

The Value of Architectural Design

Many people think that design is simply the decoration that is added on top of a project to help make it beautiful. Design is, in reality, the planning that makes a building or space function well, last longer and cost less to operate. While the average cost to hire an architect is often between 8-12% of the construction price, design is really an investment that can yield a payoff anywhere from **three to more than five times** its cost over the life of the building.

Space efficiency:

Many projects begin with a preconceived notion of how large a building needs to be. A good architect can figure out ways to make space work more efficiently and can fit a given program into a smaller space and there is no greater long term savings than the space you did not have to build, heat, cool, repair or pay taxes on for the life of the property.

Longevity:

Studies have shown that often between eighty to ninety percent of the life cycle costs of a building are associated with its long term operation: what it costs to heat and cool, to maintain and to repair. By designing a building that lasts longer and requires less maintenance, good design can save an enormous amount of cost over the life of the building.

Energy efficiency:

The architect can accomplish a tremendous benefit on behalf of their client by improving energy efficiency. By strategically insulating a house and employing innovative techniques like geothermal heat pumps, a building can save as much as 75% of the energy a typical builder supplied house would use. Over the lifetime of the building this has massive environmental and cost implications.

Visualization:

In the past, to understand architectural drawings, one had to be trained to read plans. Now, using advanced computer tools, the best architects can now design, test and take their clients on virtual tours of projects as if they were already built, right down to the furniture, materials and quality of light within the space. This allows the clients to be more active participants in the design process, which leads to a much better designed result for them.

Legal Protection & Construction Savings:

Construction is a complicated business that has numerous legal issues and enormous financial impacts on the lives of all those involved. Furthermore there is no more expensive way to conduct construction than when there are insufficient plans. Good plans and construction contracts can save clients enormous costs and problems by allowing for competitive bidding and fewer change orders once construction starts.

Effective assistance:

The benefit of having a well-planned, coordinated and complete set of drawings does not end at the conclusion of bidding. Good planning allows hundreds of different products to be carefully selected, purchased at the best cost and be coordinated to work well together. Contractors are often far more responsive to owners when an architect is on the job as architects are both the client's expert advisors and are a gateway to future work whereas most clients may only do one project ever.

Beauty:

The best architects can help create "beauty" but this quality is not always easy to define. Beauty is more than just transient style. It is the proportion, the suitability to the program and the seamless integration to its climate and site. In the realm of painting, beauty is what makes the work of one artist worth a hundred times more than the work of a lesser artist who used the same amount of canvas and paint. Architecture is like that too. In financial terms a beautiful building will sell for substantially more than a less attractive one of similar size and location. While the financial payoff for beauty typical comes at the time a building is sold, the owner will have the pleasure of enjoying an attractive and well-designed environment each and every day that they own it.

In the end, the issue is less about how much an architect will "cost" in the short term, but about how much "value" they can bring to your property over the long-term.