

What is a Architectural Designer?

An architectural designer designs buildings or landscapes, participating in the process from the idea phase to construction completion. They also produce models and 3-dimensional renderings to present to clients and other members of the design team, and meet with clients to discuss ideas, needs and the project's budget. Other duties might include estimating project costs, preparing scaled drawings, preparing and managing construction contracts and visiting worksites to make sure construction is consistent with the design plans. Architectural designers may need to work long hours to meet deadlines.

Career Requirements

Degree Level	Bachelor's degree
Key Skills	Critical thinking, organizational communication, creative and analytical skills, problem-solving

Step 1: Earn a bachelor's degree

At minimum, aspiring architectural designers must earn a bachelor's degree from an accredited university. Students have some flexibility when it comes to choosing a major, but they should look for programs that provide education and experience in topics related to architecture. Possible majors include civil drafting and engineering and, of course, architecture. Many prospective architectural designers also choose to complete a master's program in a field such as architecture, which generally takes 2-3 years to finish.

Step 2: Get an Internship

Prior to finding a full-time position, aspiring architectural designers can acquire valuable hands-on experience through an internship. Architectural interns provide assistance with all aspects of architectural design, including presentations to clients and coordination with construction teams. These opportunities often include hands-on work experience, such as 3D modeling and drafting, as well as managing project files. Interns may also be tasked with conducting on-site research and ensuring compliance with zoning laws and rules.

Step 3: Consider Becoming an Architect

Students looking to advance their careers can build on their knowledge and become full-fledged architects. Depending on a student's prior education, further coursework may be required to qualify for these positions.

Not everyone who designs structures is an architect. In fact, not even everyone with a degree in architecture is an architect! Some people who hold a bachelor's or master's degree in architecture and design buildings are architectural designers.

Architectural designers are typically entry-level employees at architectural firms. Like an architect, they design different types of structures, but—because they do not hold a professional certification—their designs must be signed off on by a supervising architect. Architectural designers also help out with the logistics of bringing a design into reality. They create digital plans based on architectural sketches, shepherd projects through the city permitting process, visit construction sites, oversee contractors, and facilitate communication with consultants.

It's beneficial for an architectural designer to have a good understanding of math and science. But—because architectural plans today are primarily created using computer aided drafting (CAD) programs—architectural designers do not use as much complex math as they did in the past. They do, however, spend many hours sitting at the computer!

Architectural designers can work for architecture firms as full-time employees—receiving benefits such as paid vacation, health insurance, and sick days—or as independent contractors who provide services to the firm but are responsible for their own taxes and medical insurance.

Some architectural designers see their job as part of the path toward becoming a fully certified architect. Because all state architectural boards require experience hours—usually around three years' worth—as part of the certification process, working as an architectural designer is an essential step toward becoming an architect.

Other architectural designers do not want to become architects. These people grow within their role of architectural designer, taking on more responsibility and gaining more independence in the management of their architectural projects.