

Excerpt taken from the American Institute of Architects web site.

The architectural design process consists of five phases. As you begin working with an licensed architect, or consider hiring one, it's helpful to know where you are in the process and where it will take you. An architect will orient you during each phase, and work with you to get the most value from each stage of the process. It's a time-tested method for establishing a close working relationship between you and your architect, and producing the very best buildings.

Phase 1: Originate

This first phase includes all of the discussions, thought, and exploration that lead to the moment when you realize you need to build something new. The phase ends with your decision to move forward with a project. When you reach the end of this phase, you can use this site to [prepare yourself for working with an architect](#).

Phase 2: Focus

Here you define the project - its scope, features, purpose, and functionality. This is the time to [select an architect](#) (50KB, PDF), and [establish an owner-architect agreement](#) (50KB, PDF). Together with your architect, you develop and refine a "vision" for the project. Your architect leads you through a "programming" exercise to help you explore the needs of those who will live, work or play in the space you create. You will [identify the services you need from your architect](#), and the design team will begin to form a cohesive relationship and a shared concept for the final building.

Phase 3: Design

Once the requirements of the project are determined, the design phase begins. Your architect gives shape to your vision through drawings and written specifications. Your input into this phase is vital, as you get the first glimpses, and then a more defined look at how your building will take shape. It is important to [establish a clear decision-making process](#) with your architect during this phase. The design phase ends when you agree to the plans that will guide construction.

Phase 4: Build

The contractor who will construct your building becomes the most active member of the team during this phase. Investments are made in materials, and timetables are extremely important. Good communication within the project team is critical, as the need for changes often arises. This is typically the time of highest stress for the project owner. Your architect will discuss changes and options with you, and ensure that alterations are compatible with your vision for the project.

Phase 5: Occupy

This phase begins the day the project is up and running and never really ends. It's where your satisfaction with the project is determined. If you are turning over the project to others who will ultimately use it, good communication during that process is important. Your architect can help ensure that the terms of your building contract were met, and can use the experience of this project to inform future work, should you team together again. For these reasons, it's a good idea to [maintain a relationship with your architect](#).