

## THE TRUTH ABOUT DESIGN-BUILD

The project delivery type, known as Design-Build, has gained widespread acceptance throughout the world and continues to grow in both the private and public sectors. Design-build places the Architect into a relationship with the builder that ties design, construction and budget to both parties. These are ties the Architect has not assumed traditionally in the past and can be difficult to understand and accept for an Architect. Even harder to accept, is the idea that a contractor will participate in design decisions. The most common criticism by Architects of Design-Build is the idea that it minimizes the importance of design aesthetic and quality for the sake of expediency and construction cost. Though this may be true for small privately funded projects where misinformed owners are only attempting to save a buck, it is not true for the majority of Design-Build practiced seriously in the public sector today. Obviously from the owner's perspective, the attraction of Design-Build is that it will save time and money through the use of a "one stop shopping" method of project delivery. But while it is true owners look to gain more value for their dollar by using Design-Build, it is not accurate to say the Architect's role is unimportant or secondary to the process. In fact, Design-Build solicitations issued by the Federal Government, General Services Administration and the Army Corps of Engineers consider the Architect's role as being as critical to the success of the project as the Contractor's. There is a significant amount of time spent by these agencies to define their design needs and requirements within their written Request For Proposals. Often these RFPs range between 700 and 900 pages in length and it is quite common to see a two-part proposal process used in short-listing potential Design-builders for a particular project. The lengthy proposal review process undertaken by these agencies include the review of the Designer's ability and credentials as well as the Builder's.

The ultimate challenge for the Architect in Design-Build is to incorporate their natural tendency towards quality design into a set of pre-determined circumstances. To achieve this balance, an Architect needs to fully understand the ramifications of their design decisions and how it affects the overall time frame and budget of the project as well as the resources of the builder. By fully embracing this process the Architect will be able to create quality design while also accomplishing the many financial and planning goals of the project. This level of responsibility and involvement with the entire team of builders, Engineers and owners is precisely what makes Design-Build so interesting, enlightening and educational. The truth about Design-Build is that it is at least as challenging and satisfying as any design project. There is much for Architects to gain and learn from such an experience. The knowledge that is gained in construction materials, methods and scheduling is priceless to us as design professionals for all projects regardless of project delivery type. Likewise, the design sense and knowledge that we can share with others in the construction industry is also priceless.

It is extremely important for Architects to understand the potential and advantages of Design-Build. The belief that Design-Build minimizes or otherwise compromises the Architect's role on a project illustrates a misunderstanding promoted by poorly managed and ill conceived Design-Build arrangements. Properly executed and managed Design-Build projects are useful and beneficial to owners, as they are profitable and fulfilling for the Architects and Contractors who work on them. The Design-Build process in its proper form, promotes a valuable exchange of ideas between parties. Parties, that traditionally, have been set against each other for way too long. Design-Build needs, requests and even respects good Architects. Design-Build projects have had great success in this country and abroad. As this type of project delivery continues to gain popularity, we should be at the forefront, guiding it, and insuring the implementation of good design every step of the way. Who better to lead a team and organize such a complex undertaking than an Architect?

Brian Altman, AIA  
editor