

I once read a book from the library that had a title promising to guide it's readers through the home design process. Chapter #1 was **"HIRE AN ARCHITECT"**



I disagree. As someone who has worked in the architecture field for many years, I can tell you that no architect wants you to come walking into their office without at least a basic idea of what you want to have designed.

Architects are not mind readers and if you will be hiring one during your home design process - do yourself, and them, a favor by taking care of the pre-design homework beforehand. Not only will it be a good exercise - one that you should do regardless if you are hiring someone to help or designing solo - you will also save yourself money on design fees, since your architect won't have to guess at what it is you want!

1. Find which house styles interest you. There are many varied styles of homes. It is helpful to at least have a general idea of which style you relate to best. Do you like the clean lines of modern homes? The charm of a classic bungalow? Drive around and take photos of houses that catch your eye. What is it about these houses that you appreciate? Search the internet for more detailed information on house styles and make note which you prefer.

2. Conduct a site analysis. To fully design your home, you will need to choose a building site. Look at neighborhoods you enjoy and consider if they have access to all the amenities your family requires. Are there quality schools nearby? What is the neighborhood proximity to work? Once you have zoned into a general area, take it a step further and determine which buildable lots are available. Look at the natural features that each lot provides. Are they flat or sloped? Is there proper drainage? What are the views like? Could you envision your family's home built there?

3. Determine your home needs. This step is very important, and the more detailed you can get, the better. Consider the number of people who will be living in your home. How do you anticipate that number changing over time? Are there any physical needs that would necessitate the home to be all one level? Do you prefer an attached or detached garage? Do you enjoy entertaining in your home, or will it be used almost exclusively by your family? Would you like fewer but larger rooms or more rooms that are of a smaller size? Does an open concept floorplan work with your family dynamic or would a more closed layout fit your needs better?

4. Decide how much you can afford to spend. Before the design work even begins, it won't hurt to talk to your banker and determine your budget. Your design decisions will partially be guided by this number, so it is important to have it early on. By using a very basic cost per square foot analysis, you can calculate the maximum amount of square footage you should design. Keep in mind that you can always design less space if it works for your family!