

APPOINTING YOUR ARCHITECT

Role of an Architect:

Today designing or planning of buildings and their construction is a subject by itself requiring a special study. The scope of this subject is very wide. It covers designing of all possible types of buildings from a humble hut to a big government building or an industrial complex, commercial or institutional structures or hospitals, hotels, interiors as well as master-planning a township. Building Design, Planning and construction management is the subject of an Architect.

An architect is your consultant in all the matters of building activities, just as you a Chartered Accountant for advising on your finances or an advocate in all legal matters or a physician for your health. Similarly, an architect would study your concerns related to design of buildings and would advise you solutions suiting to your requirements.

After the architect has made the plans for your building or along with it, you would require a structural consultant or other sub-consultants and then lastly a contractor to build the building. Any developments (present or future) without proper master plans and proper architectural inputs lead to haphazard developments.

It is rather important to note that an architect and a contractor are two separate entities in the larger interest of the owner. The reason for this is that an architect has to see that your money is spent for a proper return for it, in form of the building; while the contractor is supplying a building from your money that you are paying the contractor and on that he is making profits. Therefore, if both the functions viz. that of an architect and of a contractor are to be carried out by one and the same person or the company then there is no one to check or audit the work on behalf of the owner. A person or a company that undertakes the construction work shall be called 'contractor' and shall never be called an 'architect'. It is also prohibited under 'The Architect's Act of 1972'.

How one should select their architect?

In the first place, it could be said that when you approach an Architect who is registered with the 'Council of Architecture', New Delhi and is a member of "The Indian Institute of Architects", you could be sure of his professional knowledge of certain minimum standard.

Usually you would approach an Architect, because someone, who had engaged that architect before, recommends him to you or he has satisfactorily designed similar types of

works before and is experienced in it. This recommendation could be enough for you to make up your mind to select your architect. Or you had a good experience in the past, of a certain architect and you appoint him again. The merit in designing and the professional integrity are the main virtues of an architect. You pay him legitimate professional fees and he shall give his sincere professional services.

An architect is your consultant, like Doctor, C.A. or an Advocate and not a businessman like a contractor or a material vendor. Naturally, therefore the way of selecting an architect would be different from the way we select a contractor or a material vendor. In case of contractors, we call for quotations or tenders.

In case of an architect, one makes the best use of his knowledge and experience, by appointing him as a consultant. We do not go to a doctor because his charges are less, but we go to a particular doctor because we are told of his correct diagnosis. There, their professional fees are not the criteria. Similarly, the lowest fee is not the criteria to appoint an architect or any consultant. It is a proven fact that proper consultancy fees go a long way in controlling the overall project cost incurred to the owner. It is thus more detrimental to the interests of the owners to appoint an architect on the lowest available rate of fees. In fact, the Council of Architecture has standardized the rate of fees for various types of works, under the Architect's Act of 1972, and this shall be the criteria.

The solution is evolved with the joint efforts of the architect and the owners. Passers-by are not accountable for their remarks about the design and its constraints which perhaps, only the owners know in-depth.

Depending on the method of construction, the contractor's bills are scrutinized and certified by the architect. The owner pays the contractor only on receiving such a payment-certificate from architect. The architect's role is thus also that of an 'Auditor for the civil works'.

Also, contractors do have a line of cash-credits from their suppliers; which is not the case with any consultant or architect. Thus, you shall not make your consultants stand in the same queue as the contractors while making payments. Consultant's payments must be taken up on priority as their work is already completed when the contractors begin their work on site.

What an architect does for you?

Your architect will understand your requirements, your like and dislikes, study the site and then suggest you a solution by means of a sketch plans, preliminary design and final plans. The owner is advised to hold several meetings with the architect appointed by him till he is

satisfied with the final plans. The solution is evolved with the joint efforts of the architect and the owner. However, the owner is cautioned not to be carried away by the remarks of a third person, because only the owner and the architect are really concerned with the success of the project.

Upon owner's approval of the design / plans, an approximate estimate of cost of it is provided by the architect. Architect shall then proceed to make drawings for applications to be made to statutory authorities and give technically assistance to the owner in obtaining necessary permission from the municipality or such local authorities.

After the owner has obtained the necessary permissions, the architect shall proceed to make construction details, workings drawings, specifications detailed bill of quantities. Here onwards the architect's role of "Construction Management" begins. He shall call for tenders from contractors. On receiving tenders, he shall scrutinize the tenders and advise the client / owner on the selection of a suitable contractor. The Indian Institute of Architects has prepared the Articles of Agreement, which will safeguard the interest of the owner and the owner is advised to enter into a contract with the contractor on this form.

When the construction work begins your Architect shall periodically inspect the work as necessary, by way of site-visits, to see that the design intent is correctly implemented and ensure that the works are being executed in general accordance with the contract. The bills submitted by the contractors from time to time shall be scrutinized and certified by the architect for payment. The owner shall pay the contractor only on receiving such a certificate from architect. To keep an effective control, on the work the owner is advised not to make payments to contractor without the 'certificate for payment' from the architect.

On completion of the work your architect shall give you a copy of record plans and construction drawings showing there upon information such as (side) open-spaces, under-ground drainage & water-supply lines, etc. which you would find useful for the maintenance of the building later on.

I am sure you would find this information quite useful and help in setting up good practices.

With regards,

Ar. Aniruddha. A. Sane'

M.Arch, FIIA.