

10 QUESTIONS

FOR YOUR GREEN ARCHITECT

High net worth homeowners have been early adopters of environmentally sensitive design, but hiring an architect for such projects can be tricky—the field is littered with bogus claims and unproven technologies. *Worth* surveyed specialists in green design to find out what you should ask before hiring someone to make your home eco-friendly.



1 What experience do you have with green design? Your architect should be a LEED AP, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional. Still, certification is just the beginning. Experience is critical: What previous green projects has your architect designed and brought to completion?

2 Can I visit one of your green properties or construction sites? Give the space the “smell test,” says Tony Daniels, co-founder of Cycle Architecture and advisory board member of GreenHomeNYC. You shouldn’t smell any chemicals or pollutants in the air. Also look for signs

of eco-conscious design. Does the project make good use of natural light? Does it use recycled or reclaimed materials?

3 How are your green properties performing? Your architect should be able to give you estimates of cost savings and energy efficiency from previous projects. “What that will reveal to you is that architect’s level of engagement with the project,” Daniels says.

4 What is your strategy for green renovation? Homeowners should know which possible renovations will have the most impact. “There are some basic, low-cost diagnostics that can be done,” says Stephanie

Horowitz, managing director at Boston-based Zero Energy Design. To examine energy efficiency, she recommends a “blower-door” test to evaluate air leakage and thermal imaging to find gaps in insulation.

5 How will my priorities influence your design? Your green architect should be able to marry your lifestyle goals with your green aspirations. Ask for examples of clients’ goals from past projects. Horowitz says it’s important to listen for adaptability. “How versatile are they in finding a design solution for each project as opposed to replicating what they did last time?”

6 What are the challenges of building green on my site? Your architect should have creative ideas about how to blend home and habitat. Knowledge of native plants and trees that will flourish without additional watering helps with conservation and can provide shade to keep the home cooler.

7 Where are you during construction? Many contractors are unfamiliar with the elements of green design, so it’s essential that your architect be ubiquitous during construction to make sure that the workers don’t cut corners or botch the job.

8 Will your design win zoning board approval? Especially when using new

technologies and building techniques, your architect must have his designs approved by local authorities. “It’s a transaction that has to be negotiated,” Daniels says, “and the architect’s skill at negotiating can save an owner months of headaches.”

9 Can you meet my energy efficiency goals? If you don’t have specific targets, your architect should help you set them. If you do, mention them early on—they’ll help determine the design and construction methods used.

10 What are some low-tech options to help green my site? Don’t underestimate the power of passive design, says Robert Harris, partner at Lake Flato architecture, a Texas firm known for its climate-responsive buildings. Gravity-fed water distribution, sunshade design and natural ventilation reduce energy consumption and are relatively inexpensive. **W**

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