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Trust an Architect

Many remodelers might believe that architects exist to make their lives miserable. Remodelers might think architects stick their noses where they don't belong and unnecessarily delay projects while increasing costs. Truth is, architects exist to make sure a client's vision becomes reality. If this is your goal, too, then architects should be some of your best friends.

An architect I recently met explained the architect's role to me in a way I hadn't heard before, so I want to share it with you. While at the AIA's Custom Residential Architects Network Symposium last month, I met architect Dan Contelmo from New York, who told me that a teacher of his once instructed his class to draw something upside down. The exercise forced him to focus on proportions and details, resulting in a drawing more accurate than if he drew it right-side up. The lesson for Dan was, drawing

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from memory isn't as reliable as when he focuses on the details. Same goes for remodelers.

Dan suggested that some remodelers operate by taking a quick glance at an architect's drawings and think, "Oh, I know what he wants to do here," and proceed with construction based on a fleeting image and an interpretation of the drawings, not on the details. The resulting reality typically does not match the drawings, he told me.

When Dan shared his perspective, I remembered an episode of "60 Minutes," during which an experiment was conducted on unsuspecting college students. While in a lecture hall listening to the

professor drone on for a while, someone portraying a thief ran across the room and grabbed a woman's purse on the way out. After a minute or two of chaos, the producer entered the room and explained what had happened.

One by one, students were asked to provide a description of the person who ran through the room and stole the purse. Most of the students didn't come close to an accurate description. The point of the experiment was to highlight the unreliability of a person's memory to help solve crimes. Most students were surprised at how little they remembered about the "thief," including basics such as height, hair color and what kind of clothes he was wearing.

Whether glancing at a set of drawings or briefly catching a glimpse of a fake purse snatcher, a person's memory isn't as good as a deep view of the original. When a remodeler takes a brief look at construction drawings only once at the beginning of a project and doesn't reference them often enough, the mental reflection of the drawings becomes blurred, and the home does not match the client's desires.

To avoid this, Dan holds weekly meetings with remodelers to review the drawings to anticipate the week's potential conflicts or challenges. Dan's is one example of a relationship between architects and remodelers, in which each works closely with the other, making decisions together throughout the entire process, solving problems as they come up. It's a good example to follow.

Architects don't want to cause problems; they want to solve problems. You might think they are taught in school how to annoy and frustrate remodelers, but in reality they are fantastic problem solvers and can provide helpful insight if allowed. Architects and designers want to make your client's vision a reality. | QR



QUALIFIED REMODELER



1233 Janesville Ave.
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-0803
(800) 547-7377

- Publisher** John Huff, ext. 2711
john.huff@cygnus.com
- Editorial Director** Rob Heselbarth, ext. 2714
rob.heselbarth@cygnus.com
- Managing Editor** Laurie Grant, ext. 2709
laurie.grant@cygnus.com
- Senior Editor** Kenneth W. Betz, ext. 2724
ken.betz@cygnus.com
- ForResidentialPros Editor** Andrea Girolamo, ext. 6273
andrea.girolamo@cygnus.com
- Art Director** Carey Arneson
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A preferred publication of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry and the NAHB Remodelers

