

## Your Construction Team

Recently, a young couple explained to me how their growing family made it *essential* for them to consider a remodeling project. They had previously tackled some smaller projects themselves without involving an Architect, and shared a variety of horror stories about flaky sub-contractors and unmet expectations. The husband looked at me and said: "You'll be around to inspect the construction, won't you?" I took a deep breath before replying: "I believe a designer's job isn't done until you're relaxing in your completed home." After all, "plans" are just so much *scrap paper* after you've achieved your real objective: to build something!

I, like most designers, really do like to stay involved during the construction process to help avoid missteps and deal with the inevitable field issues that crop up. Few Architects would use the word "inspection" though. It is important not to confuse inspection with observation. "Inspection" carries with it some pretty weighty legal requirements. Considerations such as job site safety, scheduling, and protection from the weather are all part of the "inspection" process. There is also the requirement for an inspector to know *all* of what is going on at the job site, and to verify that it conforms to the intent of the design. No designer could possibly play that role of "inspector" unless they were also the contractor hands-on directing the workers.

It *is* true that construction involves much complexity, time and large dollar investments, and it is critical to have someone knowledgeable keeping track of your project. What an Architect can do on their periodic visits is *observe*. We monitor the work for general conformance with the intent of the design in the contract documents. If something is seen that is not in conformance, the obligation is to report to the owner the observed discrepancies, hopefully before they become major ones. Architects do

not, under normal contractual relationships, have the ability to actually stop the work. Only the Owner and Contractor have that power. With the ability to stop the work comes some degree of responsibility for worker safety, and supervising and inspecting their work.

No Architect can certify that the work is in complete accordance with the plans and specifications because the only person who can know that is the Contractor, who has been on the job site continuously in a position to actually see all the steps--every nail being driven, every piece of wood being handled. Is each nail the right size and type? Is each piece of wood the right species, size, and grade, and even moisture content? Are the nails driven exactly according to the specifications? The number of ways a project could fail to meet exact requirements is infinite.

In trying to help you achieve your real objective of a completed and useable finished house, observation is an important part of your designer's services. Yet, some clients, in a last ditch effort to economize, request that we do not preform *any* on-site observations. We try to make it clear that then *they* need to perform the same function of keeping track of the general progress and quality of the work. In a nutshell, you need an inspector on your job, besides the building inspector. Remember, the Building Department is only concerned with bare minimum code standards which may not only be too low for the average homeowner remodeling, but they also do not at all consider function, efficiency or beauty. As part of your construction team, you should also have an observer who is looking out for your design quality and character!

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