

When hiring an architect to create the drawings and related documents for your residential project, there are two basic options available: the 'Permit' set, and the 'Full' set of Construction Documents. It's important to recognize the differences between them, and how they can be modified to better suit your expectations and needs. The Construction Documents are the method by which an architect delivers their work to a client; they are the distillation of meetings, design skill, construction and building code knowledge, and local requirements. Understanding the amount of information that's necessary for *you* to be comfortable with these documents is crucial to reducing frustration and complications during the construction phase of your project. After considering the information presented, you might agree that a more customized set of documents is appropriate. Work with your architect to be certain that the documentation being proposed for your project is compatible with your comfort for cost variations as well as your knowledge and experience with the construction process.

The Permit Set

The Permit set, as its name implies, is a minimal set of drawings and other information that a local code officer requires to issue a building permit. Being a smaller and less detailed set of documents, they take less time for the architect to complete, and therefore are less costly than a full set of Construction Documents.

While costing less in architectural fees, these documents will, however, require *considerable* more time, effort, and construction knowledge of the owner, who should also be comfortable with and able to analyze regularly changing construction costs. Changes during construction often result in significant delays in the project's completion.

The Permit set includes basic information about the project such as floor plans, exterior elevations, some sections and details, and very

general materials and systems notes. They *do not* include detailing over and above what is required to obtain a building permit, full specifications, engineering design, or any additional design and detailing work for fireplaces, casework, millwork, kitchens and bathrooms, special stair conditions, interior elevations, tile layouts, finish materials, and so on.

The Permit set of documents leaves construction detailing and material selections largely to the builder or owner to determine and coordinate following the permit submittal. A Permit set of drawings is not recommended for a client unless they are very familiar with the construction process and are comfortable with constantly negotiating construction costs with the builder.

The Full Set

Full architectural drawings and documentation include all the information necessary to obtain a building permit and for the builder to provide an accurate final construction cost *before* construction begins. These documents include all the basic information of the Permit set as well as thorough specifications, more sophisticated construction detailing, any required interior elevations, kitchen and bath design, finish material layouts and schedules, casework design and detailing, trim and paneling, lighting layouts, and much more. One of several goals for this level of documentation is to provide enough information in the drawings to eliminate assumptions by a builder—different builders reviewing the same drawings should arrive at similar pricing for the project.

The research, design, and documentation required to provide this level of detail requires significantly more time than a Permit set of drawings and, therefore, the architectural fee will be higher. In addition, as with the Permit set, there are compromises involved which carry potential risks for additional costs. This set of documents will make the overall cost of construction apparent *before*

construction begins. If the builders' s proposal is more than the owner is willing to spend, design and drafting work will need to be revised and the owner will almost certainly incur additional architectural fees. In contrast, the minimal amount of information included in a Permit set will inevitably result in additional construction costs or 'Change Orders' during construction, as differing expectations between the owner and builder become apparent.

How do I balance included information and architectural fees?

For a commercial project, a Permit set is rarely done. Likewise, unless you are asking an architect to design a uniquely custom home, it isn't necessary to have a full construction set of documents prepared. For a typical residential project, a Permit set enhanced by additional detailing for items of special interest to the owner, as well as items known to result in unexpected costs or to prevent installation of materials of poor quality is more appropriate. For example, the owner may want details typical of an architectural style or might be concerned with accessibility for an 'aging-in-place' design. Including more detailed specifications for finish materials, doors, windows, and plumbing fixtures, can eliminate disappointments after construction is complete. Carefully detailing how different materials come together goes a long way to creating a quality final product.

For most residential clients, Identity Design PLLC recommends opting for drawings that include enough information up front to allow builders to provide reasonably accurate overall construction cost estimates. Balancing the information required of the builder between the owner and the architect will allow enough of the design to be planned out in advance that clients are not scrambling during construction to finalize selections and detailing. Although this level of information will vary by project and the owner's requirements, it will not necessitate spending excessive time (i.e. architectural fee) on design and detailing that may need to be revised or eliminated due to budget constraints.

Thank You

Hopefully this information provided some insight into the documents architects produce and builders use to construct your project. Architectural services are not something most people are familiar with, so it's important to explain your expectations and comfort with construction projects with an architect.

If you're ready to get started on a project you've been thinking about, we're ready to help. Please contact Identity Design, PLLC with any questions you may have about this process.

RECOMMENDED READING

Jonston, Amy. *What Your Contractor Can't Tell You: The Essential Guide to Building and Renovating*. Shube Pub., 2008.

Krapf, Richard D. *Considerations on Hiring An Architect: How The Design Process Works*. N.p.: n.p., 2013. ([available at www.id-architects.com](http://www.id-architects.com))

Krapf, Richard D. *Considerations On Hiring An Architect: Residential Services*. N.p.: n.p., 2013. ([available at www.id-architects.com](http://www.id-architects.com))

Krapf, Richard D. *Considerations on Hiring An Architect: I Don't Need An Architect! Common Myths and Misconceptions*. N.p.: n.p., 2013. ([available at www.id-architects.com](http://www.id-architects.com))

Locicero, David. *Working With An Architect: What to Expect Working with an Architect on your Home Addition or Remodel*. CreateSpace.com, 2008.