

# PAUL WILSON ARCHITECT.

## ARCHITECTURAL FEES



I speak from experience when I say negotiating over fees ranks very low in our profession's list of favorite activities. Many people are uncomfortable talking about money, but it's a necessary part of life and no less so in design and construction. I view it a bit differently, because the initial consultation and fee discussion is a necessary beginning point for a successful project. For better or worse, nothing quite focuses the mind as much as dollars-and-cents.

Some clients find the architect's fee to be an unnecessary add-on in their journey to the finished product. Obviously, I disagree, and let me tell you why. In short, when dealing with the messy, complicated and occasionally mystifying world of construction--particularly when it comes to your own home where you have a high level of emotional as well as monetary investment--it may cost you a great deal **not** to have an architect. I view the ideal architect-client relationship as one based on trust and advocacy. I think the best description of an architect is "trusted adviser." I become the advocate for the project, and the one who's there from beginning to end.

Let me also tell you why I prefer to give a client the unvarnished truth about the range of fee I think is appropriate for the work I do. I firmly believe that a homeowner needs an honest up-front estimate about what I think it will take to deliver the design quality, attention to detail, range of options and timely response that I think you want based on an initial consultation. If I'm wrong, I'd rather err on the high side in an hourly fee arrangement. On the other hand, if I've made any assumptions you think are incorrect, please let me know and we can work together to get the numbers into your comfort zone. Arriving at a fee we can both live with is a collaborative process; it is certainly not a "take it or leave it" situation.

Unfortunately, a low-ball, get-your-foot-in-the-door guesstimate can be a common tactic in the building industry. What appears to be an attractive price at first may not turn out that way in the end. Some people work that way but I consider it unethical. They'll either resort to pressure tactics (like frivolous and inflated charges for "change orders," "extras" and "additional services") to get you to pay more on the back end, or they'll cut corners in order to deliver for the original price and still make a profit. I'd rather the first number you hear be the highest one, then we can refine the numbers downward as the project becomes better defined. I liken it to Michelangelo's process of "finding" the sculpture in the block of stone by removing the unneeded portion. It takes time, skill, and patience, but the result is something extraordinary.

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