It also establishes a protocol to keep the client involvement to a minimum and a system to keep change orders to a minimum if possible. Generally at this meeting, I try to size up the GC to find if our relationship will be cooperative or adversarial.

To enhance the GC's interest in the project, I let the GC know that I welcome suggestions if they can satisfy the design criteria cheaper or faster by altering details to adapt to a mode of construction with which the GC feels comfortable, so long as it doesn't compromise the integrity or soundness of the building. Should there be changes, obviously they are documented. The GCs like this because it puts them on a more professional level and in a partnering situation and they develop a better understanding of the drawings in search for a better mousetrap.

When we have the formal preconstruction meeting, the agenda has been predetermined, the issues are addressed with clarity and decision, and the client will usually sense a clear understanding between GC and architect and feel more at ease.

Project Data Sheet

Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA
San Antonio

Some builders associations report that on smaller projects it is very difficult to find basic project data. Who is the owner? When are the bids due? Bonds and insurance requirements? Form of contract? Even where to turn in bids. A project data sheet has been suggested. Why don't you review the sample below and adapt it for your projects? It may help remind you to answer certain questions and it organizes the information up front. Got a better one? Send it in!

PROJECT DATA SHEET		
NAME OF PROJECT		
ADDRESS		
OWNER		
PHONE/FAX		
ARCHITECT		
PHONE/FAX		
SQUARE FOOTAGE (SIZE)	VALUE	
BRIEF DESCRIPTION		
BIDS DUE TO		
TIME/PLACE		
PLAN DEPOSIT - YES	NO	AMOUNT
SCHEDULE	CONSTRUCTION START	
CONSTRUCTION FINISH		
ADDITIONAL NOTES:		

MEMBER QUESTIONS

What Qualities Do You Note in Builders You Refer Business to Repeatedly?

*Heather McKinney, AIA
Austin*

After a discussion of this issue by AIA Austin's Small Firms group, I am struck by our objection to the semantics used. Most of us deal with contractors, not builders, and we see a distinct difference between the two. A builder requires very little from the architect in terms of direction, materials selection, detailing, and construction administration. A contractor, on the other hand, bases work entirely on our drawings and specifications. A builder is likely to have a prior relationship with the client and quite frequently hires the architect. A contractor is usually careful to come first to the architect if he finds discrepancies or opportunities to improve the project during construction. That has not been our experience with builders. To be sure, these are generalizations but our comments are nonetheless based on experiences with contractors rather than builders.

Integrity has to be at the top of our list. Especially with residential remodeling projects, clients go through serious emotional upheaval and they need to feel secure in their contractor and architect. We also look for flexibility. Often, unknowns surface during construction and the contractor must deal with these fairly, with a good attitude and a collaborative spirit. To recommend a contractor to my clients, we must also feel that they will get good value for their money: that he or she will seek competitive pricing and quality of craftsmanship. They must also show good judgment in evaluating if a problem on the job site requires our attention. They are good team players, never trying to

wedge between the architect and owner. They give reasonable timelines for a project and keep the owners abreast of upcoming work. They complete that last 5 percent of the project with alacrity and are responsive to the postconstruction issues raised by the clients.

*Jack Hoyt, AIA
Berkeley*

When I refer a builder repeatedly, the builder usually does at least the following three things very well:

1. Manages the clients—communicates frequently and easily, addresses client's concerns about controlling costs, schedule, security, dust, safety, the pets, etc.
2. Bids with a finished or complete project in mind—raises concerns during the bidding such that there is typically no need for change orders and cost increases during construction except for client upgrades.
3. Makes use of our office through regular contact—for clarification of the drawings, for our ideas on how to do something better or differently, and especially to understand our intent when variations are necessary.

It's After Bid Time

*Alex Bergtraun, AIA
Berkeley*

I've always been amazed at how little importance many clients and even other architects put in the fact that contractors generally put a lot of time into competitive bids. A contractor can easily put in 40 hours of work sometimes without even a "Thank you for your efforts" phone call in return. Trying to put myself in their shoes, I've likened bids to design competitions. It's extremely important to me to see the work of the winning entry(ies) so that I can learn and grow from the experience.

In this vein, whenever a project of mine goes out for competitive bid I make sure that the bids are itemized, and that they are itemized in specific CSI divisions that can be used for "apples to apples" comparisons. I then send copies of these itemized bids along with a personal thank you note to all of the bidders involved. This gives everyone a chance to see how they stand in the market and helps turn a not-so-enjoyable process into a bit of a workshop/learning experience. Prior permission is always requested from the contractors before sending out their bids to their competitors and the response has always been not only affirmative, but quite often one of surprise and gratitude for the consideration. It's little things like this that I believe help build some badly needed goodwill between builders and architects in the construction industry.

Member Question MQ11

*Mark Robin, AIA
Nashville*

I prefer to refer clients to contractors who believe the smartest way for an owner to have a project successfully completed is to have an architect on the project team. In my area, contractors are required to have certain financial qualifications—some general business understanding that is demonstrated in an open-book exam—but only a bare minimum of building knowledge. Sometimes the lead carpenter can read construction drawings better than the general contractor. So when I refer a builder for a small project, I look hard at that person's building science knowledge.

What Qualities Do I Look For in a Builder?

*Diana Melichar AIA
Lake Forest, Ill.*

Honest, technical expertise and a team player attitude are the qualities that I look for in a contractor. I have to trust that the contractor will execute our designs properly at a reasonable cost. And, most importantly, I look for team players. I like to work with builders who work through problems with us rather than taking an adversarial approach. When I look for new contractors to bid on our projects, I interview them thoroughly. I visit some of their built projects, check references, and ask for insurance certificates. Also during the interviewing process, I'm looking for a personality match between me and the builder and, ultimately, between the client and the builder, who will practically live with the owner through the construction process.

Notes on Future Issues/ Forum Business

*Donald Wardlaw, AIA
Oakland*

Forum members are welcome to send in comment and suggestions on these Small Project Forum Reports. We are beginning our third year. Included with this issue is our biennial member survey. We use this survey to plan our programs and information focus for the next two years. We can tailor SPF work best to all of our needs if you will take five minutes to complete and return the survey.

With this issue we are pleased to welcome a new member to the Small Project Forum Advisory Group: Cynthia Pozolo, AIA, of Albert Kahn Associates, Detroit. We are delighted with the qualities and talent she brings to our efforts.

We also bid a fond farewell to Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA, San Antonio, who served as forum chair

our first two years, showed very special dedication and leadership skill, and now steps down to lead a normal life.

One of our goals for the report is to include photographs and graphics. This goal fits nicely with one of the physical constraints of the report. We publish reports like this in four-page increments, which means that inevitably we end up with some fraction of the four-page increment vacant as in this issue. We would like to begin filling this space with photos, drawings, sketches, cartoons, and technical drawings by forum members. You are invited to contribute to a collection of material being created for this purpose. Bear in mind that selection will be weighted to graphics that are either related to an article, rich in content, of special appeal to architects in small-project practice, or in some rare instances insanely beautiful. All submittals must be in either 35mm slide format, or in flat format not exceeding 8½" x 11". Submitted materials will not be returned. Send graphic submittals to Donald Wardlaw, AIA, 460A Santa Clara Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610, (510) 268-9524. Credit will be noted and, where space permits, additional credits may be possible.

New Member-to-Member Question:

*Donald Wardlaw, AIA
Oakland*

Our next issue, No. 7, has as a special focus business planning. Articles, tips related to this topic, responses to the member-to-member question, or any other materials for publication are due no later than March 26. That issue is scheduled for delivery by June 1. All written materials should be sent to the coordinator of that issue, Rosemary McMonigal, AIA, at McMonigal Architects, 125 SE Main Street, Suite 345, Minneapolis, MN 55414, (612) 331-1244. Submittals should

include a hard copy and a text file on PC-formatted disk.

Members submitting articles should note that the tone we are looking for is: "This is what in my experience I have found to be true," or "This is what has worked well for me," as opposed to "This is what you should believe or do."

The member-to-member question for the next issue is: "If you could step back in time and start your practice all over again, what would you do that you did not do the first time around to give your practice a more profitable edge?"

(continued from page 6)

My thinking is influenced by the workings of this group. One critical aspect of architect-builder relations, in my view, is a mistrust born not of knowledge about one another, but born of traditional cultural divisions between professionals and tradespeople, between white collar and blue collar, between the university and the school of hard knocks, between mind and hand. The sliver group found a persistent sensitivity among builders to traditional stereotypes, which label them as unprofessional, less ethical, or less educated. I believe there is a similar sensitivity among architects to the image of architects as impractical, arrogant, and unconcerned about their clients' budget and other basic needs. I argue that this tension, when it crops up on a small project, can limit project quality.

Are there ways to circumvent inappropriate stereotypes? The preconstruction conference may provide an opportunity to focus attention on project challenges and build rapport among the owner, builder, builder's subcontractors and crew, and architect. My own experience with preconstruction conferences are from years past and on projects much larger than those I'm involved with as a sole proprietor. Those projects were larger, the work crews were larger, and the administrative procedures were more formalized. Consequently, I found preconstruction conferences focused mainly on project procedures (submittals, weekly conferences, payment schedules) and special project problems (e.g., long lead time items, special owner requirements, and particularly difficult construction situations).

A small-project preconstruction conference might have a different flavor, especially on projects where the architectural design was seriously considered and careful workmanship is needed for proper execution. Might it not begin with the premise that the builder is capable of understanding why things are designed as they are? I believe

benefits accrue to the project when the builder and his or her crew makes an investment in the aims of the owner and the design team and feels like a valued and respected player in the whole operation. Such a conference might involve a presentation by the owners on their project aspirations and lifestyle, the architect on the project history and the ways the project responds to the special requirements of the owner, and the project engineer on the special problems presented by the owners needs and the architect's resolution of those needs. Such a conference might include not just the builder (who may or may not actually do field labor) but also the builder's key crew members and subcontractors. A preconstruction conference of this type might then have the following objectives:

1. Better acquaint owner and builder's crew with one another
2. Alert builder to particular owner sensitivities
3. Review scope of work and special technical challenges
4. Review key design concepts
5. Elicit personal investment by builder and crew in larger project objectives.

Can this be done successfully? A builder I know, Deva Rajan, Canyon Construction, Moraga, Calif., has spoken of an experience along these lines. Prior to construction of a new residence, a conference was held in which the architect, structural engineer, owner, builder, and key personnel and subcontractors attended. The owners had a special interest in Asian art. Their home would not only display their many examples of it, it would also incorporate many Asian motifs in the design. At the preconstruction conference the owners showed examples of the art of Asia and some of the materials and motifs they wanted to incorporate into their house. The engineer discussed the structural concept and his special concerns about the construction. The architect, Glen Jarvis, Jarvis Architects, Berkeley, (a really fine

group of architects), discussed the architectural design, special construction concerns, and expectations for the project. Was it a useful exercise? According to Rajan, "There is definitely an extra something that occurs. You want this project to be really successful. We are dealing with craftsmen looking for integrity in their lives—treat them with respect, ask them to dig a little deeper. Share the inside story, you'll get the best of them." Adds Jarvis, "I started out as a builder—I have a special interest for the builder."

Relevant, Fun, and Designed for You!

*Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA
San Antonio*

The Small-Project Forum will sponsor six AIA convention programs in Minneapolis, May 10-13, 1996:

1. "Small Project + Small Computers = Big Profits" Joseph Vance, AIA, (cosponsored by Computer-Aided Practice PIA)
2. "Small Firm Marketing: Getting the Top Job" James Franklin, FAIA
3. "Small Practice - Big Risk = New Operations" Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA, Lugean Chilcote, FAIA, and John Laping, FAIA
4. Our third annual brochure Swap Meet and Reception
5. "Sole Practitioners Breakfast," another opportunity to kibitz with colleagues, we are arranging to have a speaker give a short talk on current trends in sole practices
6. Our Small Project Forum Advisory Group meeting.

I am looking forward to returning to Minnesota. Are you?

MEMBER PROFILE

Fred D. Cawyer, AIA
Cawyer * Stephens + Associates -
Architects, Garland, Tex.

John Reese, AIA
Carrollton, Tex.

After his 12-year association with the largest architecture firm in Dallas, Fred Cawyer started the one-man firm of Cawyer + Associates - Architects four years ago during an economic slowdown. The birth of his own firm has given Fred something he has always wanted, "the freedom to do what I want."

Approximately a year ago Fred made the decision to associate with another architect, Roger Stephens, AIA, to pursue larger and, hopefully, more profitable projects. This decision brought about the new firm Cawyer * Stephens + Associates - Architects. The firm pursues work in architecture, interiors/space planning, and master planning for projects such as banks, credit unions, churches, private schools, and single-family residences.

Fred points to his investment in his own future rather than someone else's as the most rewarding part of having his own firm. While the large firm left Fred with a feeling that others were benefiting more from his hard work than he was, ownership in his own firm has given him a chance to profit fully from his work. The long hours no longer bother him the way they used to. He makes his own decisions as to when to work and whom to work for. This has given him the freedom to enjoy his family when it is convenient with them, which is very important to Fred. With his Garland office just three miles from his home, Fred no longer has a long commute to and from downtown Dallas (which used to eat up much of his day). He now schedules meetings to avoid rush-hour driving whenever possible and avoids the stress of traffic.

Having a firm of your own is not stress-free, Fred points out.

Keeping the flow of projects at the right level is never easy. Fred notes there is a great feeling associated with landing the project, but there is also a great low with losing the project to someone else. After losing two projects to out-of-town design/build firms, Fred says that he realized that clients are willing to pay extra "to have their problems go away." Many clients do not have the time or experience to handle a project or do not want to deal with multiple contracts. In order to compete, Fred and Roger made the decision to enter the design/build market. They have already selected a contractor to joint venture with on commercial projects and are considering serving as the contractor on their residential projects.

The future of the firm is bright according to Fred. The progress of the firm has been steady. While being small has its benefits, Fred says that they would like to see the firm grow. A firm size of 10 to 15 people would be ideal. Fred never wants to be as big as the firm he used to work for or to lose contact with each project and client.

A Note From Our 1995 Chair

Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA
San Antonio

As one of my last actions as chair of the Small-Project Forum, I want to direct your attention to some items regarding our Forum and some suggestions.

First, a heartfelt thanks to the many contributors, especially the founders and the writers.

Here is an element that is dedicated to making AIA membership and its services a vital resource to our profession. I find this refreshing and I hope you are encouraged to do your part.

Second, our leadership. I've been involved for three years: in 1993 as a member of the task force developing the small-project

standard forms of agreement and, in 1994 and 1995, as chair of the forum. Our 1996 chair, Rosemary McMonigal, AIA, predates me by having served on the roundtables that led to the 1993 task force. Our 1996 vice chair, Donald Wardlaw, AIA, is very active and has been the voice behind most newsletters so far. A new member, Cynthia Pozolo, AIA, is already in the loop and we look forward to her first year.

Third, communicate. I've received many calls and letters, but considering that we have over 2,000 members and since our phone and fax numbers are published in every newsletter, there could be more. I'm not asking you to do a lot of work. But you really can have a direct influence on what our section of the national AIA does for its members.

Fourth, an issue. Three of our local advisors have asked for a change of focus from small-project issues to small-firm issues. I've had discussions with Rosemary, Donald, and David Takesuye, AIA, our staff director, about this possible member need. What do you think? Should our forum stick to small projects or serve both small-project and -firm concerns or change to small-firm issues? Look for this and other issues in the attached survey. Please take part by sending it in.

It is so rewarding to see an idea become a reality and then to see our PIA become one of the larger ones. I'm leaving the national advisory group but will continue as a local advisor representing San Antonio. I believe in the value of our profession, the people in it, and the role we play in society. For that reason, I intend to stay active and would truly welcome a call from you.

[Ed. note: The following is a note I received from Heather McKinney, AIA, of Austin. I wanted to share it with you since it illustrates a common need with small firms across the country. —Gabriel Durand-Hollis, AIA]

In a nutshell, our little Austin group is really a small-firms group, not a small-projects group. As you noted, many of the concerns are the same. However, we are much broader-based in our concerns, not just focused on how to get and run small projects effectively, but also how to run our offices. Issues of "to grow or not to grow" (à la the argument presented for staying small by Gary Cunningham and Max Levy) make for compelling conversation in our group. We are very ad hoc: the group took a hiatus during the summer and is now trying to meet about every month. The last meeting involved looking at a presentation of software not exactly honed to our particular focus. In the past we have focused on issues like getting your foot in the door with public-sector work, how to supply benefits without cost to employees, when contract labor really is employee labor, and how to stretch resources. I am hopeful that we can address issues like employee manuals, office procedures, and other trappings of the large office that so many small firms have avoided. Often people choose small firms (both as employers and employees) because they are more flexible and without so many built-in rules. However, there are good reasons to create some structure even in small firms and finding our way through these issues is what interests me.

Report from Seattle

*Lavae Aldrich, AIA
Seattle*

"They" tell us that Seattle has more architects per capita than anywhere else in the country. "They" also tell us that more people in Seattle hire architects for small projects than anywhere else in the country. ("They" also tell us we drink more coffee than anywhere else in the country so obviously "they" can be trusted.)

Clearly this is bad news and good. The professional climate here is very competitive, with lots of architects vying for small projects ranging from commercial buildings to deck remodels. But the other side of this dilemma means that there're lots of opportunity for architects. The result is an abundance of creative energy yielding excellent design results. Fostering cooperation rather than competition, Seattle AIA is helping small practitioners get together by setting up networking opportunities and public-awareness programs.

Towards cooperation and self-education, about two years ago member Larry Johnson started a bimonthly forum for discussing issues of particular interest to small offices. As a group we felt we were each reinventing the wheel silently and privately in our own offices. We wanted to straighten the learning curve and share what we each have discovered.

At AIA Seattle there already existed a number of committees and PIAs dealing with design, technical, and social issues. The gap we felt seemed to focus on running a small business. The Sole Proprietors/Small Practitioners PIA (formerly Small Office Task Force) now consists of an open invitation to meet bimonthly for a brown-bag lunch around a table at the chapter office. There we continue to discuss issues ranging from construction contracts and bookkeeping software to compensation and retirement planning. Occasionally, prior to discussions, we have had a formal presentation by an expert (such as a financial planner). The loosely organized membership is further encouraged to meet during alternating months to talk on an even more casual and personal level.

Clients in Seattle (and throughout the Puget Sound area) seem to be highly aware of the value of design in the environment and routinely hire a professional for even their small construction projects. Because there are so many professionals from

whom to choose, owners do their homework before selecting. To assist this research, the chapter offers a Saturday seminar once a month called "How to Select and Work With an Architect." The two-hour seminars are presented by a pair of residential architects. Attended by 10-20 homeowners each month, the seminars have yielded well-prepared clients with realistic expectations.

The final half hour of each Saturday seminar is an introduction to the Resource Center for Architecture. Opened to the public four years ago, the center consists of a user-friendly library of design portfolios of member architects. Every day of the week, people walk into the chapter office at our downtown location to peruse the notebooks and make notes of simpatico designers. They are encouraged to call several, interview a few, and select one. Along with the Saturday seminar, the center has proved to be a very successful way of educating people about the value of hiring an architect. Lots of good work for local architects and quality design for our region has resulted.

By coming together in a number of ways, smaller architects in Seattle are learning from each other and improving their craft.

Small-Project Survival— Real-World Techniques

*Dan Jansenson, AIA
Santa Monica*

For many of us in southern California, the prevailing economic climate has forced us to change significantly the ways in which we work. Projects are harder to get, budgets are much tighter, and schedules much shorter. Clients have also changed and have become more involved in their own projects, often acting as true project managers. During the past two years I have observed in my projects a sea change in the way clients approach projects.

- Owners often want to participate fully in the design process (I provide pencil and paper).
- They want to buy products and materials directly.
- They want to negotiate with all suppliers, including the contractor.
- They want complete and detailed financial and schedule information before construction begins.
- They insist on hiring specific subcontractors directly and making the general contractor responsible for integrating the work of the owners' subs into the project. Owners have also been acting a lot tougher.
- They hire, as contractors, the lowest bidders, then negotiate prices down further.
- Self-reliant individuals, they continually challenge all aspects of regulation: building codes, structural engineering safety margins, etc.
- They refuse to accept building officials' code interpretations and will often seek to fight rulings.
- Owners will often refuse to abide by the decisions of community design review boards and are willing to litigate when they see an advantage.
- Owners are often willing to allow imperfect construction to obtain further concessions from the contractor.

In response, contractors have been changing their behavior as well:

- Lowest-price bidders have often been reluctant to scrutinize the drawings carefully, preferring a quick, overall approach.
- While exhibiting good will, they strive to adhere to a more general definition of the project and prefer using specific methods, materials, and dimensions they have used before in other projects, even when this requires extensive design changes.
- They readily intervene with the owner to attempt design changes that will lower their own cost without necessarily reducing that of the owner, often using schedule

delays as an incentive for an owner's approval.

I do not mention these items as a complaint, but as an observation of an increasingly frequent reality in the field as I have observed it. Contractors are operating under increasingly stringent cost and schedule constraints, which create their own, inevitable dynamic.

The result of these changes in the projects I have worked on has been a new project delivery process that combines the changing requirements of the three major actors: the owner, the architect and the contractor. The relationships among all three have now become very fluid, political, and fast-moving, and requires that all three act as true members of a team, even while not often exhibiting great mutual regard.

All this has required me, as an architect, to work differently.

- I now participate more fully in the construction process with very frequent visits to the site.
- At the start of a project, I sit with the contractor and the owner to review the specifications and drawings carefully and thoroughly and try to answer as many questions as possible in advance of construction.
- I complete construction details *after* the initial meetings with the contractor, once we have agreed on techniques and details.
- I identify, for the contractor, those parts of the project that are especially important from a design viewpoint, and those where flexibility and changes can easily be accommodated.
- I solicit his or her advice on doing things better or more economically.
- We establish a schedule of meetings timed to coincide with major steps in construction.
- At each step, we review the work about to be performed, and I try to alert the contractor to potential problem areas.
- I now do as much as possible in writing—requests for information and changes are all answered only in

writing with copies to all parties, including the owner.

- I try to make myself available to answer questions at any time (within reasonable hours of the day), and promise a speedy answer, usually within an hour or less. (I have often found that a small delay in providing an answer—say two hours—can result in the contractor making independent design changes which then become expensive for the owner to change.)

The inescapable fact is that for many of us, the world of architecture and construction has changed drastically, and this has required great changes in the way we all work. For me, as well as the contractors, the potential exposure to liability has greatly increased, and the steps I have described above represent an effort to create a cooperative climate in which potential problems can be identified in advance and headed off.

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If you would like to report on issues relevant to the Small Project Forum from your area on a regular basis, we invite you to join our network of local Advisors. Please call Rosemary McMonigal, AIA.