



Selections & Decisions

Quite possibly the most daunting task that you face as you begin the design process for your new home or renovation is the need to manage the decisions that you will be asked to make. At the outset, it may feel overwhelming. We're here to help you manage this process, and to guide you in making these decisions. First off, let me assure you that we don't need to make detailed selections of finishes and fixtures right now, unless these selections are absolutely critical to your enjoyment and appreciation of the finished project. For example, if you can't envision your kitchen without a 48" Wolf Range Top, then by all means, let's make that decision and add it into the design mix. But you don't have to.

As a general rule of thumb, we divide our design projects into 7 overlapping phases which are characterized by a certain level of information that needs to be assembled. Each phase of the process is somewhat iterative, during which we revisit the same questions, but overlay a more specific and detailed set of information. Ultimately, our decisions should support the overall set of priorities and visions that we determine at the very inception of your project. The result is an organic response to an idea that is a physical expression of your goals and aspirations.

Of critical importance is the setting of priorities from which you will derive your decision making process. Of the utmost importance is to determine the most important general theme to serve as the overriding determinant for your decisions. Many examples exist, and can be rather elaborate. In the course of my career, I've managed to boil it down to four primary considerations for general aspects of the project that must be addressed:

1. The architectural design for the structure (DESIGN)
2. Your maximum expense for approvals, design, and construction (BUDGET)
3. The possibility for future resale of the building (MARKETABILITY)
4. The environmental consciousness of the building (SUSTAINABILITY)

Please reflect upon these deeply, and often, so that your future decisions are consistent with your overall vision for the project. To give you a structured approach and help you guide your decisions, please consider the following questions that generally encountered and the level of information that we will try to assemble during each phase of the process:

Preliminary Design / Research

1. What and where do I want to build? Do regulations allow me to build there?
2. What are my priorities? Will I occupy the building? How long?
3. How big is it? How is it situated onsite?
4. What general styles of buildings do I prefer?
5. How much do I want to spend?
6. When do I want to start, and when can we be finished?

Schematic Design

1. What activities will be contained in my building? What rooms can I define?
2. How do the rooms / spaces relate to each other? To the outside world?
3. How do the interior spaces feel?
4. How big are these spaces? What specific furnishings / functions will be contained in each space?
5. What are the engineering considerations – soil, grades, others?

6. What will be the exterior finishes on the building? What general forms, shapes, roof orientation?

Design Development

1. Confirm room size / configuration relationships – circulation pathways all work?
2. Windows and doors properly sized and situated to provide access, light, view, egress?
3. How shall we heat and cool and otherwise maintain the interior environment?
4. Confirm finishes, shapes, sizes of major building elements?
5. Confirm that all spaces contain the proper equipment and furnishings?
6. What environmental / sustainable strategies should I integrate into my project?

Construction Drawings

1. Architect and engineers complete drawings for the project.
2. How shall we build this – who will be the contractor? Shall we bid or negotiate a contract? Pick 3 General Contractors / bidders.
3. Is there specific work that I can or want to do, or to hire out separately?
4. What general plumbing fixtures and fixed finishes? What general equipment? Lighting?
5. What specific exterior finishes are we going to select? What window and door designs?
6. Is financing in place for the construction loan? What information does the lender need?
7. If needed, do we have a place to stay?
8. Are the final drawings what we envisioned? Do they fulfill our expectations?

Bidding and Negotiations

1. Review bids, confirm availability and check qualifications of builders.
2. What does each builder bring to the table that will make things easier / better?
3. Which do I entrust most in managing my limited money? Who do I like best and can see myself working with for an extended period.
4. Who wants it most?

Construction

1. What are the specific finishes that I want in each space?
2. What specific fixtures, appliances, and equipment do I want? Where can I see options?
3. Where to shop for all items that we need to buy?
4. What color selections need to be made? Who will supply cabinets, countertops, built-ins?
5. What changes may I make after we're underway, and how will we integrate the cost for these changes into the budget?
6. What needs to be inspected and reviewed by my architect / engineer / building official?

Inspection / Completion / Warranty period

1. Do all pieces of equipment work? Are there any items that I need (filters, screens, etc).
2. What are the warranties, and how is service arranged in the event that we need something fixed?
3. Are all the reviews completed?
4. Has the architect and engineer certified that we are done? What items need to be finished (punch list)?

The preceding is a somewhat general list of questions and issues. It will help guide you on your way to complete your project. As always, we're here to help you find answers, or even to determine the right questions to ask!