

5 Steps to Prevent Mayhem When Building or Renovating your Property (from someone who's built for himself and others for many years)

1. Drawings are the language in construction, without them a lot goes wrong.
2. Good design protects your investment now and, in the future, here is why.
3. Are you concerned about costs, watch for these?
4. Effective Project Management is what gets your project finished on time and within budget.
5. Who you choose for your project matters and here is why.

1. Drawings are the Language in Construction, without them a lot goes Wrong

As a property owner you can't leave the design features of your property to the discretion of the wrong individual. You should never verbally discuss your design objectives with a construction or renovation contractor without requesting drawings to review and confirm that the features you require for your property are clearly specified over blueprints (drawings). There are various good reasons why.

- **Architectural or construction drawings are the GPS for everybody involved in a construction project:** When we need to drive to a place we have never been before and is unfamiliar to us, we use our GPS. Can we make it to our destination without a GPS? Yes, we can, but not without stopping to ask for directions and be at the discretion of the people we ask along the way. It takes us longer, it doesn't prevent us from hitting traffic jams along the way, we can't plan our trip because we don't know how long it will take us to get there and, worse, we may end up at the wrong destination if we get the wrong information along the way. Construction and renovation are much more complex than a trip to an unfamiliar place. Design/construction drawings are the common language everybody

involved in the project needs to abide by and, as you will see, are indispensable.

- **Don't kid yourself, drawings are necessary, here is why:** (1) Your town's building department will require drawings from you or your designer to review and approve your construction project. They will also inspect your construction project to make sure everything is being built as approved on those drawings. (2) You may want to have several contractors bid for your construction work to choose a competitive offer. Drawings will allow you to compare the proposals you receive from those contractors "apples to apples", because they have the same drawings to base their proposal on. (3) The contractor you hire to do the work needs blueprints to plan and execute their work; similarly for other trades involved in the work such as plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians, floor and tile installers, and others. They all need to follow drawings. (4) Drawings are the right documents to refer to when writing a contract between you and any of the trades you hire to do the work; they protect you. (5) Your architect or designer requires drawings to confirm that the contractors are building or renovating your property as designed. (6) If there are any disagreements between you and your contractor during or at the end of their work, drawings eliminate any ambiguity about who is right. There are many more reasons as to the importance of proper drawings before, during, and after your construction project as you will continue to learn below.
- **Without drawings contractors can't proceed:** Contractors need to follow drawings, not just because they need to follow a preestablished design guidelines but also because time is money. For once, you want your building to look, feel and perform as designed by your architect or designer and agreed by you, and reviewed and authorized by your town's building department. You don't want your building to be the result of a "well intended" contractor's inspiration. Also, time is fundamental for contractors. Labor costs increase with time of execution and directly affect their profit margins. Construction projects that take longer than planned eat away contractors' profits. Proper drawings prevent contractors from wasting money and having to ask you or your designer to

purchase materials to proceed with their work. Many times, property owners are the link between designers/architects (the ones responsible for proper drawings) and contractors (who require proper drawings). Helping contractors save time by having all the necessary information available to them goes a long way to completing projects on time and on budget. Save yourself money, time, and aggravations by having the necessary drawings available before construction starts.

2. Good Design Protects your Investment Now and in the Future, Here is Why

Good design prevents your building from becoming obsolete a few years after construction or, even worse, at the moment you move in.

- **A smartly designed building makes a dramatic difference on how much you'll enjoy your property when you move in and many years after.**

Good planning goes a long way to prevent many regrets. Good planning pays off greatly when done before construction starts. This can easily be done by choosing a good architect and builder who have knowledge and experience to do the heavy lifting for you. A well thought out building design not only allows you to enjoy all the aspects of a property that fit your needs and wishes, but also makes the building more comfortable, a healthier environment and a more valuable asset. Good material choices serve a similar purpose and help extending the life of the building. A property represents a large investment for you as the owner, a well thought out design helps protect that investment.

- **Did you know that an environmentally responsible building can be very beneficial to your health and also help improve your quality of life?** The construction or renovation of a building is the perfect opportunity to utilize new available technologies to make houses much more energy efficient, better for your health and more comfortable. Don't let boring industry jargons about new construction technology dissuade you from selecting those which really affect your quality of life while at the same time helping the environment. Missing newer building materials and construction technologies not only will affect your health and quality of life

as user, but also make your asset become obsolete much sooner. Construction has significantly evolved in the last decade and, by far, not all architects and builders have kept up with the important technological shifts. Sadly, many property owners these days still end up settling for a less healthy, energy efficient and comfortable property because they are not informed by their architects and builders.

- **Well-designed buildings, with the right technology and materials, last much longer and save the environment:** One very important aspect of buildings which not everybody is aware of but is critical is air leaks. Air leaks bring contaminants and allergens into your building, which you are unaware of but breathing constantly. Furthermore, air leaks create water condensation within walls, floors and ceilings which produce mold and, over time, destroy your building and health. Lastly, a lot of heating and cooling energy gets wasted escaping through leaks, making your building not only very energy inefficient but drafty and uncomfortable. Unfortunately, not too many people know that an air-leak free and better insulated building can reduce energy consumption up to 90%, improve your health and make your building more comfortable (zero drafts!). Why wouldn't you choose this alternative if it is available to you for the same cost and significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions!? That is why a well-designed building matters!

3. Are you Concerned about Costs? Watch out for these!

Property owners frequently talk about the cost of construction being high, and they are right, it is high. Often, they don't realize that their decisions can dramatically affect those costs.

- **Nothing affects the cost in construction more than finishes.** Finishes are the materials you mostly see in a building, that is why they are referred to as finishes. What we referred to as "good bones" is very important in a building and well worth investing money but has nothing to do with finishes. Many times, building owners have the "keep up with the Joneses" mentality and want to show off to their friends and family all the details they included in their property which makes it very expensive. Nothing

wrong with that, we work hard for our money; we only live once and why not reward ourselves from time to time! The only problem is that a house could go from \$X to \$3X depending on the finishes you choose. It is also important to recognize that the money you spend on those expensive finishes rarely gets recovered the day you decide to sell the property. In my experience as a contractor and a building owner, if you want to keep construction costs manageable, I strongly suggest operating under the 3 Bs solution “bueno, bonito y barato (good, pretty, and inexpensive)” vs “I want to impress my friends with these \$25,000 bathroom fixtures.” At this day and age, by being more selective when shopping, we can find finishes that are good quality (bueno), have the looks (bonito) and are inexpensive (barato). Try it, it works very well, you save a lot of money and in most instances the difference is unnoticeable!

- **Another very important aspect of keeping costs at bay during construction is avoiding wasting time.** As we all know time is money...to you, to your architect or designer and to your builder. It is fundamentally important in construction to reduce time wasted. As a project moves from planning, through design and later construction, it gets progressively more costly because of the increase in complexity and magnitude of the assets involved. By the time the project reaches construction, wasted time becomes unforgivable. Wasted time can bring a construction company to its knees. That is why the planning and design phases are so important. By the time you are in the construction phase you want to avoid changes in design and/or insufficient specifications which slow construction. Is you architect or designer part of the problem? Design changes during construction significantly increase construction costs, do your best to prevent them. Also, has the construction company received all the necessary drawings and specifications to prevent wasted time during construction?
- **Have you aligned yourself with a designer and a construction company that are interested and knowledgeable at helping you keep your construction costs down?** Sometimes because designers and contractors are not good project managers, they create (intentionally or unintentionally) delays that affect construction costs and later feel the

need to pass those costs down to you. More about that under the Project Management section next.

4. **Effective Project Management is what gets your project finished on time and on budget**

You sure don't have unlimited amounts of time and money to get your construction project completed, you need a good project manager as your builder and an enabler architect to support them.

- **What are timelines, how do they work and why are they so necessary?**
Timelines are very important project management tools, especially in construction and renovations. They provide you, the property owner, with a date by which you can expect the construction or renovation work to be completed, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. Timelines do a lot more than just that. Timelines help monitor project delays ahead of completion and help identify the area(s) that are delayed and indicate the amount of time a project is delayed. Timelines, when implemented right and kept up to date, not only identify problems before it is too late to correct them but also help establish measures to prevent further delays. Timelines also help contractors schedule all the necessary trades and purchase of materials at the required time which is fundamental in construction. A question well worth asking your construction company and designer is...do you use timelines during your projects, and will they be implemented to maintain the project on time and on budget?
- **How to prevent construction costs from creeping up during construction, which can ruin your return on investment and/or make your contractor financially insolvent.** We discussed these in greater detail in section 3, here we are more concerned with how to prevent them. With the right project management tools and the experience to make the right decisions when problems arise, effective project managers take the necessary measures to stay on schedule and prevent costs from creeping up. Aligning yourself with an architect and a construction company, both with good project management skills, makes all the difference in how smoothly a construction project runs and the probability of completing the project on

time and on budget. It also greatly reduces the amount of stress the owner experiences when a project is mismanaged.

5. Who you Choose for your Project Matters and Here is Why:

If you read all the material presented before, you already have a fair understanding of important issues which arise in the design and construction (or renovation) of your property and why. Here, we want to mention additional guidelines that will help you make a better decision.

- **When looking for an architect or designer it is important to choose someone who is comfortable at listening to your needs while using their knowledge in the field to guide you through what ultimately should become your dream property.** Remember, your property is a very valuable asset, and the right design is key in making it become a good investment – as a very desirable property to you but also as the asset it can become. You want someone knowledgeable about the right technologies and choice of materials to make the best out of your investment. Also, you want your architect or designer to help the building or renovation of your property be a good experience for all parties involved while helping streamline the construction process and reduce unnecessary costs. In other words, a good architect/designer is a well worth investment for your construction project.
- **Given all the hoops property owners need to jump through when building or renovating a property, it is important to choose wisely whom they partner with:** Many times, when property owners don't do the necessary homework, they end up having to wear many different hats, including managing the construction project themselves. If your time is limited or day-to-day construction management is not your thing, I suggest you become selective when choosing your building or renovation contractor. Construction experience, professionalism, honesty, attention to detail, effective project management are all very important attributes, but so is style of communication. Can you communicate well with the individual or organization you will be dealing with for the entire length of your project and, likely, even after your project is complete? Will they make your construction experience a stressful or unpleasant one? Remember, even

when buildings are complete, you always want a construction company at your side willing and capable of answering any questions you may have after you occupy the building or to make certain adjustments for items you or your designer may have overlooked during the design phase.