

How to Select an AIA Architect

Just as in selecting a partner for any other major undertaking in life, it is important to find an architect who is a good match with your goals, your concept of the project, your personality and your budget. Choosing the right person from the start allows you to enjoy the process as much as the finished product. The following steps in the selection process can make all the difference in creating a successful partnership.

Step 1

Make a list of potential firms and solicit information from them. Colleagues and acquaintances who have worked with architects are excellent resources, as is your local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Contact those architects or firms and ask for information, qualifications and references. If you are ready to ask the architect for a preliminary proposal, send a written description of your project to help them in the process. Find out how the architect charges for services and ask about additional expenses that could occur as the project moves ahead.

Step 2

Evaluate your finalists. Consider your candidates' track record in general, as well as their direct experience with projects similar to your own. Determine who can best complete the project within your timeframe and budget. If possible, visit a few projects designed by your finalists. There's nothing like looking at the actual work of a candidate to decide whether you are a match.

Step 3

Interview two or three final contenders for the job. See whether your personalities mesh, as well as your concepts for the project. Clarify the proposed schedule, fee structure and areas of responsibility.

Step 4

At this point, you will probably have a good idea who is your leading candidate. To double-check your instincts, make a checklist. Look at relevant experience, technical competence, budget considerations and time frame. Finally, review the interview in your mind. Did the architect really listen to what you were saying? Did she ask the right questions? Did she offer reasonable solutions? Above all, did you feel comfortable?