

Cultural Daily

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The Difference Between an Architect and a General Contractor

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When you think about architecture, what first comes to mind? Many people think of iconic buildings, like the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, or the Pantheon. You may wonder what goes into the construction of these buildings. It should come as no surprise that the process to create them is as collaborative and artist-driven as theatre or dance.

You may know famous architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, but you may not know the general contractor that brought his famous works, such as Fallingwater, to life. Unfortunately, society has so far failed to recognize the effort that goes into creating buildings besides the architect. General contractors play a huge role in the planning, organization, and execution of the buildings we adore.

So what's the difference between an architect and a contractor?

An architect unites artistic vision and practicality before anything is actually built. They are important at the beginnings of creating a project, and their drawings serve as a reference point for all the construction work ahead of time. Not only must they satisfy their own vision, but they must also make sure the building adheres to regulations and codes according to the law.

To become an architect, you must earn a professional degree from an accredited school according to the National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB). Both Bachelor's in Architecture and Masters of Architecture are available. This is how architects begin a career in the field.

A contractor manages the construction of a building, which the architect designs. They are needed to actually execute the vision, and are often the ones who hire subcontractors and construction workers to build the project. They work in tandem with the architect to finish the project with few issues.

Contractors do not necessarily need a degree or a license to work in the United States, but degrees like construction management and carpentry are helpful in this career path, and create opportunities for better jobs. Exams for contracting licenses are available online, as well as study guides such as this [website from Contractors Training Center](#) which boasts high success rates in their students passing the licensing exam.

Can I have one without the other?

The relationship between the architect and the contractor is a symbiotic one—the two departments complement each other and are therefore necessary for the success of the architectural project. The

dynamic between the contractor and the architect is like the chemistry between two lead actors or the matching of two colors—they must be seen on equal footing, in collaboration with one another to reach an end goal.

A good architect provides clear and concise designs for the contractor to follow, and the contractor defers to the architect for any questions during the construction. A contractor relies on the architect for information, while the architect trusts in the contractor to execute their vision accordingly.

Contractors provide a practical approach to the project which is crucial to actually constructing it. Often, they may find themselves working with architects to create solutions for problems on projects.

Frank Lloyd Wright himself commented on the importance of his contractor saying, “I’d rather hire a crook who knows how to build than an honest man who doesn’t. I can police a crook but I can’t get something out of an honest man who doesn’t have it in him. I can’t turn a sow’s ear into a silk purse.”

Even Frank Lloyd Wright couldn’t build his own buildings himself—he required a contractor with enough skill and equitable artistic vision as himself to complete his projects.

Which Field to Choose?

Many people think that to create beautiful buildings, you have to be an architect. But this isn’t necessarily true! A general contractor has the potential to work on fulfilling projects, in tandem with an architect. If you are interested in becoming a general contractor, maybe you’ll be responsible for bringing the next magnificent building in your area to life!

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