THE ARCHITECT

The Architect designs buildings and other structures.

OVERVIEW

Architects do more than create blueprints of buildings. They meet with clients to decide the purpose, design, cost and appearance of a building. Then, they create a draft which takes into account the functionality, safety, costs and zoning laws which may affect the construction. Architects help the client choose a building contractor and continue to represent the client until the construction is completed. Their duties require a number of skills which include design, engineering, management, communication and supervising.

A degree in architecture can provide a variety of working environments. Some architects enjoy working in community design and urban planning firms; public agencies and private community development corporations. Others find the construction environment more to their taste, choosing positions with contractors, developers and building product manufacturers or suppliers. Still others discover they can manage and design projects within corporate, institutional and governmental facilities offices.

Some career paths lead out of the architecture practice and into related activities (architectural history, historic preservation or computer-aided design), allied disciplines (planning, landscape architecture, engineering or interior design), or related industries (computer software development, real estate, finance or the law).

Introducing: Andrew Fell
Architect/Manager at Andrew Fell Architecture and Design

Andrew Fell is the owner of Andrew Fell Architecture and Design. His projects include single family, multi-family, commercial and mixed use buildings. He has won numerous awards - including awards for preservation and conservation.

Andrew's day begins and ends with answering email. In between, he meets with clients, contractors and developers; reviews drawings and marks them up for the drafters; and visits construction sites to solve problems. After Andrew's initial meetings with the clients, he provides the drafters a rough sketch. After they provide him a first draft, Andrew will refine the math based on the drawing.

Many of Andrew's clients are campus properties which present unique challenges because the land is so valuable. The goal is to build as big as legally allowed taking into account the parking and open green space requirements. "It's an algebra problem," he asserts. Andrew noted that the government allows you to build a larger building if it's built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. This is valuable on campus and other areas where land prices are especially high.

Andrew always liked to build things and take them apart. He considered engineering but his love of art and math pointed him toward architecture. Andrew believes an architect must be able to think three dimensionally, be good at math, and able to use computer tools. "Today's computer tools are so useful. To be able to build a 3D model on the computer - and to edit it - really speeds up the design process," he said.

Andrew is pleased that energy efficiency is being incorporated into buildings on a more regular basis. One reason is out of necessity. Many communities design to the International Energy Code. The other is increased interest in energy efficiency. While most developers still only look at the bottom line, the general public is more conscious of the benefits.

Owning an architecture firm means that Andrew's work is now more about business than art. He went into the field expecting to design beautiful buildings, but the reality, he says is "you end up doing a lot of non-glamorous buildings." He believes that to be successful you have to have people skills and be able to divorce yourself from your personal and political beliefs when dealing with a variety of clients. "It's not about you, it's about your clients and their needs."

OPPORTUNITIES

Architecture is a highly competitive career. One reason is that it is very dependent on the economy. When the economy is good, construction increases giving a need for the work of architects. So, in years of economic recession, fewer architects are needed.

The economic recovery is especially good news for architects. During the recession, the industry was hit hard as new construction projects, including homes, health care facilities and office buildings, declined severely. With the economy on the mend, both commercial and residential construction is climbing toward pre-recession levels, which should prove to be a major boom for an industry that shed thousands of jobs during the downturn.

The median annual wage for architects dipped slightly in 2012 to $73,090. The best-paid 10 percent in the profession made approximately $118,230, while the bottom 10 percent made approximately $44,600.

EDUCATION

The entire path to becoming a licensed architect takes anywhere from five to seven years to earn an architecture degree plus a three-year internship.

Most states require architects to possess a professional degree in architecture from one of the nearly 125 schools of architecture accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board. However, state architectural registration boards specify their own standards, so a degree from a non-accredited program may suffice in select states. Therefore, check the requirements for any state where you wish to work. There are a few routes to obtaining a degree in architecture. Most architects choose the five-year degree intended for students with no previous training. Others opt to enroll in a graduate program, which can take one to five years to complete, after obtaining an undergraduate degree in a field outside of architecture. Graduates must complete a training period, typically of three years or more, before they may sit for the licensing exam. Requirements for this training period vary by state.