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# TulsaPeople

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against poultry producers p.16



# Working with an architect

The role of an architect is unique and specialized. From designing a home to simply providing expert advice on an existing plan, it pays to know how and when to ask an architect to step in.

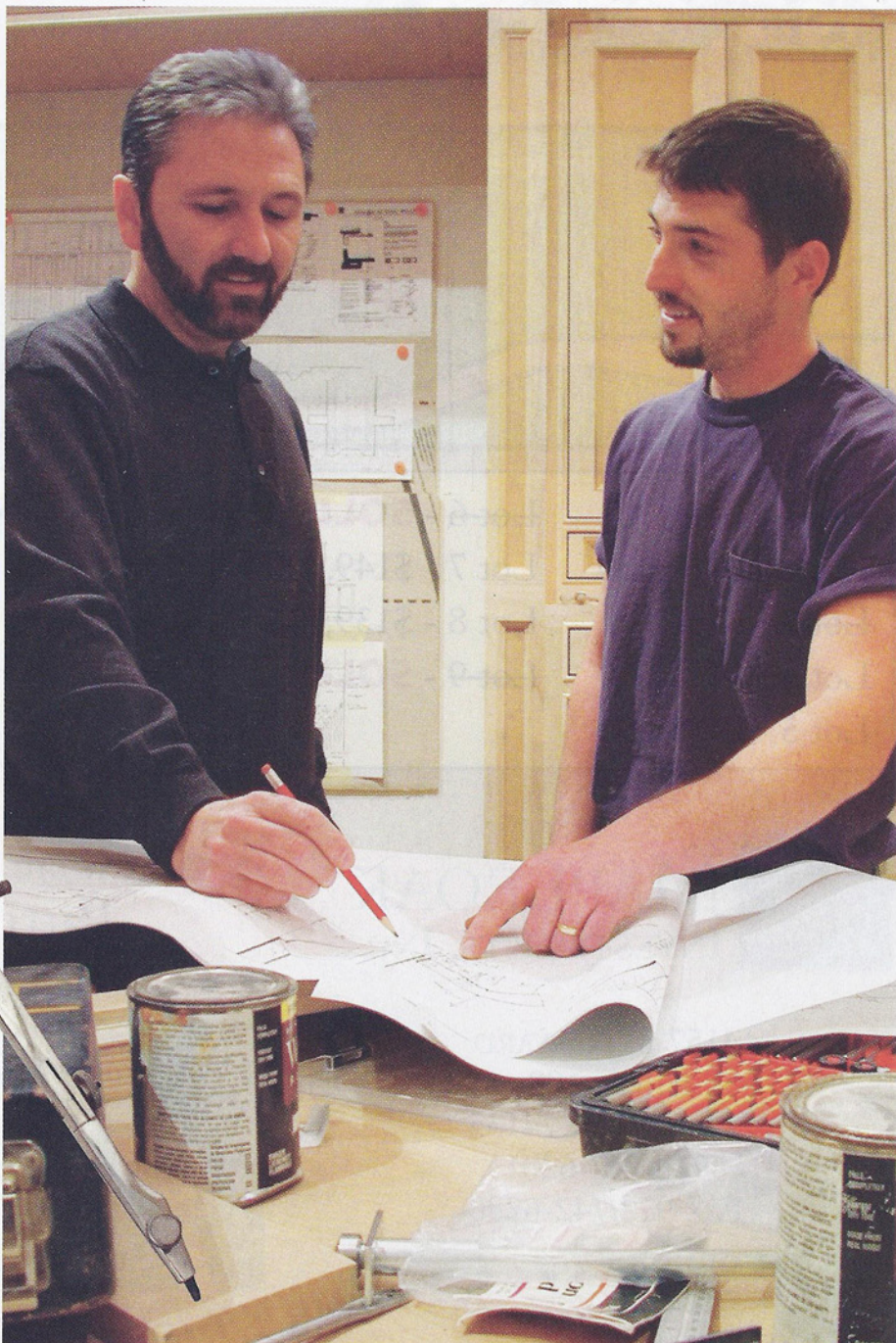
by Susan Everly Douze

A custom house designed by an architect should fit you like a custom-made suit, says **Brian Freese**, president of the American Institute of Architects-Eastern Oklahoma Chapter.

Or, as his fellow Tulsa architect **Alan Madewell** puts it: friends should walk through the door and say "this house looks just like you."

## But does everyone need an architect?

"In an ivory tower situation, I'd say everyone does, but in reality the answer is 'no'; a lot of people are happy with builder plans," Madewell says. "An architect is for people who are looking for something more or something a little different—a house that makes a statement. It's taking it to a new level."



Architect Alan Madewell and David Walker, trim carpenter, discuss the finishing step of a current project.



But that doesn't have to mean a mansion, even a McMansion. There's room for an architect even on a tight budget.

Recently, Freese created a home for a single woman on a limited budget "who wanted a small but customized house with just the right living space and aesthetics to perfectly meet her needs." Frequently, he says, designing these smaller, creative spaces is "as satisfying as larger, more complex projects."

Besides the unique design difference, an architect is appropriate for special needs such as creating a home for a client with a handicap or dealing with a lot that is oddly shaped or has challenging elevations.

### **A lotta architect or a little?**

You can hire an architect in a variety of ways and costs. There's the total package of

design (down to your preferred depth for the sock drawer) and then overseeing of construction. Or you can simply purchase this expertise by the hour to review existing house plans from a builder or other source.

"If you can't afford the custom house or think the builder's plan is just about there, but not quite, consider buying a few hours of an architect's time," Madewell says. Changes can range from changing the roof pitch to making a big room cozier.

### **How to select an architect**

A recommendation from satisfied friends is an obvious way to go. Ditto if you love the looks of distinctive homes you see around town. Find out who designed them. In addition, the AIA provides a list of local architects who specialize in residential construction.

Freese recommends interviewing about three architects. Ask the same questions of all. If you're working with a large firm, talk to the architect who would handle your project.

That initial interview generally should be a freebie, Freese says. But remember to ask. In fairness to the architect, explain that you are talking to several others. In addition to seeing examples of the architect's work and learning how the fee schedule works, consider personality. You'll be spending a lot of time with this professional and discussing

**Myra Sellers and Phil Haney discuss the developments of the plans for their new home with architect Brian Freese.**





personal details of your life. A minor personality clash at the initial get-together probably only will get worse. You shouldn't feel in awe of your architect.

### How to work with an architect

Honesty is key. That goes from your wish list of the features that you'd like to include to what your budget really is. An architect is not a mind-reader. But, says Madewell, a good architect will ask many questions about your lifestyle. Don't be embarrassed to bring along magazine clippings that include features you like or just rooms that make you feel happy even if you don't know why.

"An architect should ask, 'Tell me how you live,' not just how many bedrooms do you want," says Madewell, who frequently

tells clients that they can rent a whole lot of nights in a nice hotel for a guest for the cost of another bedroom. Lifestyle concerns include, for example, whether one of a couple gets up early and the other is a late riser.

An architect can sort out lifestyle wants and needs from unrealistic expectations. "There's a difference between Home and Garden TV and reality," Madewell says.

"We make dreams come true," says Freese who designed a smashing but sleek villa for clients, who through their travels, became smitten with Italy's Tuscany region. And he incorporated another client must: there's not a blade of grass on the entire property.

But Freese notes perfect homes don't just

happen. Fortrightness from the client is essential. The design stage is the time to ask question after question—not keep your mouth shut and hope for the best. Changes are easier and less costly in the early stages of design.

**Michael Lane,**  
construction  
supervisor, Barron and  
McClary General  
Contractors, and  
architect Alan  
Madewell consult  
plans on the job site.





## How to pay

Compensation for an architect can range from a percentage of construction cost to an hourly rate. Each has its advantages. Before you decide on an architect, understand how his fee schedule works.

## How to find a contractor

An architect can be invaluable in selecting the right contractor. Competitive bidding might get you the cheapest price but not always the contractor who best fits your needs. "There's a difference between an expert at a \$150,000 house and a \$500,000-plus house; each has his niche," Madewell says.

Freese notes that preselecting a contractor before the home is planned or built allows the architect and contractor to work together from the start.

## Follow through

Even with completed construction drawings in hand, your architect can be your best friend during the building process. "Construction administration" means paying the architect to make sure what was planned is built that way. "This is the person who has the strongest vision and understanding of the project," Freese says. "It's a very undervalued phase."

Not only can an architect troubleshoot, Freese says, he's on hand in the field if "an opportunity arises for a better solution." That could mean, for example, "moving columns a few feet over to take advantage of a better view."

## And what makes an architect-designed home a success?

"We've achieved our goal if it's a place that makes you feel good," Madewell says.

Or as Freese says, "It's a dream come true."

## Want to know more?

The AIA-Eastern Oklahoma Chapter (583-0013) has two booklets—"You and Your Architect" and "Home Delivery"—available to the public. ■



## ARCHITECT OR BUILDER?

A lot of the time, you don't need an architect to build a new home—particularly if you are happy with a traditional design, want the most square footage for your dollar, and speed is important.

Builders can provide numerous plans to choose from—frequently allowing you to select from a menu of options that range from moldings to light fixtures and floor treatments.

At Simmons Homes, Heather Patterson, project coordinator, says there are about 20 different plans from which to select. Frequently, you can take a feature, such as a kitchen, from one plan to incorporate into another. After a preconstruction meeting to decide on a particular plan, there's a design stage to select finishings. At this point, you have the option of "upgrading" from standard finishes. For example, you might decide to replace the standard kitchen laminated plastic countertop with granite, she says.

Another advantage to builder plans is that there generally are model homes available to see what the house actually will look like. "You can see what you are getting, and that's important for a lot of people," Patterson says.

And so-called custom homes are not just the purview of the architect, says builder Bill Cassetty who does custom as well as spec homes. Cassetty says he can start with a drawing or a look at another house that the client likes and proceed from there. He can also provide so-called "stock plans" that can be modified to personalize the house. Cassetty generally uses professional home designers to produce the plans from there. These designers are not architects but specialize in creating private homes tailored to a family.

Cassetty's designers use a traditional drawing board as well as the computer. Computer programs are house smart. They can tell a designer, for example, that he left out a bathroom window. And they can give an estimated cost of construction.

The Internet increasingly is a source for house plans, he says. For example, the site COOL House Plans (<http://www.COOLhouseplans.com>) offers some 7,500 house plans by 70 designers, from 600 to 10,000 sq. ft. Houses can be searched by style, from seaside and Victorian to historical and contemporary.

Cassetty can modify the plans to fit the client's lot.

Stock plans, even modified stock plans, can save a home buyer money because the cost of design already has been absorbed, he says.