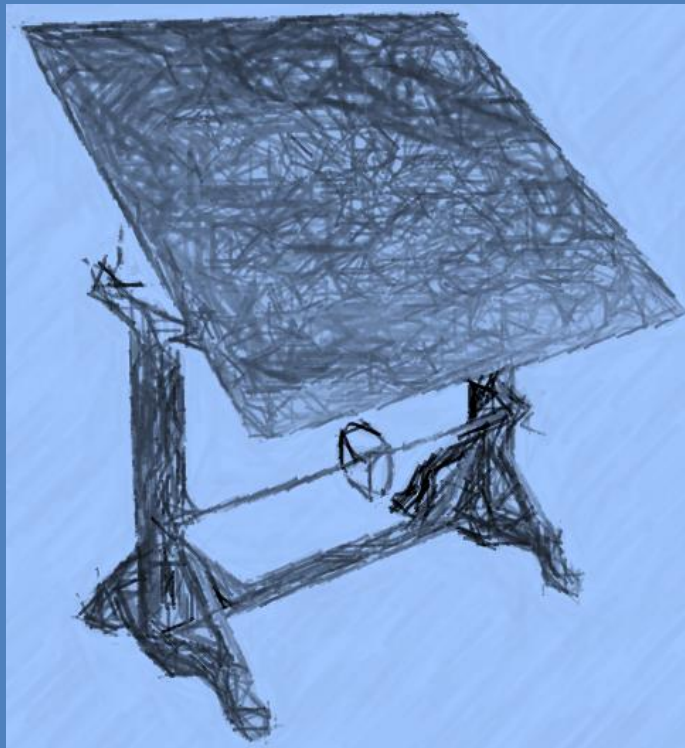


What's the difference between an Architect vs. Residential Designer?

Setting the record straight on Custom home design



By Greg Genereux

LANDEN DESIGN-BUILD

Copyright protected 2020

*So, You Want to
Build a New Home
or Renovate!
Who do you hire
for architectural
design work?*

Setting the Record Straight

On

Custom Home Design

**This book is dedicated to my father, whom bought me my first power tool when I was 10 years old.
His trust in my ability formed my craft, and the man that I became.
For that I thank him.**

Disclosure notice to reader

The ideas and concepts presented herein are for general conversation purposes only, and are based on the authors 40 years' experience on the subject matter, the ideas and opinions presented herein may differ from that of other experts in the field. Furthermore any costing data presented herein are based on averages for labour and materials that have been directly used by the author and or Landen Development Inc., and are based on 2019 rates for the Calgary and area market in Alberta. It should be noted that there may be other builders and or contractors that offer substantially different rates and price structures and that the author and or Landen Development Inc. assume no liability what so ever for the use of the information contained herein. Further the reader should in addition to the information contained herein get an opinion and guidance from several other expert sources before making any financial commitment or entering into any contractual arrangement.

© 2019 by Greg Genereux & Landen Development Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the Author, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below:

Mail to: RR2 Site 10 Box 2 Okotoks AB T1S-1A2

E-mail: info@landendevlopment.com

Web: landendevlopment.com

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 3

Introduction 5

Setting the Record Straight on Custom Home Design 6

 Architect:..... 6

 Interior Designer: 7

 Architectural Technologist 7

 Residential Designer 8

 Residential Designer vs Architect..... 9

 Comparing Residential Designers to Architects 9

 Responsibilities of Residential Designers vs Architects 10

 Residential Designer Responsibilities 10

 Architects Responsibilities 11

 What is the difference between a standard set of basic plans vs detailed plans..... 11

 Some of the differences between designer options..... 12

Cost of an Architect vs a Residential Home Designer 13

 Architect or Custom Home Designer Fee Options..... 14

 Architect Costs per Hour 14

 Architect Costs as a Percentage of the Project Cost 16

 Architect vs Residential Home Designer, Costs Per Square Foot..... 16

Using a Blend of Architect & Residential Designer 16

 What happens if you don't like an architect or designer's design? 17

 Something in-between using an Architect or Home Designer? 18

 Size of the Project Matters 19

Getting Preliminary Plans Done 19

 Preliminary Plans - Which cost more, Architect or Residential Designer? 19

 Complementary design and how it basically works:..... 20

Getting References 22

 Past Client References 22

 Trade, Supplier, and Contractor References..... 22

Refund or Credit of Design fees 22

 Landen's Refund Policy 23

Design & Construction Errors.....	23
Insurance.....	24
Using the same party for both Design & Construction	24
You now have 3 to 4 design proposals, now what?.....	24
Getting too many design proposals?	25
15 Essential Questions to Ask,	26
1. Do you specialize in any particular type of project?.....	26
2. What are the main design challenges the designer may see in relation to your building site, or existing home if planning a renovation or addition?	26
3. Will you do an onsite inspection of the building site or home (if renovating)? If so, how much do you charge for this Inspection?.....	27
4. Do You Have a particular Signature Design Style?	27
5. Who will actually Design your Home?	27
6. What Project Management Services Do You Provide?	28
7. How Do You Charge?	28
8. What’s your track record for completing projects within the original budget and timeline? ..	28
9. Can You Provide Three-Dimensional Renderings?	28
10. Do you provide estimating & budget preparation services?	29
11. Do you provide Tendering & Bid/quote services?	29
12. Will you recommend any good General Contractors? Or are you a Design-Build firm? ...	29
13. Do you have References?	29
14. If we don’t like your preliminary planning, how can we terminate your services?	29
15. Who owns the plans after they are done?	29
Conclusion.....	30
OTHER REFERENCE MATERIALS	30
About Greg Genereux:	31
Frequently asked questions,	32

Introduction

The very first thing you need in order to even think about starting any building project, be it a new home, renovation, or an addition to an existing home, is to obtain a set of building plans, also referred to as “blue-prints”. However, many clients have no idea where to start, who to talk to, or what type of designer is needed.

The second issue is the cost of getting such plans done, for which there is really no “*one size fits all*” price solution! The old adage “*you get what you pay for*” could not be any truer when it comes to having someone design your dream home or renovation.

In this booklet, we hope to help set things straight to steer you down the right path, and hopefully save you unnecessary grief. We also hope to save you some money in the design process, that will ultimately translate into savings in the cost of construction. Good design versus bad design can literally help drive the end result in construction cost.



The one big thing you want to avoid when engaging any designer or architect, is having your contractor later telling you, “**looks good on paper, but I can’t build this!**”

Or the other big-bad nasty contractor’s statement, that ends up being added to the bottom line of construction cost, due to bad design or poorly done building plans, is “**That will be EXTRA!**”.

So let’s get into it, and help you solve this design dilemma.

(Cartoon complements of “The Right Brain”)

**Form follows function - that has been misunderstood.
Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.**

Frank Lloyd Wright

Note: The following information is based on normal industry practises and averages as determined from the local Calgary market, and further based on the authors 40 some years’ experience in the industry, however, this information may not be in alignment with that of other markets outside of Alberta. The reader is cautioned that any pricing or budget information that has been provided herein, is provided as a guideline only, and may not be relied upon as any hard costing data, as every home design is unique in nature and must be priced out separately by a competent party. Furthermore, comparison examples of different professional fees are deemed to be the author’s opinion only, and in no way intended to undermine or state what any professional’s billing or pricing structures are.

Setting the Record Straight on Custom Home Design

By: Greg Genereux CEO of Landen Design-Build.
(A division of Landen Development Inc.)

One thing we have come to realize, is that when it comes to a client's understanding of what type of "designer" is needed to design or draft a custom built residential home, is that there is much confusion about what the differences are between an Architect, or a Residential Home Designer, or Architectural Technologist, or even an Interior Designer.



We often get asked “**Are you an Architect?**” Or hear comments like “Oh... you are just a designer”, or “you are just a draftsman” and some may even think we just do interior design?” **So let us set the record straight!**

First let's explain in general what each category of Architect, Interior Designer, and Residential Home Designer, (Architectural Technologist) actually does, or doesn't do!

Architect:

A qualified architect must possess a degree in Architecture. They plan and design a full spectrum of buildings, such as high-rises, schools, commercial complexes, stadiums, residential, and so forth. An Architect may also get involved with the coordination of construction, including exterior and interior structure, layout, flow, shape, use of space, and placement of buildings on site. They also deal directly with municipality issues, development permits (DP) approvals, and permits. They need technical expertise in by-law, site selection, building code, sustainable principles, and construction technology. They must also keep up with mandatory annual licensing, registration, and continuing education. Furthermore, architects are liable for what they design and therefore must have mandatory insurance for such liability, and therefore also must be a member in good standing with the Alberta Association of Architects at all times. All of these requirements tend to add to an architect's billing rate as compared to a residential home designer. A key role of an architect is to meld creative design with technical expertise. Also, an architect's scope of practice covers all types of buildings, and they may also lead a team of engineering consultants during a project's construction process.

Interior Designer:

A qualified Interior Designer possesses a diploma or degree in Interior Design. The main focus of an interior designer will be interior finishes, usually after the drywall stage. Interior designers may also get involved with detailed kitchen & bath cabinet design, flooring, wall coverings, colour schemes, furnishings, window coverings and even the selection of electrical and plumbing fixtures.

However, most interior designers do not create any construction details, nor do they design actual structural building layout plans. This is usually left to the residential home designer or architect, or in the case of interior finishes, left to the cabinet builder or mill work supplier to come up with actual construction plans for interior works. A qualified Interior Designer can do interior planning of both residential and commercial spaces “inside the building’s exterior shell” but normally has nothing to do with anything structural, nor has anything to do with the exterior look or selection of exterior finishes of a building. The interior designer may also act as a liaison between home or building owners and may also work with trades and suppliers sub-contracted by the main construction contractor.

Licensed Interior Designers, in accordance with the Alberta *Architects Act*, may provide the same services as a Licensed Architect, except on all matters that affect the exterior shell of a building, environmental separations and exits. They need to be qualified by a relevant post-secondary education, completed the international NCIDQ examination, have years of supervised work experience, have ongoing mandatory professional development, and adherence to high professional standards and codes of conduct.

Unlicensed interior designers and decorators require no such ongoing professional rigour, formal training, or license to practice. In general, interior designers and decorators manage the appearance of interior spaces; they work with embellishments, furnishings and built-in components to address the aesthetics and function of individual rooms.

Architectural Technologist

In Alberta, the term Architectural Technologist, also known as a building technologist, would be an individual that has been trained as a building designer, with a diploma from a Government approved training institution such as SAIT (*Southern Alberta Institute of Technology*) or NAIT. (*Northern Alberta Institute of Technology*) These institutions provide technical training in building design services in architectural technology, including overall building technical design and construction design. Furthermore, Architectural Technologists also apply the science of architecture that concentrate on the “technology of building,” and the design technology of construction used in such design.



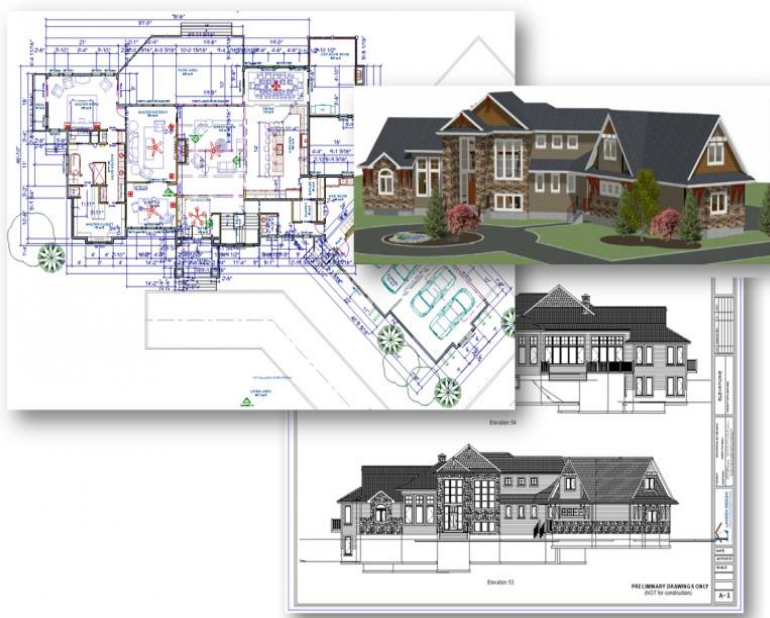
SAIT Coat of Arms

This training also concentrates on the ever-increasingly complex technical aspects in building projects, that also attribute to matters of aesthetics, space planning, lighting and traffic flow circulation that also form part of the overall technical design. Many architectural technologists also manage the build process from conception right through to completion of a project. Unlike an Architect, architectural technologists focus on the technical aspects of a building project to make sure that the overall design “vision” can be converted into actual build-able plans and blue-prints that can be easily constructed with industry standard building practices, using industry proven building systems. Whereas many Architects are more concerned with the aesthetics of a vision, and tend to leave the “construction details” to a technologist and engineers to deal with “*the finer construction details*”. One reason that many construction workers have a saying in regards to some Architect’s visions, “*looks good on paper, but how do you build this!*” And, that’s why a lot of architects also employ Architectural Technologist within their design firm.

Residential Designer

A qualified Residential Designer may also possess a diploma in Architectural Technologies. This is not a legal requirement in Alberta, and therefore there are a number of residential home designers that may only have some type of “practical experience”. A good Residential Home Designer deals with the full spectrum of home design from the beginning (*starting with a blank page*) right through to the finished home product. Many good residential home designers may also have some other qualifications such as several construction certificates, journeyman certificates, or even engineering technical certificates. Similar to architects, a residential home designer will also deal with all of the exterior and interior detailing, including the option of kitchen and bathroom cabinet construction, design, and layout.

They also deal with the structure, layout of a home for further review by the roof and floor truss/joist manufacturers, and then later have their proposed roof and floor layout stamped by a qualified professional engineer.



A qualified custom home designer also designs the electrical layout of the home for such items as plug, switch, and lighting locations, and in many cases does a mechanical plan. Furthermore, a good custom home designer can prepare a building takeoff, including a full lumber takeoff, and a material takeoff, and many also include a detailed building budget. A good custom home designer can also assist in creating detailed building and finishing specifications, ready for tender and the bidding process.

The residential home designer is also responsible for conveying a client's wants, needs, and wish list into an overall home plan, with flow, shape, and use of space. Placement of the home on the building site, so as to make the highest and best use of the land in relationship to the sites unique and individual aspects are also of importance. Like architects, a residential home designer also deals with the municipality and other approving authorities for approvals that pertain to Development Permits and Building Permits. A custom home designer must also have technical expertise in bylaw and site selection, along with extensive knowledge of the Alberta and National Building Code. They must fully understand sustainable principles, along with overall construction technology. A quality custom home designer must be well versed in continuing education in design fields, such as energy efficiency, ecological impact of specified materials, radon design, PWF foundation design, ICF foundation design and keep up to date with new building materials and systems. *(See also Landen Design's founder Greg Genereux's credentials below).*

A good custom home designer comes up with a creative design that includes problem solving with technical expertise that tradesmen and work crews can easily understand and implement in the field, as well as maintaining good cost control over construction cost. A typical residential designer deals mostly with single family homes, and in some case multi-family buildings up to four stories, and may even design some small commercial projects. They don't generally get involved in larger commercial projects like an architect would. Some architectural technologists even work directly with an Architect on larger scale project designs. Another quality of a good residential custom home designer is an extensive understanding of construction practices and building codes. A designer acts as a liaison between homeowners and their builders, trades and suppliers, as well as being able to consult with homeowners, builders and realtors regarding a sites building potential.

Residential Designer vs Architect

Residential designers and architects complete many of the same design tasks, but there are a few differences between the two positions to satisfy a client's real design requirements. As a potential client, the only way for you to figure this out, is to weigh all of the facts, services offered, and the historical background of design work performed by each. At the end of the day, both end up completing a set of blue-prints that tradesmen, contractors, and sub-contractors will need to follow. In both cases both need to provide a set of plans that will be acceptable to the planning and building permit approving authorities. The usual main deciding factor between the two professionals may simply come down to overall design cost!

Comparing Residential Designers to Architects

Residential designers focus on what an individual client wants to build in a new home or renovation of an existing home. They strive to create a client's requested private space in a

unique way. Architects may also design for individuals, but unlike residential designers, architects also design for corporations, towns, cities, or governments. Architects generally require a much broader range of design training and experience in the overall design field, as well as a broader range in bidding, inspection and construction processes. This “extra” training might be considered “over-kill” for that of basic residential design, and in many cases architects are more suited to larger commercial or industrial projects. The big question that is most often asked is, “*Is there any difference in an architect’s building plans vs a residential designers building plans?*” The short answer - there is no difference in what will be required to get a development permit or building permit, as both professionals will require the exact same “minimum” design requirements to meet with any planning and approving authorities. Both will require the same “minimum” construction information for tradesmen, contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers, to be able to bid on the finished set of plans and need the same planning and specification information thereafter to complete the project.

Responsibilities of Residential Designers vs Architects

Both of these professionals need to meet with clients to understand the clients goals for a building, however, residential designers tend to assist with more than just drawings and required blue-prints. In fact, many good residential designers also assist in designing most of the interior elements, structural elements, construction details, and help the client visualize their dreams in full 3-D CAD renderings. While many architects tend to sub-out this same work to engineers, drafting technologists, and an artist to create detailed drawings of the structure, whereas residential designers do most of this work themselves. However, architects do carry much more certifications that allow them more authority when ensuring a building is up to the required codes. Additionally, both of these professionals tend to use CADD also known as CAD (computer-aided design and drafting), along with other design tools.

Residential Designer Responsibilities

Residential designers meet with clients looking to build a home or update their current residence. After finding out the client's budget and vision for the project, they also draw plans and build 3D CAD models of the space. For a residential designer, one key element is how a space will be used on a daily basis, and a good designer will work to match this function with the lifestyle and taste of the client. To do so, a good designer needs to be up to date with the latest design trends, and they need to research new design and building methods on a regular basis. Most good residential designers tend to be a one-stop-shop for all needed design work, whereas many architects tend to sub-out the “grunt work” of structural design and the rendering process.

Job responsibilities of a residential designer include:

- Draw floor plans, which may also include furnishing layout

- Draft electrical plans
- Draft floor joist and roof truss layout plans
- Draft all elevation and section view plans
- Assist clients in selecting the best materials for construction based on their background and knowledge of design and industry average pricing
- Prepare building and construction specifications
- Prepare room to room finishes specification
- Prepare an exterior window and door schedule
- Prepare detailed cabinet design drawings
- Procure permits when necessary
- Oversee the build and installation of any ornamentation

Architects Responsibilities

Architects design everything from private dwellings to industrial factories. The first step after procuring a job, is to meet with the client and learn the details of their desired building. During this meeting, architects may make initial sketches and provide rough estimates for the cost of the project, which includes materials and building quotes. The last step, before handing the job over to a main contractor, is to create blueprints and other images of the proposed building or addition that include specifications and measurements.

Job responsibilities of an architect include:

- Write up contracts for contractors who will bid on the project
- Research building regulations in the area to ensure the building code is met
- Lead a team of engineers, drafting technologists, and artists who will complete a full set of scaled construction plans
- Visit the proposed building site throughout construction

What is the difference between a standard set of basic plans vs detailed plans

There is no real “short answer” to this question. There can be a big difference in what is needed for “basic permit application plans,” and building plans that are clear enough to hopefully avoid the big problem of vague plans that are “skinny” on detail. You want to avoid **extra-billing** from trades and contractors, so they don’t come back and use the old saying “THAT’S NOT ON THE PLANS” *so it is now going to cost you extra!* At that very moment you then figure out that saving a buck on getting basic design plans done, may not have been the smartest move!



One example is a designer that only gives you “standard architectural elevations,” such as in the sample shown to the left. This compared to that of elevation plans done by Landen shown on the next page. The basic plan to the left has only what is needed as a bare minimum for permit requirements.



The example to the left is from a set of building plans that not only includes a full 3-D view of the elevations, but also includes the exterior areas takeoff, done for all wall finishes, soffit areas, roof areas, etc.

These calculations, if done within the CAD system tend to be much more accurate than if done manually by your contractor, and are also a good way to verify that all contractors are using the same specifications in the bidding process.

As well, a more detailed set of plans will clearly set-out all building specifications, and have much more detailed construction details.

Some of the differences between designer options

Now that we have set aside the basic differences between all of the different options of Architect, Residential Designer, Draftsman, and Technologist - there are a few other things to consider when selecting a design firm to design your custom home or renovation. And like all things in life, the devil is in the details! Before you shop around, you should try and consider all aspects of what will be required by your selected designer, know what they are capable of achieving, and of course, check out their track record. The following are just a few items that need to be considered.

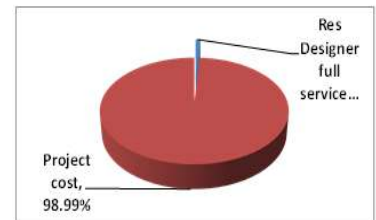
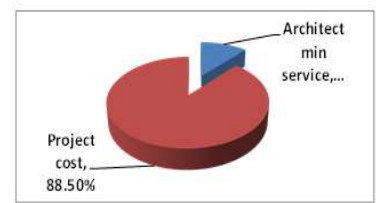
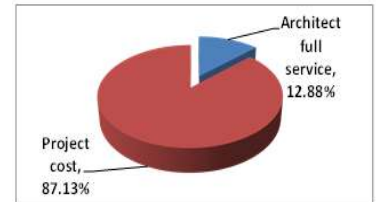
Cost of an Architect vs a Residential Home Designer

Architect costs can vary greatly from one firm to the next, depending on the size of the firm and the size your project, and what you expect the architect to do for you. The size of the Architect firm translates into more overhead cost which is passed onto the client. Some architects charge by the hour, some by the square foot, however, most tend to charge by a percentage of the total cost of the project. The Chart below gives a general comparison between the two:

Comparison of planning cost Architect Vs Residential Home Designer

Based on a construction budget of: \$ 400,000
 based on an average home size of : 2,000 sq. ft.

Architect	unit rates	Full Service	Min. Service	
Administration fee (*)	5%	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	
Design fee 5 to 8% (*)	7%	\$ 26,000.00	\$ 26,000.00	Architect full service 12.88%
Site visit charges	6 \$ 175.00	\$ 1,050.00	\$ 46,000.00	Project cost 87.13%
Sub-out rendering artist	1 \$ 500.00	\$ 500.00		
Sub-out technologist per hour	60 \$ 45.00	\$ 2,700.00		Architect min service 11.50%
Sub-out engineering per hour	10 \$ 125.00	\$ 1,250.00		Project cost 88.50%
		\$ 51,500		
Based on 2,000 sq. ft. Average per sq. ft.				\$ 25.75 \$ 23.00



Residential Home Designer	unit rates		
Administration fee	0%		Res Designer full service 1.01%
Design fee per sq. ft.5 to 8%	2,000 \$ 1.75	\$ 3,500.00	Project cost 98.99%
Site visit charges	1 \$ 75.00	\$ 75.00	
In-house 3-D rendering	INCL	INCL	
Sub-out technologist per hour	INCL	INCL	
Engineering letter (if needed)	1 \$ 450.00	\$ 450.00	
		\$ 4,025	
Based on 2,000 sq. ft. Average per sq. ft. \$ 2.01			

These rates can vary from one firm to the next, and also depend on the level of involvement of the Architect in a given project throughout construction. Many Architects “require” that they are directly involved during project construction, and also charge for each project visit, stating that they “are liable under the Architects Act of Alberta” if they don’t oversee the project through to final completion, and deem this administration of your construction project as being a fiduciary responsibility. It is their duty to ensure that your contractor adheres to design plans and may help keep modifications to a minimum, however, their administration fee usually runs about 5% of the building cost budget. This is on top of the architects “planning services” where most architects also tend to charge on a percentage basis from 8-15% of the total cost of the project.

Landen Design Flat Fee Schedule	Flat Rate
As of Jan 2,020	
Home Design 1,500 to 1,999 sq. ft.	\$ 3,200
Home Design 2,000 to 2,499 sq. ft.	\$ 4,000
Home Design 2,500 to 2,999 sq. ft.	\$ 5,000
Home Design 3,000 to 3,499 sq. ft.	\$ 6,000
Home Design 3,500 to 3,999 sq. ft.	\$ 6,900
Home Design 4,000 to 4,500 sq. ft.	\$ 7,800

Most residential designers tend to charge based on a flat fee basis, or charge on a per sq. ft. bases. This “Flat fee” bases is still somewhat directly related to the overall project size.

For example, at Landen we use a flat fee for certain home size ranges as shown to the left:

Over 4,500 sq. ft. Priced Separately

Alternatively, we at Landen can also work off of a fixed per sq. ft. fee based on the type of plans needed. We offer our flat per sq. ft. fee in three different formats. The first one is for our “Basic Plans” fee, which includes the bare minimum design work needed to be able to apply for permits. Second, we offer a full planning service, which includes a full rendering service, including very detailed structural layout details for floor joist and roof structure. *(It should be noted that with our base plan, the client is required to get the floor structure and roof structure plans from the supplier of roof and floor systems).* Third, we offer a full design and project budget projection and tendering service. The chart below shows an example of a 2,500 sq. ft. home with a basic two car garage included, with an optional basement development layout.

Landen Design by the Sq. Ft. area		As of Jan 2,020			
		Totals		Totals	
example home living area sq. ft.	2,500				Total
Basemnet development area sq. Ft.			1,500		All-in
Basic plans per sq. ft.	\$ 1.45	\$ 3,625.00	\$ 0.60	\$ 900.00	\$ 4,525.00
Full planning service	\$ 1.70	\$ 4,250.00	\$ 0.70	\$ 1,055.17	\$ 5,305.17
Full service c/w construction cost budget	\$ 2.10	\$ 5,250.00	\$ 0.87	\$ 1,303.45	\$ 6,553.45

Architect or Custom Home Designer Fee Options

There are three different payments structures that architects and home designers use. Each brings its own fair share of pros and cons. Before you hire an architect or home designer, make sure you understand the ins and outs of all architectural fees. Some of which are listed below:

Architect Costs per Hour

Architects usually charge \$95 to \$150 per hour if you hire them on an hourly basis. If you hire a principal, who typically runs an architectural firm, expect to pay closer to \$150 per hour. If you hire a junior architect, prices typically hover around \$95 per hour and up. However, if you use a residential home designer, the hourly fees tend to start at \$50 per hour and no more than \$60 to \$70 per hour. Some charge less than that, but the old saying “you get what you pay for” may apply.

If you’re a decisive person and can decide on a design and stick to it, then an hourly basis may be for you. However, if you have a hard time making decisions, hiring an architect or a home designer of any type on an hourly basis may not be ideal. After all, the longer the design process takes, the more you’re going to pay.

If you fall in the latter category, you might want to think about negotiating a maximum “cap-rate”. That way, even if the project takes way more hours than both parties expect, you as the client will not pay more than the cap rate amount before a new contract amount needs to be pre-negotiated.

Architect vs. Residential Designer Comparison to overall construction cost

Note: fist chart & pie graph show only residential designer being used, with second chart using only an architect, highlighted in yellow below, note the base construction cost stay the same, but the overall cost change from \$395,960 to \$443,960 using different design servuces:

General Break down of cost average 2,000 sq. ft. home

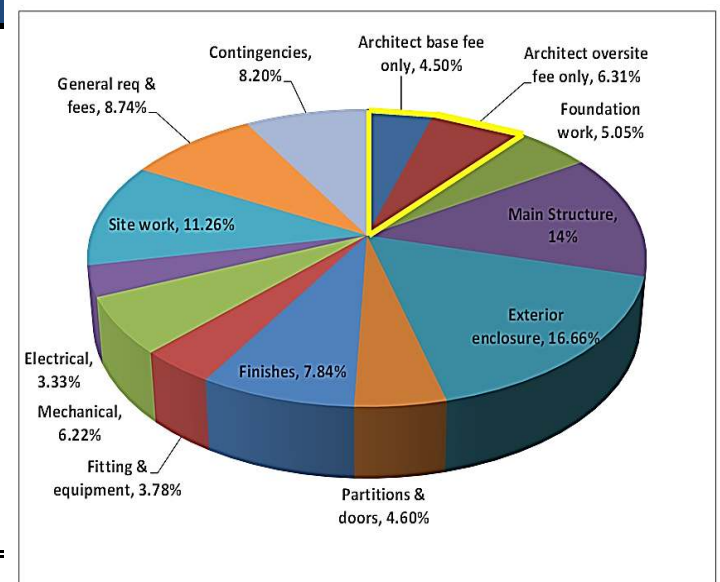
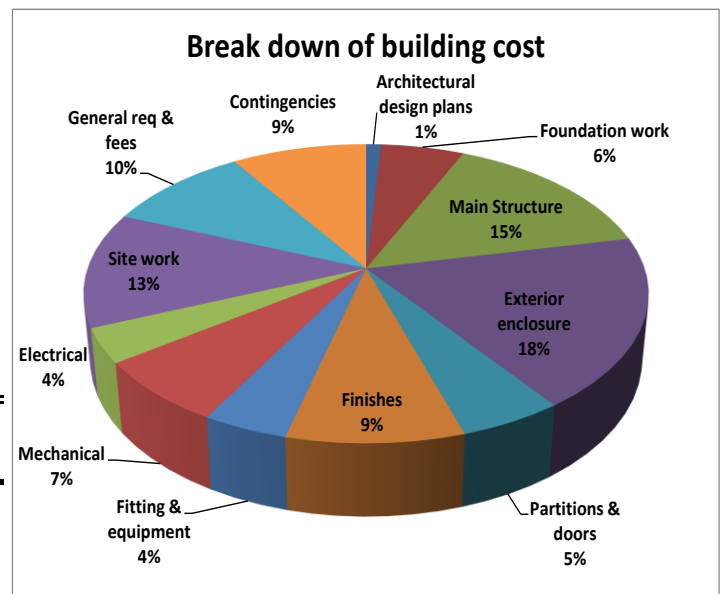
Using Residential Design plans	1.01%	\$ 4,040.00
Foundation work	5.60%	\$ 22,400.00
Main Structure	15%	\$ 60,000
Exterior enclosure	18.49%	\$ 73,960.00
Partitions & doors	5.10%	\$ 20,400.00
Finishes	8.70%	\$ 34,800.00
Fitting & equipment	4.20%	\$ 16,800.00
Mechanical	6.90%	\$ 27,600.00
Electrical	3.70%	\$ 14,800.00
Site work	12.50%	\$ 50,000.00
General req & fees	9.70%	\$ 38,800.00
Contingencies	9.10%	\$ 36,400.00
100.00%	\$ 395,960.00	

Using an Architect basic fee	5%	\$ 20,000
Using an Architect oversight fee	7%	\$ 28,000
Same home total cost with architect		\$ 439,920.00
Difference		\$ 43,960.00

VS.

General Break down of cost average 2,000 sq. ft. home

Architect base fee only	4.50%	\$ 20,000.00
Architect oversight fee only	6.31%	\$ 28,000.00
Foundation work	5.05%	\$ 22,400.00
Main Structure	14%	\$ 60,000
Exterior enclosure	16.66%	\$ 73,960.00
Partitions & doors	4.60%	\$ 20,400.00
Finishes	7.84%	\$ 34,800.00
Fitting & equipment	3.78%	\$ 16,800.00
Mechanical	6.22%	\$ 27,600.00
Electrical	3.33%	\$ 14,800.00
Site work	11.26%	\$ 50,000.00
General req & fees	8.74%	\$ 38,800.00
Contingencies	8.20%	\$ 36,400.00
100.00%	\$ 443,960.00	



Architect Costs as a Percentage of the Project Cost

You may balk at the idea of paying an architect a percentage of overall project cost, knowing that the architect is in a position to be able to drive up the total cost of a project. However, no matter if you use an architect or a residential home designer you can address this concern by communicating up front your total budget before the design process even begins. No matter who designs your project, they can help stay within budget, especially if they end up being in charge of selecting, negotiating, and overseeing contractors and subcontractors (see also project management).

If you choose the percentage of project cost for design fees option, make sure you clarify what factors and associated costs actually account towards actual project cost. Some project costs like allowances for lighting, appliances, and plumbing fixtures should be set aside and not be included as project percentage items. For example, *gold-plated plumbing fixtures* take any contractor the same amount of time to deal with as say they would with chrome fixtures. These “*extra allowance costs*” can all add up if you’re paying a percentage of the “project cost” for overall design fees. This is also one area where some Architects and designers try to “pad” the deal by trying to talk you into expensive allowance upgrades. Having allowances as a ‘set-aside item’ takes that temptation off the table and then only deals with real project cost. It is essential that everyone is on the same page in terms of what is included as project cost to avoid future conflicts.

Architect vs Residential Home Designer, Costs Per Square Foot

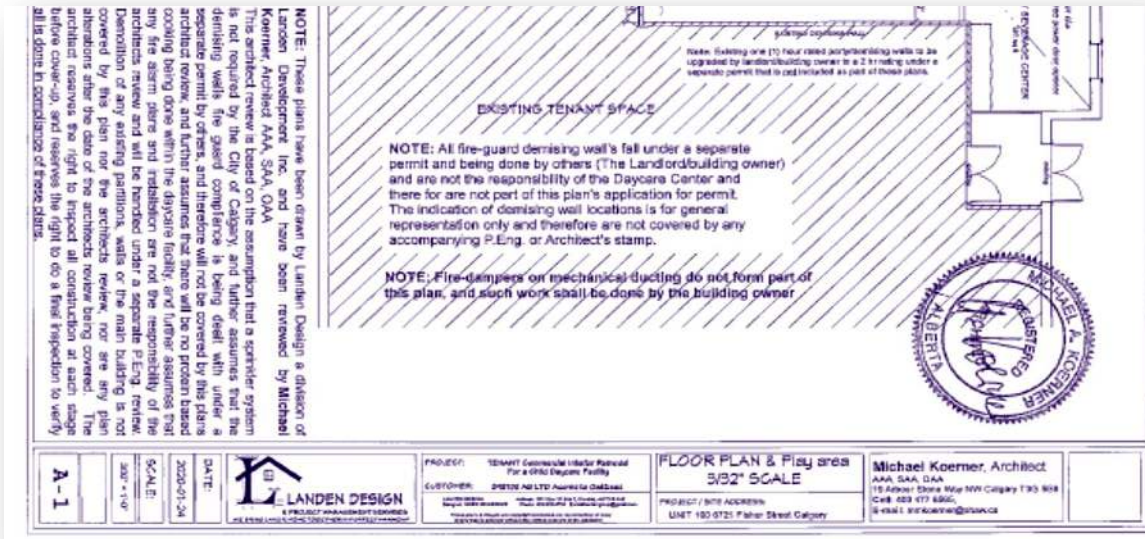
In Alberta, architects can charge anywhere from \$2.25 to \$5 per square foot. Some may charge as much as \$10 per square foot, depending on the nature of the project. However, most residential designers in the Calgary area start at about \$1.45 to \$1.75 per sq. ft. and depending on the “other services” offered such as project budget preparation, general specification preparation, and room to room finishes preparations, or items like project tendering; could add up to \$2.10 to \$2.25 per sq. ft. of the livable sq. ft. area of a home plan.

Using a Blend of Architect & Residential Designer

The two big differences between an Architect and Residential Home Designer are the overall price and their experience. Typically an Architects fee tends to be much higher than residential Home Designers. Furthermore, many Architects have not spent any time in the way of in-the-field hands on construction experience, whereas, many residential designers started in the trades working on-site and getting hands-on construction experience - then working their way up to a designer.

So, what if you could use a blend of the two practices and achieve a “*middle ground*” of an Architects vision for design, along with the hands on experience of a residential home designer

who is also a fully qualified Architectural Technologist? As well, get all of this service rolled up into an overall design fee that is way less than you might spend with a full blown stand-alone Architects firm. What you would need is something “*in between the two*”, and we at Landen have solved this problem by forming a working relationship with a very qualified Architect that specializes in modern residential concept design, but uses Landen’s design services in Joint Venture with his concept design. This helps to bring down the overall design cost compared to using the full services of an Architect. This can be done in joint venture with or without having the final finished plans “stamped with and Architects SEAL”, as shown below:



Note: In the plan image above that Landen Design worked in joint venture with Michael Koerner, Architect. Also note his Architects stamp.

What happens if you don't like an architect or designer's design?



Upon occasion, a client may be dissatisfied with the architect or home designer's work or approach to overall design. Keep in mind that the creation of a custom home design is a complex process, and an architect or residential home designer may not "hit the nail on the head" on the first go around.

If you as the client feel you're not being served appropriately, it is best to discuss your concerns directly with the architect or designer before asking to end the relationship.

Most architectural/design engagement agreements have termination provisions built into the agreement. It is the client's duty to make sure this clause is included before engaging any design services. Generally speaking, and in most cases either party may terminate the relationship at any time if it is noted in the agreement. However, in most cases the client is required to pay for design services rendered up to the notice of termination.

In the case of using Landen services, we offer a no charge, no obligation up-front preliminary design service to “qualified clients” (*see qualifications*). This way you as our client can get a very good feel for what our design capability is, before you are required to fully engage our design services, and before you owe us anything. Landen is one of the very few design firms that offer this unique service, and we get asked all the time how or why we offer this no obligation service. The short answer is, we find that in most cases our complementary design service leads to a full design contract and in most cases also leads to a full build contract for our building or project management division.

Something in-between using an Architect or Home Designer?

The one question that we at Landen get asked, “*Is there something in between a full blown Architect and a regular home designer?*” To answer that question Landen has teamed up with well known Architect Michael Koerner in Calgary whom specializes in one-of-a-kind “modern residential concept work.” Michael works in joint venture with Landen’s in-house draftsman/designers to take Michael’s concept design and then add to his concept plan the “*design grunt work*” of any needed structural and architectural detailing to his Architect’s concept plan. With this joint venture, the client gets the best of both worlds - being able to use a fully qualified Architect for concept design, while achieving a net overall design cost for building plans that is substantially reduced from that of using an Architect for the entire set of plans. However, it should be noted that this blended method would still cost more than using only Landen’s in-house design team. One major advantage to the blended design formula, is that you get to tell all your friends that you had a well-known Architect design your home or renovation for you. In some “high-end” communities this can make a big difference in resale value by having an Architects name attached to the design.

The typical cost for a blended design formula tends to be roughly twice that of simply having Landen’s in-house “residential designer” do the work, but does tend to run more than half that of what you would pay most other “full blown” Licenced Architectural firms based on only 5% of the same project cost to build.

It should be noted that many Architects charge way more than 5% of projected project cost, with many charging 8% or more. (See chart to the right)

Example Cost Comparison Architect vs. Landen or a Blended Formula			
Example home sq. ft. area		3,000 sq. ft	
Example home project build cost budget		\$ 840,000	
A.	Using Landen Design only per sq. ft.		
		\$2.70	3001 sq. ft. \$ 5,101.00
B.	Using a Blend of Architect & Landen		
	Architect concept planning per hr.	30	\$ 150.00 \$ 4,500.00
	Plus Landen's drafting & design	\$ 1.45	3000 sq. ft. \$ 4,350.00
			\$ 8,850.00
C.	Using a Blended design & Arch. Stamped		
	Architect concept planning (No stamp)	30	\$ 150.00 \$ 4,500.00
	Architect fully reviewed & stamped plans.	50	\$ 150.00 \$ 7,500.00
	Plus Landen's drafting & design	\$ 1.45	3000 sq. ft. \$ 4,350.00
			\$ 16,350.00
D.	Using only a Fully Licenced Architect		
	Architect only percentage of cost @	5%	\$ 42,000
	or		
	Architect only percentage of cost @	8%	\$ 67,200

Size of the Project Matters

One thought to consider when looking for a home designer or architect, is the size of the project that you wish to engage them for. Generally speaking, most residential projects are deemed “too small of a project” for most architects to take on, the reason being two-fold. First off, architectural firms generally have a much higher overhead cost and liability cost than say most residential home designers, and therefore most architects need to take on larger projects to cover this overhead cost. Secondly, smaller residential projects don’t tend to appeal to many architectural firms as they want to make a name for themselves. Whereas residential designers are more accustomed to residential projects normally deemed to be too small for many architects. Some residential designers don’t even look at larger projects as they are most often taken on by architects. To be clear, that does not mean there are not architects that don’t specialize in residential home design, as there are some that do, however, the ones that do generally only take on “high-end clients” or work on homes in high-end neighbourhoods.

Getting Preliminary Plans Done

Most all designers offer a preliminary planning service. However, most charge for this preliminary planning service. In Landen’s case we offer up to 30 hours of preliminary architectural design, 3-D rendering and consultation as a complementary service. There are however client qualifying conditions to this no charge service. To qualify the client must first demonstrate (*if wanting to design new home*) that the building site has been tied up or acquired. Second condition, the client must first demonstrate that they have a realistic construction budget in mind. Third condition, the client has fully filled out Landen’s standard client “wish-list” form, so that we have a good understanding of what the client is looking for. Forth condition, that the client is willing to sign an agreement of non-disclosure, meaning that the client understands that any plans done by Landen, belong to Landen, and cannot be used by another designer or builder (*unless paid for*). Fifth condition, that the client has pre-booked a complementary design slot with Landen’s design team within time slots that are available, as we at Landen can only do so many complementary designs within each building season. IT should be noted that this no charge process book-s up early, especially in the spring market, and once fully booked up Landen reserves the right to turn clients away, until a design slot is available.

Preliminary Plans - Which cost more, Architect or Residential Designer?

Most all designers and architects charge for “preliminary Planning” and most charge by the hour, which gets back to comparing the standard cost rates of each. However, you’re in luck if you are reading this, as Landen is one of the very few design build firms in Calgary that actually put "preliminary plans" together as a complementary service, see conditions above. You can check out our website for more details at landendevlopment.com



Complementary design and how it basically works:

1. First we meet up for a complementary design consultation and review all your wants and needs.
2. After this first consultation, and if we both feel we are a good fit, we then mutually agree to move on to the preliminary planning stage. This stage includes "roughed-out" to scale floor plans and a few full colour 3-D renderings, all done to scale. Keep in mind they are only rough plans at this stage, but do give you a very good idea of what your project would look like. Again, we at Landen do not charge for this stage. If everything looks like we are on the right track, we can then put some rough preliminary pricing together based on the "roughed out preliminary plans". Effectively, at this stage we are creating a rough project budget. It should be noted that this first no-charge stage includes up to three major revisions to the preliminary plan. If you wish to request more changes to the preliminary plan on the next stage, all parties would need to enter into a design engagement agreement. However, at this point you would have a very good idea of what your project would look like and a very good idea of what to expect for project cost. Up to this point you will not have spent a single dime, other than maybe putting on a coffee or two for our in-home presentation!
3. If the budget is acceptable within the first stage planning process and the preliminary plans are in line with maybe the need for a few more client requested revisions, then we will go to finalized plans. This is when we enter into a design engagement agreement. *(Note: at this point you can decline and move on with zero obligation to move forward with Landen).* Most completed permit ready renovation plans done by Landen cost

around \$1,500 to \$1,800 depending on complexity of any particular renovation/addition and number of revisions. Custom new-homes tend to run from \$2,700 to \$4,000 for permit ready plans, again depending on the scale of the project. If at the finished preliminary plan and initial budget stage you decide not to go further with Landen's design services, you owe us nothing, and you can go to another designer or home-builder to design your project. However, you should note that the preliminary plans done by Landen to this stage, still belong to Landen under copyright law and cannot be used by another designer or builder to have them completed.

4. If you as our client decide to move forward with Landen's design service to complete/finished permit ready plans, it would take us about 2-3 weeks to complete (*depending on any revisions requested by the client*).
5. Once the plans are complete we send them out (*only at our client's request*) for tender to our trades, subcontractors and suppliers. As well, we do a very detailed materials takeoff, for which we have a standard \$800 fee for this tendering and estimating service, of which we fully refund if you do decide to use Landen for the construction of your project. On a further note, Landen will also refund all design fees if you end up building with us or using Landen for project management.
6. Once plans are complete and fully paid for, they can be used by the client, to get overall comparison bids from other builders to build the project. Once the plans are paid for, they belong to you. It should be noted that we are one of the very few design firms that pass ownership of plans onto our clients. Most other designers and architects KEEP ownership of plans and effectively only license the plan to you. We prefer not to do that.
7. Once you have a few competitive bids in, we offer a no charge service to do what we call our **Apples versus Turnips** comparison check to make sure all builder and bidders are actually bidding the same thing. As some builders might not even be in the normal "Apples/Oranges" category, this the reason you need very detailed specifications and plans up front, as sometimes it's hard to tell the differences from "fruit vs vegetables"!
8. If at this point you decide to go with Landen for the construction of your project, then, and only then do we ask you to enter into a construction contract. We have three basic ways that this can be done which we fully outline in our initial consultation meeting. Our standard method of contracting selected by many of our past clients is "**project management**" whereby we build your project on a fixed management fee based on 12% of the mutually agreed to building budget. You then get to see ALL project costs which are directly passed onto you the client, along with all of our contractor discounts which on average tend to be 10%. Effectively you get our project management services for about 2% net of our discounts. Alternatively, we can work with a fixed price project contract. (*See our web site landendevlopment.com for more details*)

Getting References

As with any big commitment you need to verify that the design firm is reliable. In this day and age it is not good enough to simply look at a firm's office, website, or business card. You need to verify the track record of the designer by verifying with as many references as possible.

Past Client References

Probably the most important thing to do is ask for past client/customer references. This is not only important from a design point of view, but also important to verify actually built and completed projects. This is especially true if you are considering the use of a design-build firm.

At Landen we are very transparent with all that we do, for which we have literally many hundreds of customer references for you to follow up on. We are insured up to \$2,000,000, bonded, licenced, and a fully qualified design-build firm with 40 years of custom home and renovation experience.

Trade, Supplier, and Contractor References

Another good source of references is trades, suppliers, and contractors that the design firm has worked with. By asking these sources "*Have you been happy working for the design firm?*" can tell you if trades and work crews like to work with the designer's plans. You might be surprised to hear that many of these contractor sources may actually complain about certain design firm's because of their "poorly done plans". This is where the old saying comes out, "*looks good on paper, but how do you build it!*" There is another saying in the industry "*happy trades, happy client!*" Trades and work crews that are happy generally do a much better job than ones that are frustrated with building plans.

Refund or Credit of Design fees

Architects and most other design firms do not have any refund for preliminary planning, nor have a refund for any part of their design services, even if you don't like the design work that was done. In fact most design firms and architects want an ironclad design engagement agreement right up front. Most of these engagement agreements would have an exit strategy, also known as a termination clause, however this is usually an expensive way out of a contract. In some cases you as the client can actually be sued for early termination, where the designer/architect sues for balance of design contract, even though they have not completed the entire job. Another reason you need to be entirely happy with your selection of designer or architect.

Landen's Refund Policy

- At Landen we also offer a full design credit for clients that end up building with us, meaning that any of our “design clients” that do decide to work with us in either a “project management” formula with a “fix management fee” or wish to work with us under a “fixed contract price formula”, will then receive a full credit for our Architectural design fees.
- If for any reason you are not happy with our architectural design process up until we have completed the “preliminary plans” (*this does not include full structural plans*) Landen will give you a full refund of any preliminary planning fees, however, you should note that the preliminary plans to this point are the property of Landen Design-Build and cannot be used by another designer to complete them.
- If within 6 months of having your construction plans done by Landen you find another designer or architect that offers a better design rate, offering very similar design services, and comparable quality of completed plans, Landen will refund the difference. Effectively a price guarantee!

Design & Construction Errors

No one is perfect and any designer or architect can make an honest mistake. Errors in plans inevitably come up, especially in one-of-kind custom homes. As such, the client needs to be legally prepared to deal with the circumstances of such errors.

There are basically two types of potential design errors. Errors that are caught “before” any construction work has been done, and errors that only show up “after some of the work is already done! Of course errors that are caught before work is done can be easily fixed up by the designer and then new revised plans being issued. However after-the-fact error issues can cause extra charges and delays to the project, and then the big question comes up who is at fault? Or who is to blame?

Design errors by an architect fall on the architect, and they may need to make a claim on the architect's insurance policy, if something was improperly designed with say the wrong dimensions, and the builder did not catch it, then the fault must fall on the architect. This is the reason that design errors must be addressed up-front in the architect's engagement contract.

Likewise, construction errors can happen on the job-site. An architect does not necessarily know everything about construction and if the architect does not work closely together with the builder/contractor, errors will occur. If they do, then the fault may need to fall on the contractor.

Design work done by a residential designer does not generally have an insurance policy to fall back on. In fact most residential designers have a BIG disclaimer on their plans that states “**Any errors or discrepancy with in these plans must be reported to the designer BEFORE any**

work progresses”. This way the designer avoids the liability of such errors. Second, most residential designers add an additional disclaimer note on their plans that states **“The contractor/builder must fully review these plans BEFORE any work has commenced, and report back to the designer any errors or discrepancy, the designer assumes no liability for any such errors”**. Effectively the residential designer washes their hands of any responsibility.

There is one more type of error that is not necessarily an error, but may still require the designer or architect to amend their drawings. This can happen at the approving authorities permitting stage, whereby they pick-up something, or may find an item that has just had a code change, or bylaw change, or could even be an issue of “interpretation of the code”. The building code is kind of like reading the Bible, each reader can interpret it differently, and in many cases the building code can actually contradict itself. In such cases it is usually best to simply agree with the planning authorities and make their requested changes. Again this is where you need to make sure this is all covered off with the design engagement agreement.

Insurance

Architects in Alberta are required by law and the society that they are members of to have insurance. Residential home designers on the other hand are not required to have liability insurance. You need to check to see if your designer has liability insurance, this for any possible design errors that might cause extra charges or possible damages due to bad structural design. In Landen’s case we carry \$2,000,000 in liability insurance and can provide our clients with a certificate and verifiable copy of liability insurance coverage.

Using the same party for both Design & Construction

By using the same firm to do both the architectural / structural design work as well as the construction work, or alternately use the same firm to design the home and also be the project manager, should eliminate any design error issues, as each discipline effectively become one & the same party. By using the same firm for both design and construction should also eliminate any extra charges due to possible design errors, as in that case no one can blame the other. However this should be covered off within both the design engagement agreement and the construction or project management contract.

You now have 3 to 4 design proposals, now what?

Once you have a few design proposals in hand it is then time to decide on which design firm best meets your needs. The old adage that the cheapest is not always the best is also true with design firms. However the most expensive does not necessarily mean you that you will get better design services! So how do you compare the “design” apples & oranges, to make sure you are not buying “design turnips”! There are a number of things to verify about each design firm, but the most important might be your “gut-feel”, meaning which design firm do you feel most comfortable with?

Getting too many design proposals?

Similar to getting too many construction contractor or builder quotes, there is such a thing as getting too many design proposals. Here is why, like the construction industry most good design firm's or architects all know each other, and word gets around that you "are just shopping"! What tends to happen once they realize that "many firms" are bidding the same project, then all of design firms tend to fire out a "high-ball bid"! This because they may think you are just wasting their time. Also, you should note that putting out a full design proposal is a lot of work for each design firm, and is really not fair to them if you are shopping around for say a dozen quotes. This is especially true for design firms that offer an upfront no charge consultation, or don't charge for their proposals. Ask yourself, how you would like to work for free!

The other thing that does not make much sense is getting a bunch of bids from both architects and residential designers. As described above, architects generally charge much more than residential designers. If you are strictly looking at keeping within a lower budget range you would be better off sticking with all design proposals coming from residential designers, again it is really not fair to architects to compare them up against residential designers, as each offers a totally different type of service. The same goes with a decision to use an architect, it's simply not fair to residential designers to ask them to bid up against an architect, as they simply don't have the same overhead and expenses that architects do.



15 Essential Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Architect or a Residential Home Designer.

Choosing your residential home designer or architect isn't a decision to take lightly. The professional you hope to engage will be the one that needs to take your vision of the home you have in your head and put that vision into a set of construction plans that end up meeting your design requirements. Effectively the designer will be the brain power behind your project, problem solver, and key translator of your vision to trades, suppliers and sub-contractors in the form of executable blue prints, and must be a good listener to be able to achieve this! Furthermore will also be the main person to make sure the design meets with your construction budget, and help you keep that on track.

Here are fifteen questions to ask at the starting point to help you hire the right design candidate that will best fit your design needs.

1. Do you specialize in any particular type of project?

If you are looking for a custom home design, asking your designer or architect what they specialize in, and also ask them if they do both residential and commercial buildings, and what ratio of residential they do, compared to the commercial work that they do. This will give you a good indication of the type of design focus the design firm mostly does. For example using a design firm that mostly does commercial projects, such as schools, hospitals, shopping plazas, etc., and only does the odd residential home here & there, might not be the best selection of professional, compared to say, a custom home designer that only does residential design work.

2. What are the main design challenges the designer may see in relation to your building site, or existing home if planning a renovation or addition?

An architect or residential home designer may have a great looking portfolio and may also have many great references, but that may not really indicate how they'll approach your particular project. During your initial interview, ask about "their vision" for your project and how they plan to solve any obstacles that they see such as:

Building a new home

- What is the designer's view of the highest and best use of the building site?
- What building site restrictions does the designer feel will impact the home design
- What approving authority restrictions do they see with your home vision

Renovating or adding an addition

- What's working now in the existing home, and what can be improved?
- How will a remodel or addition blend with the rest of the house?
- Can you create a remodel or addition design that will look like it was always there?
- What renovation challenges do you see?

The answers to these questions are important, but you'll also want to use these early on conversations to make sure you have a good rapport and that your personalities are compatible. You can hire any number of architect's or designers who'll come up with creative solutions to your project. However, the differences may be in how well they match their design ideas to your taste, lifestyle and ideas.

3. Will you do an onsite inspection of the building site or home (if renovating)? If so, how much do you charge for this inspection?

Before you have short listed the firms you think will best meet your needs, and before you engage a designer or architect, you should make sure they are willing to visit the building site, or home that you plan to renovate. You may need to pay for this site visit, so you should understand up-front if there is a charge for this site visit, some design firms don't charge for this initial visit and consider it a cost of doing business.

4. Do you have a particular signature design style?

Most architects and designers pride themselves on their adaptability, which allows them to tailor their design style to meet with the client's needs.

However some residential designers or architects may have an overriding design responsiveness that they bring to "every project". For example, a designer might specialize in sleek modern homes, and do very little in the way of traditional or historic home design. Or visa-versa, a designer might specialize in Craftsman style or Mountain style homes, and does very little work with a modern look. Regarding acreage design, there are designers that specialize in country living and know what is required over and above that of say "city slicker life style", such as experience in rural design requirements of water-well, septic systems, and mechanical systems that are totally different from "city homes".

Another design style that is unique from any other conventional design is "Timber Post & Beam design" where it would be best to hire a designer that has a great deal of experience in working with timber or rough timber construction.

By talking about the home designer's or architect's signature style up front, you can decide whether it's the right fit for you.

5. Who will actually design your home?

Unless you're hiring a sole proprietor, there's a good chance the person you meet initially isn't the one who'll handle the actual design work. That's okay, as long as you understand it up front. Because good communication is crucial to a successful job, you need to meet the lead designer or architect for your job before you hire the firm.

6. What project management services do you provide?

As discussed earlier working with a design firm that also does construction and or project management can eliminated a bunch of potential project issues later on, and may help eliminated the issue of “passing the buck” when design errors or issue pop-up. Also design-build firms usually have a much better handle on cost of construction, and won’t design a home that is way outside the original target budget. Unlike design only firms that may have “0” construction background or experience.

7. How do you charge?

As discussed earlier, it is very important to fully understand what the overall design process will cost you. Also, if they are a design build firm, ask if they refund design cost if they are also the contractor/builder?

8. What’s your track record for completing projects within the original budget and timeline?

If using a design only firm, you need to know the track record of meeting a design budget, you can find this out by asking any references how their project went. As for design-build firms, you need to know not only how well they keep a design budget, but also how well they have done with construction budgets.

9. Can you provide three-dimensional renderings?

For some clients reading a standard two-dimensional “flat” plan isn’t easy. Even if you can tell where the walls, windows, and doors are, you may not get an accurate feel for how the design will look in the real world. Ask your design candidate how they present their ideas and drawings, and in what format they can be viewed by you the client. Many residential home designers and architects use CAD software, but not all CAD systems can render photo realistic 3-D images that can be rotated and viewed from multiple angles. A lack of 3-D rendering capabilities may mean the candidate isn’t up to speed on the latest building techniques and methods. Furthermore some architects and designers sub-out rendering work to out-side “artists” to create photo realist renderings, which tend to add much more cost to a design project. The other question related to rendering your design is how much the designer charges you for 3-D renderings, some designers and architects charge “extra” for this service, while others include a certain amount of 3-D photo realistic renderings.

Furthermore, some designers also have the CAD capability of creating a video “walk-through” of you project, meaning to can have full color 3-D walk-through of both the exterior or interior of your home, as if you were actually walking through the home, this before “it ever exist”!

10. Do you provide estimating & budget preparation services?

Designing a home is one thing knowing up front what a home will cost to build “before” you get too far ahead on your home plans is quite another thing. A good home designer can give you a fairly detailed rough budget at the “preliminary plan” stage, this way you as the client can look at “changing course” with the plans if things look like they are heading in a direction that will cost too much to build. This not only keeps your building cost on budget, but also helps keep your over-all home design cost on budget.

11. Do you provide tendering & bid/quote services?

Having a rough budget at the start is one thing, however knowing up front what a home’s “real hard cost” will come in at is also quite another thing. A good home designer will have a long list of trades, suppliers and sub-contractors that they have worked with, and also know that these same sources have a proven track record of reliability and quality. Whereby the designer or architect can send out their final building plans for a “full tender” of the homes construction cost. Where by the original “rough-budget” is tightened up with real hard quotes.

12. Will you recommend any good general contractors? Or are you a design-build firm?

Good architects and designers can recommend reliable general contractors in your area and help you evaluate portfolios and bids. They may even recommend someone they've worked with before. Ask, if they get a commission, or referral fee for such recommendations.

13. Do you have references?

As stated earlier, I can’t state enough how important it is to get good quality references, doing so will save you, time, money, and possibly save you from major headache’s going forward.

14. If we don’t like your preliminary planning, how can we terminate your services?

This is usually handled within the enjoyment agreement, but is nice to know right up-front.

15. Who owns the plans after they are done?

Most design firms and architects retain ownership of their plans. A few firms will agree to pass on ownership of plans, this usually done through a “transfer of copy rights agreement”. Either way it is nice to know if you are paying for plans who will actually own them. You might also want to ask, can or will they allow your plan to be re-produced or re-built by another client/builder? What some design firms do is re-sell “stock plans” to clients that don’t want to go through the entire design process. Effectively they take your custom plan and put it into their “stock-plan-inventory”. This way effectively get paid more than once for the same plans!

Conclusion

I know that I may annoy some architects and a few home designers by expressing my opinions in this booklet, stating what I know as industry practices, pricing, and design facts. Although I am not an architect, I have done my best to portray the facts fairly as I know them within my own custom home design credentials and 40 some years of experience in building custom homes. My opinions presented herein are just that, my opinion, and any architect or designer that reads this article can also have their differences of opinion, for which I can respect and welcome their dialog.

Closing NOTE: At Landen you can down load a full set of sample plans from our website to see exactly what type of plan you will get from our architectural design services, and we highly recommend that you compare our plans to any other designer. In the end we are confident you will see the value difference. Furthermore, you should also verify what “other services” are offered by your selected designer, ask if they also provide detailed cost of construction estimating service, provide detailed roof coverage takeoffs, and exterior siding/finishes take-off information with in their standard plans, also ask if they provide a detailed tendering service. And ask if they provide an up-front no charge preliminary planning service, like we at Landen Design-Build offer!

OTHER REFERENCE MATERIALS

You can also download from Landen’s website, a full set of sample plans, a set of preliminary plans, our MS-XL working template for estimating “rough building cost” using estimated “average cost” that have been based on industry average costing data derived from two sources, being CMHC, and the BTY Group, as well as data also used by the banking industry in determining bank construction draws. Also on our web site are many other E-books on a range of subjects, all in an effort to help educate our clients, and help them in their decision making process.

About Greg Genereux:

CEO of Landen Development Inc.

Principal Custom Home Designer



Greg has worked in the field of custom home residential design and construction for over 40 years. He has built some 1,000 custom homes and has designed well over 1,000 custom homes. He has many certificates and credentials in construction & design, such as an Architectural Technologies Design Certificate (SAIT), Land Planning & Zoning Certificate (PHBI), Structural Technologist Training (SAIT), is a fully qualified Red Seal Journeyman Carpenter, cabinet maker and mill work expert, experienced in virtually all facets of custom built homes, including interior design, kitchen, and bathroom design. Greg also has additional certificates in ICF foundation design and installation (ICFMA), and is an experienced PWF foundation designer & installer. Greg has won many Design & Building excellence awards, including SAM awards for best design for home, kitchen, bathroom and renovation (CHBA), and was awarded the coveted Golden Hammer Award from CHBA for 10 years with no unresolved issues in customer service excellence.

Greg has provided custom design services in the residential and construction industry in many areas ranging from modest custom homes to multi-million dollar homes, including many renovations, additions, second floor add-ons, and other custom interior design. Greg has designed many luxury city homes, acreage homes, vacation homes, and infill homes in and around Calgary. He has also designed and built several multi-family projects, and was CEO of Discovery Ridge Development Corporation for nine years. With this wide range of experience and focus to detail within the residential design field, it has been a huge asset to Landen Design-Build – as well as to Landen’s clients.

These past relationships have enabled Greg to provide progressive and versatile design and building services with a long track record of very happy clients, many of whom have provided hundreds of testimonials attesting to the total satisfaction of custom home design and project implementation. Furthermore, Greg and his team have tradesmen, contractors, sub-contractors, and supplier relationships that go back in many cases more than 35 years. These are tradesmen and suppliers that have a proven track record of quality workmanship that have lasted the test of time over Greg’s 40 years of building experience.

If you are a builder or homeowner currently seeking out a custom home designer for your new home or renovation, or if you just want to connect with us, please give us a call at 403-619-4734 or find us online at landendevlopment.com or e-mail us at info@landendevlopment.com

Frequently asked questions,

Related to Residential Home Designers vs Architects:

Q. If I use a residential home designer, do I need an architect later to get permits?

A. No. An architect is not needed for residential design permits. Properly completed plans and design work done by a competent qualified residential home designer will suffice for most building permit or development permit applications as related to “residential home design”.

Q. Do architects charge more than residential home designers?

A. This can vary from one residential designer to the next, or for that matter from one architect to the next. The big difference is how the industry bills for their services in general. Architects usually bill based on a percentage of project cost, whereas most residential home designers generally bill on a per sq. ft. rate based on the finished living area. Alternatively, some residential home designers bill a fixed flat fee, or bill on an hourly rate. In most cases architects tend to cost much more than a residential home designer. Much of this difference is due to the added liability, licencing, memberships, and other overhead expenses to be covered by an architect in order to maintain their architects licence. Whereas the same fees and expenses are neither needed nor enforced upon a residential home designer, meaning they generally have much less overhead to deal with, compared to an Architect.

Q. Will I get as a professional home design using a residential home designer as I would if using an architect?

A. Like all fields of consultancy expertise, there are good architects and not so good architects out there, similarly there are good residential home designers and ones that are not so good. The key to look at (*cost aside*) are the track records of each. Most architects design a wide variety of buildings, and may only design the odd residential home “once in a while”, whereas as a custom residential home designer specializes in custom residences, and that is all they do! As most architects only design the odd home here and there and mostly design commercial buildings they may not be as up to date with “residential” real-estate design trends. However, that’s not to say that architects are not as good at residential home design as say a residential designer, as there are many architects with a very good reputation for very unique residential home design work. In my opinion, it’s kind of like asking a general surgeon, compared to a heart surgeon to look at dealing with a blocked artery problem, both are qualified doctors but one specializes in a field that is more related to the task at hand, which would you rather go to if you were having heart trouble? Same thing, with custom home design, using a design firm that has designed many hundreds or thousands of custom homes, compared to a firm that only does one or two custom homes per year because they mostly cater to commercial projects. Which would you use?

Q. Can residential home designers provide the same 3-D rendering services as an Architect?

A. Yes. However, most Architects use an outsourced rendering firm to create a photo realistic view of their projects, and in most cases this can be very expensive to have done. Many residential home designers use CAD systems that can also render in 3-D views, and in each case this depends on the software that each designer uses. At Landen we use the very latest in full colour 3-D design CAD rendering software. We render full 3-D colour, any interior or exterior views from any angle of the home (*prior to construction*) or we can also create a realistic movie style walk through of both the interior and exterior view of a home design, and provide all of this extra rendering service within our standard design fees!

Q. Do the plans completed by a residential designer have higher or lower construction costs to build than they would if an architect did the plans?

A. They shouldn't. However, in my experience and in most cases, an average Architect plans tend to cost more to compile than plans designed by an average residential home designer. The big reason is that most Architects design their buildings to make a reputation for themselves, meaning they tend to design a "one-of-a-kind" building using building concepts that are not as recognized or used as "standard residential construction techniques". Because of this, trades and suppliers tend to bid much higher on architect designed plans. Effectively these sub-contractors are budgeting for the "what-if-factor" to allow for concepts that have never been done before, or where they are not sure how to go about achieving the "vision an architect has".

This may be one reason you don't see a lot of architects designing residential homes in lower price ranges, and tend to only do multi-million dollar projects. On another note, if you look at many commercial projects designed by architects, they tend to have cost overruns as compared to the original building budget.

Q. Will a home designed by a residential home designer be as structurally sound as compared to one designed by an architect?

A. No matter who designs your home, plans of both need to be vetted and approved by the city or municipality permit and planning departments, which verify the soundness of structural design. No matter if you are using an Architect or residential home designer, both need to make sure that the building structure aligns with the Alberta Building Code and National Building Code. Furthermore, both of them need to make sure the building abides with all by-laws, fire codes, community guidelines and other rules that may be affected by the design. In many cases no matter who designed the home, they may need to have an engineering review done by a qualified Professional Engineer - and further to that point, all roof trussed structure design, floor system design, and main beams such as LVL Gluelam and steel beams would need independent Professional Engineer reviews of each major component. Therefore, anything designed by either a residential home designer or architect should be more than structurally sound and safe to live in.

Q. Will my home have greater resale value if designed by an Architect?

A. In most cases it should not make any difference in the end resale value, no matter which designer was used. However, like the garment industry, there are design trends that come and go, and a design that may seem like it is “industry leading” today may be totally out of style a few years later. Many architects tend to design more modern looking “trendy” homes rather than say more traditionally designed homes. In the long run traditionally designed homes have historically proven to appreciate more in value over time, more so than homes that may have been trendy in their day but now out of style. However, there are some “high-end” communities in Calgary where “an Architects good name” can add to a perceived real estate value. Furthermore some architects do design homes that are truly enduring or even set a new design standard to follow by others, such as Frank Lloyd Wright.

Q. Does a residential home designer need to be licenced?

A. No. While many people use the term “designer” or “draftsman” interchangeably when referring to home design, these disciplines differ from a Licensed Architect or say a Licenced Interior Designer, from that of a residential designer/draftsman in Alberta. Either way, to ensure you hire a qualified designer for your project you need to do your due diligence.

Currently, residential designers or draftsman, whether they have a design certificate or not, are not required to be licenced. These are not protected titles in Alberta and so anyone can use these titles regardless of qualifications, achieved certificates or credentials in the field of residential home design. In this context, residential home designers are not recognized as “registered professionals” as referred to by the Architects Act in Alberta. The client therefore needs to verify that they are hiring a home designer whose skills are appropriate for the project and level of responsibility required. It should be noted that Licensed Architects and Licensed Interior Designers are the only registered Alberta design professional title governed by the Architects Act, and therefore usually charge more to cover off the cost such registration.

This is one reason why most residential home designers, “qualified or not” charge much less than fully registered Architects or fully registered Interior Designer’s. If hiring a qualified residential home designer you may be getting a lot more “bang for your buck”, however you do need to do your homework before engaging any custom home designer.

Q. Some home builders have in-house architectural design; do they use an Architect for this work?

A. In most cases an architect would not be working in house for a builder; however, some builders do have a contractual relationship based on a referral base, whereby the builder refers clients to the Architect and vice-versa. Most of the builders in and around Calgary that do offer in-house design services use “draftsmen” that may or may not have any “real” qualifications, however that’s not to say they don’t know what they are doing. There are many draftsman out there that have worked years under other very good home designers and learned the trade but never bother to get any certification. As for the average “track built

home” builder, they tend to use in-house draftsman to create their “stock plan’s selection”, and then use these same draftsman to make customer plan changes to these stock plans. This track-home process to design makes the overall home design cost much cheaper than say having a home “custom designed” one at a time.

Q. Can I use an Architect to do my preliminary plan, and then have a residential draftsman finish up the plans to help in design cost?

A. Maybe. Most Architects and custom design firms will not allow any part of their plans to be used or reproduced by another firm to finish off the plans or modify their plans, even if they are only preliminary plans, which are also protected under copyright law in Canada. However, we at Landen have formed a fairly unique joint venture with Michael Koener, Architect, where you can use Michael for the preliminary concept design work, and we work in joint venture with Michael to finish off his concept design into buildable plans. As well we have also worked with clients where we at Landen start the initial design process, and get the homes floor plans to the liking of the client and then engage Michael to come in and add his unique “architects flair” to the plans. Furthermore, if you use Landen for the preliminary planning process, and if you have paid Landen for the preliminary plans, you can then go to any architect and have them finished off, this is very unique in the industry, as Landen is one of the very few architectural design firms in and around Calgary that are willing to fully transfer the “copy right” of our plans to our client, that is once all plans are paid for. It should be noted, that Industry standard for most design firms is to retain ownership of all plans, even though you as the client may have fully paid for the design service. Effectively these firms only licence the plans to you for a one time use of the plans.

Q. When I shop around I find there are many different prices quoted for design work, what is the standard going rate to have a home design done?

A. The short answer, there is no real standard rate, and the price ranges can vary greatly depending on the level of design service offered. The old saying you get what you pay for, couldn’t be truer, when it comes to home design. If you are only looking for “basic home design” meaning a standard floor plan of each floor, 4 exterior elevations, a couple of section views, along with a foundation plan, designed ready for a building permit, then you can find someone that could probably put that all together for about \$1.40 per sq. ft. based on the homes designed footprint sq. footage. But that base price would not include any 3-D rendering work, nor include floor joist layout or roof structure layout, nor would that include any kitchen and bathroom detailed design etc. If on the other hand you want a full design service, that can run you about \$1.70 to \$2.15 sq. ft. and up. The one quick way to verify what you will get from a designer for the their price, is to ask them to provide you with a sample set of plans, it should then become very evident which designer will provide you with the best set of plans if you compare one designers finished plans to the next designer. The above mentioned prices are based on residential home designers, architects ten to charge more and usually base their price on a percentage of the project cost.