



## **Five Little Known Secrets to a Successful Architecture Project (and why some people don't want you to know them!)**

Trust me, there are a lot of things that some people in the business would love to keep hidden from you. I will discuss some of them in a few minutes.

But first, let me ask you...

Has it ever been more confusing trying to figure out who you can trust to help you renovate your current house or build your new custom home?

How can you be sure that when you spend your hard earned money you'll get exactly what you paid for?

If you're confused you're not alone. Haven't we all heard the "nightmare stories" of the contractor scams, fly-by-night contractors, unfinished jobs or general lack of professionalism?

Scary stuff!

Unfortunately, the bad apples in the industry have made it really hard for the homeowner to tell the good guys from the bad.

You can't pickup a newspaper or turn on the TV news without seeing another story about someone who had a terrible experience with their custom building project.

- Some hired the wrong contractor and were left with unfinished or poor quality work...
- Some were plagued with permitting conflicts with the municipality...
- Some were left holding the bag all together...having already paid in advance, when their contractor went under.

Most of us are just too busy in today's fast paced world to learn everything we need to know when making an important and major investment in our homes.

Is it any wonder why most homeowners make costly mistakes when they face the challenges of improving their homes or building new?

What are these secrets you may ask?

Here are the Five Little Known Secrets to a Successful Architecture Project



## Secret #1 - Avoid Common Misconceptions

**#1:** “As a builder I can do it cheaper because you don’t need to pay for an architect.” This *might* be the case but what sometimes happens is that either:

- A. You don’t get to prioritize your needs and understand potential issues up front.
- B. As both designer and contractor you might not have an impartial advocate (your Building Advocate) looking out for your best interest throughout the project.

**#2:** Going with the lowest price saves you money. Maybe! Everyone tends to look for the lowest price. On a low estimate, you must ask yourself what is being left out or what shortcut is being taken.

One of the most common signs of trouble is someone offering to do work for significantly less money than others. As with all things in life, you can’t get something for nothing. Be careful of choosing the professionals you will be working with based solely on lowest price.

## Secret #2 - How to Choose The Right Professional, 10 Questions You Should Ask Any Architect Before You Meet

1. What sets your firm apart from other architects with similar experience?
  - This question helps you get a sense of what their focus is for the firm. Some focus on design. Others are specialists in certain parts of the process.
  - At Incite Design we tell prospective clients that our collaborative approach helps them solidify and prioritize their needs up front. We also have a system that helps them minimize risk in custom building projects. And they don't need to do any of the time consuming things, while still having as much control of the project as they want.
2. As an architect, what challenges do you foresee for my project?
  - After getting an idea of what your current situation is and what you’d like to accomplish, right off the bat you’ll begin to get a sense of the architect’s thought process. It also is very useful to compare a few different responses. If one says that they don’t see any challenges and others respond negatively, either there is a big communication gap or you need to probe further on what makes them respond that way.
3. What means will you use to collect information about my needs and goals?
  - Most firms will meet with you to get a sense of how you live and what you’d like changed. We like to start with this process without jumping to the conclusion of renovation/addition/new house right out of the gate. For instance we have advised one couple to re-configure their original concept of how they would build an addition to generate a more effective end result. And we’ve even advised one couple to move to a different house rather than tackle an addition that might not get them a good return on investment when it came time to sell.



- Not everyone's needs are the same so we like to say we don't have an end result in mind when we meet with you. Its something we come up with collaboratively through the process of understanding and prioritizing your needs.
4. What are the steps in the design process, and how are they organized?
- As part of the [Incite Method](#) we have 8 steps to the process.
    - i. Preliminary Research and Discovery Phase
    - ii. Schematic Design
    - iii. Design Development
    - iv. Planning Variance Process
    - v. Permit and Construction Documents
    - vi. Tender Documents Review and Guidance
    - vii. Tender Negotiation and Contract Signing
    - viii. Construction Management

You can download the FREE Guide at <http://incited.ca/go/guide>

5. How disruptive will construction be?
- Your family's tolerance for dust and disturbance will be the gage of how much you can withstand, but in general the larger the scope the more disturbance there will be. We most often advise clients to move out during the construction phase or schedule it when they are able to take breaks during the dirtiest, noisiest parts of the project.
  - Some clients see moving out as an unnecessary cost but as much as we work to remove the stress of the process, but there will be disruption when you can't use your house like you'd expect. If you factor the cost into your budget, you will be glad you didn't tough it out at the end of the job when you move back into your beautiful home.
6. What role do you have during construction? Am I expected to work with the contractor directly?
- Architects usually play a supervisory role during construction, conducting site visits to make sure that the plans are being followed by the contractor. In some situations, firms have both design and construction services so the architect is involved more heavily during the construction phase. Neither is superior – each has its pros and cons and the application should be discussed during the early stages of your project to determine which suits your needs.
  - Again, some clients prefer to be very hands on with the contractor especially if they have a background in construction. But most of our clients are busy with work and family and would rather only deal with the contractor on an exception basis and have our firm take care of the items that are part of the construction process.
7. What is included in your basic services and what services would incur additional fees?



- Our basic fees usually include up to the point where a contractor enters into contract directly with the clients. We then have a responsibility to do site visits a handful of times on a per diem basis at certain points in construction to satisfy building code and due diligence.
  - We do suggest that our increased involvement would benefit clients to help catch problems before they get out of hand and cost more money to fix.
8. When do you get paid?
- As with all service professionals you should expect to pay for service at the time it is rendered. For larger jobs, it is customary for you and the firm to agree on a payment schedule, where you pay a portion of the total when specific milestones are reached.
9. What's your favourite building?
- This is actually an interesting question to ask, not just for what the specific building is but the justification from the architect. This helps you as a client find a partner that is a fit for your style and what you are trying to accomplish. (If you want my answer, you'll have to wait till the end)
10. Will you receive a written proposal, including the fees?
- It may seem obvious...but you would be surprised by how many providers in the construction industry will verbally quote a price to a customer to win the job, then change the price after the work has begun, leaving you little choice, but to pay what they want to finish the job.
  - ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS get a detailed WRITTEN proposal, including the cost, from the architect you are hiring. If they can't give it to you in writing and stand by their proposal be very suspicious.

### **Secret #3 - The Biggest Mistakes Homeowners Make and How To Avoid Them**

**#1:** Listening to the wrong people. I am always amazed when people take advice on their project from people who are completely unqualified to give good advice on the topic. The results I see (and I see it almost everyday) are construction messes, unnecessary work and damage to homes that shouldn't occur...

When I ask where they got the idea to do what they do I get answers like...

"My brother-in-law said I should do that. He used to do work like this on the side in college."

"I was talking about it with a buddy at work and he told me he did the same thing to his home."

"I read an article online that said I should..."

Everyone's got an opinion about how to design your house. Just because they're your relative or friend does not mean they know anything about architecture. If you've got an issue call someone qualified to assess the problem and give you viable options for correcting it.



**#2:** Call several references for the architect you want to hire. Most people start off with good intentions...they ask for references but few ever make the calls.

You're about to hand over the care of the actual "roof over your head", not to mention a lot of your hard earned money. You can never know too much about the firm you're considering.

Take the time to call the references you're given. It will be worth it!

Ask if the job was started and finished on time and for the agreed upon price. And be sure to ask if the architect was easy to reach. If the communication was difficult this is usually a bad sign.

### **Secret #4 - How to Tell If Your Project Will Run Smoothly Before You Sign The Contract**

**#1: Good communication.** If you can call and talk to one another you'll be able to work out any details when they come up.

- When you leave a message, does he/she return your call promptly?
- Do they respond to emails promptly?
- Do they listen to you (after all it's your home)?

Nothing is more important than feeling like your architect understands your needs and listens to you. If they are too busy to return your calls or emails you might consider looking for another firm.

When you're in a conversation with them, do they really listen to you...I mean really listen. This is very important.

You should always feel like you're both "on the same page." Doing so will help you avoid the costly errors and frustration that comes with miscommunication.

Choose someone who will listen to you.

**#2 Comfort.** If you feel comfortable with the architect you choose, there's a good chance your project will run smoothly. Face it...you just invited a stranger to help you on a large project: your home - the largest investment most people make in their lifetime. Is this person nice, polite, personable, a listener?

Or, did they make you feel like your project wasn't important?

This architect and his employees will be around your home for an extended period of time...make sure you're comfortable having them around.

**#3 Trustworthy.** If you feel your architect is trustworthy, the chances of a successful project are good. Check the company's references. Listen to your gut feelings.

**#4 Completion.** Will your architect give you a timetable for beginning and completing your project? If not, be concerned. A good architect should know how long it will take to get permits from your municipality, and complete the work he is proposing. Nothing is more frustrating, or more risky to your home, than a project that drags on and on.



**#5: Down Payment.** If your architect asks for the full amount up front or a large sum of money, this may be a clue that the firm's not in good financial shape. Generally, a fair down payment will be 30% or less. The written proposal you get from the architect should spell out exactly when each payment is due and how much it will be.

**#6. Change orders.** With any type of construction there is always the chance that you may want or need to make changes to the plan after the contract is signed. Be sure to ask how these changes are handled. They should be written up in a separate change order document that spells out the exact changes line by line and the cost of the changes. Oh, and this should be given to you before the changes are actually made. Both you and the contractor should sign this document.

### **Secret #5 - Plan Your Project!**

This is really the most important secret of all!

Plan your project with an experienced professional!

Most people spend more time planning their next vacation than they do planning their house project. If you are thinking about a project of this size (remember its often the biggest or second biggest purchase of your life), the best thing you can do is seek the advice of a competent and reputable professional.

Someone who can explain all of the new options for your project (yes a lot has changed in the last 15 or 20 years). Someone who can guide you to the proper materials for your home and your budget. Someone who listens to all of your concerns and answers all of your questions.

In short, someone who does business based on the principles I describe in this report.

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As you might have guessed, this is the only way **Incite Design** does business.

To begin you'll get a FREE, NO OBLIGATION consultation. We will chat to get an idea of your needs and priorities and suggest ways to move forward.

If your current space can meet your needs with just a few tweaks we'll tell you. If we're able to help you decide on building an addition we'll tell you. And, if there's no way to realistically modify your current home, we will tell you that as well.

Sounds good, doesn't it?

You have to understand, I truly love the work that my firm does. We help our clients make a beautiful home for the most important people in their life. I take that job very seriously.



INCITE DESIGN

<http://www.incited.ca>

If all this makes sense to you, and you like my approach to taking care of your project, please call me at **(416) 477-5636** or **Toll Free 1-855-464-6248** to schedule a brief 20 minute call. Or email me: [Jeffrey.veffer@incited.ca](mailto:Jeffrey.veffer@incited.ca)

And remember, absolutely NO PRESSURE!

No one is going to try to sell you anything. This is simply a chance for you to chat with one of us and see if the work we do can benefit you.

If you think my approach is fair and honest, please call my office while this is fresh in your mind and schedule a brief 20 minute call. Again my phone numbers are:

**(416) 477-5636 or Toll Free 1-855-464-6248**

Either way, I wish you the best with your construction project.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Veffer

Partner and Co-founder, Incite Design

[Jeffrey.veffer@incited.ca](mailto:Jeffrey.veffer@incited.ca)

## The 10 Most Frequently Asked Questions About Starting an Architecture Project

1. How much does a renovation/addition/new house cost?
  - It depends.... There are many factors that influence the cost of your project. A few are difficulty of construction (e.g. lots of open spaces that require complicated framing), high-end finishes/fixtures, compressed time frame and changes that require rework.
2. What's the cost per square foot?
  - Again it depends (see 1 above)
3. What does an architect do?
  - We work with clients to help them realize a successful project. What does that really mean? If a lawyer is your legal advocate, an **architect is your building advocate.**
4. Do you actually build the project?
  - No although there are some firms that have contractors as part of their service offering. Some clients have commented that this could lead to higher costs, as there might not be true competitive bidding for the work. But it could also generate a smoother project if the design team uses the contractors experience during the design phases to create a project that avoids complexities in construction.
5. How much do you charge per hour?
  - We prefer to talk about ROI (return on investment). This is likely a client's biggest purchase in their life (often six or seven figures in construction costs) so having a trusted partner to look out for their interests and make sure that the money is spent wisely is a good investment in the long term.
6. Why do I need an architect?
  - Few people realize how complicated it is to build--that is, until they find themselves lost in the maze of design options, building codes, zoning laws, contractors, and so on. No two building projects are exactly alike, so there is no single, clear-cut path to follow.
  - The architect is the one professional who has the education, training, experience, and vision to guide you through the entire design and construction process, from helping you define what you want to build to helping you get the most for your construction dollar.
  - Whether you are remodeling, adding on, or building from scratch, the architect can guide the way. Working with contractors and other construction professionals, architects can help you end up with a well-designed project that meets your needs and works with your budget and time frame.
7. How long will it take to do a renovation/addition/new house?
  - It depends on the scope of the project. To further complicate matters if a project requires minor variances from your municipality it could add time to the schedule as





well. But for a custom house we usually budget a year, from initial meeting to drawings to tender through construction, if there are no variances needed.

8. Do you select the contractor?

- We help advise you in selecting the contractor and we can suggest ones that we consider well suited for your particular project. In most cases you as the client will hire the contractor directly and pay him directly though we can assist in the construction management process, depending on our specific arrangement for your project.

9. Why won't the city let me do X?

- Most municipalities have laws and statutes call Zoning Bylaws, which dictate things like height overall size, and minimum distances from property lines. Generally their intention is to provide some uniformity in the streetscape as well as limit some uses that have been deemed not in keeping with a residential area. But even this is changing as more and more mixed use areas become mainstream so you can look for zoning to undergo changes to keep up with development over the next ten years or so.

10. What's your favorite building?

- Thanks for asking! Most architects will qualify this by saying residential or commercial? Modern or classical? [and so on...] I just say that it varies for me depending on what I am working on and what influences I am studying at the moment. If I had to say at the moment it would be Philip Johnson's Glass House for promising a simpler way of living.