



Freelance Architect or Firm? How to Choose

Both a freelance architect and a firm can design your house well. What decides it is who does your drawings, who is free when you need them, and who answers if something goes wrong on site.

We run a small studio, so we are not a neutral voice here. That is why we would rather you check a few things yourself than take our word for it.

01 Start with the license, not the label

Building plans need to be signed and sealed by a licensed architect. Ask for the license number and confirm it with the Professional Regulation Commission before any money moves.

A licensed freelancer is a real architect. A firm with no licensed architect on your project is a problem. The size of the office changes neither point. A license is the one fact you can check independently, which is why it comes before style, price or office size. Example: a friend recommends a designer whose drawings look great, but no license number is on the proposal. Ask for it and confirm it first. Why this works: plans without a licensed signature can stall at the permit office, and checking early costs you a phone call instead of a redo.

02 What a freelance architect can offer

You deal directly with the person drawing your house. A freelancer can adjust quickly when you change your mind, and overhead is often smaller.

The weak spot is capacity. One person has one calendar, so ask who covers during illness or a rush job, and who handles the engineers and permit processing. Working with one person can make decisions quick, but it also puts everything on one calendar. Example: if your freelancer falls sick during permit season, ask now who finishes the drawings and who follows up with the engineers. Why this works: a named backup plan turns a possible delay into a known step.

03 What a firm can offer

A team can cover for absences, and engineers are often already part of the picture. That can help on bigger projects or tighter deadlines.

The weak spot is who you actually get. Ask who attends the first meeting, who does the drawings, and how a change reaches the person who decides. A team spreads the work across several people, so you need to know which of them actually touches your project. Example: if the senior architect pitches you but a junior draws everything, ask who reviews the drawings before they reach you. Why this works: knowing the real chain of people lets you reach the right person fast when you

want a change.

04 Match the choice to your project

Rule of thumb: Hire the person who will actually do your drawings, whatever the sign says outside.

A single house or a renovation is often well served by a freelancer or a small studio. Several units, commercial space or a tight deadline may call for a team.

If you are building from abroad, choose whoever answers messages consistently and has a clear way of working remotely. The right choice depends on what you are building and how you will communicate, not on which type of office is better. Example: a family building one house from abroad may do best with one architect who answers the same day, even if a bigger firm looks more impressive. Why this works: matching the office to the project removes the gap between what you expect and what you get.

05 Three questions to ask before you sign

1. Who will do my drawings, and who checks them?
2. If you are unavailable for a week, who covers?
3. Who handles the engineers and permits, and is that in your fee?

Have a project in mind? Book a free 15-minute consultation.

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