

BARRY PRICE ARCHITECTURE

COMMENTARY/FAQ's

On Sustainability

While the use of recycled and reclaimed building materials, mechanical systems utilizing renewable energy resources, and high performance thermal envelope systems all contribute significantly to the realization and maintenance of sustainable buildings, the process of designing sustainable architecture begins with basic planning principles that embrace limiting building size, giving consideration to solar orientation/exposure and efficient building configuration. It is not until these basic planning principles have been addressed that the appropriate and disciplined selection of building materials and systems can be pursued as an extension of the fundamental architectural strategy.

On High Performance Building

Once environmentally informed planning principles have been addressed, the careful consideration and design of the building envelope takes precedence. Detailing for drainage moisture and air infiltration coupled with planning for thermal isolation of the building structure informs the selection and distribution of building materials outside and inside the building. The resulting 'tight' building requires integrated ventilation to assure proper indoor air quality, and the recovery of conditioned (heated or cooled) exhaust air.

On Indoor Air Quality

High Performance building practices result in what are referred to as 'tight' buildings. With air-sealing properly achieved, indoor air quality can only be assured with mechanical air changes. Removal of interior conditioned air and its displacement with makeup air affords the opportunity to harvest heat and reintroduce it into the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) system. The small amount of power required for Heat/Energy Recovery is more than compensated for by the reduced demands on the heating equipment. Additionally, consideration must be given to the fixtures and finishes that will complete the interior of the buildings. Finishes, surfaces, fabrics and all other components that makeup the building interior must be assessed for their VOC (volatile organic compound) content. Low or No VOC products are a necessity for tight buildings.

On Timing

Some clients approach the studio only months prior to an anticipated construction start. Our response is to endeavor to invest enough time for careful planning and consideration of the project. The time required is less driven by the design, drawing and specification process, than by the opportunity to provide our clients with time for the careful consideration of the development of a project while it is still on paper. We typically request at least six months of planning/drawing time prior to completing contract documents for construction. This will assure that the drawings are coordinated, and that the client has had adequate time to engage, consider, and approve the work. Revisions and changes are best accommodated on paper, and there is no substitute for planning time to manage and minimize the number of changes that could occur during the construction phase of a project.

On Construction Cost

Projects cannot be undertaken without a clear understanding of the anticipated budget parameters involved. While cost reference guides can be obtained for commercial construction, assessing residential construction costs can be somewhat more elusive. Cost per square foot projections remain the preliminary estimating tool of choice (lacking other options) while a project remains in the 'schematic' phase. The difficulty here lies in what actual amount to ascribe to the cost per square foot equation. On this topic there is and will continue to be

disagreement, and we continue to refine the multipliers we use for our preliminary projections, as we obtain data on finished projects. It is only when the project drawings are developed and the work can be broken down into quantifiable materials, labor hours and associated costs that more project specific numbers can be obtained.

On Bidding vs. Managed Construction

While competitive bidding between interested general contractors remains a common strategy for the rewarding of contracts for construction, there are other approaches to assessing potential builders and quantifying cost that are worthy of consideration. Many builders offer services as 'Construction Managers,' coupling ongoing consultations during the design phases with updated cost projections as the drawings evolve. The result is an opportunity to understand cost implications as the design of the project unfolds, making the best use of time, and minimizing the potential for 'sticker shock' that waiting until complete drawings are available for pricing may bring. While retaining a Construction Manager may entail cost at the front end of the process, it will more than likely pay for itself with the savings in time, design revisions, and budget reconsiderations.