

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE JOB

Imagine this situation: you've worked hard and long with an especially bright and talented Architect, creating a wonderfully complete and detailed set of plans. You've gone through a careful contractor selection process, have a building permit in hand, and are ready to go. What's the next logical step? Can you conceive of signing twenty blank checks, turning them over to the contractor, shaking his hand and saying: "See you in six months when everything's done!" The thought of that scenario probably sends chills down your spine. Imagine what might go on if you just turned a bunch of subcontractors loose on a project without any supervision, management or observation. I've recently had the chance to see the result of this type of situation: poorly constructed homes with literally life-threatening safety and structural deficiencies. Fortunately, it's unlikely that work done on your home would ever approach such extreme low quality!

Intuitively, I'm sure you realize that every construction project requires *a set of eyes* to observe its progress, keep it on track, and ensure success. This precaution doesn't necessarily denote a lack of trust in your contractor. However, it's a way to stay ahead of misunderstandings, misread information, information just plain overlooked on the plans, and a variety of other unforeseen situations that are certain to come up during the course of construction. I believe that every successful project is the result of a team effort. Here's an overview of "the eyes" on a project and who ideally plays what role.

Supervise

Supervision is the day-to-day direction of the means and methods used on the construction site. It is the *sole responsibility of the contractor*, who often has a trusted employee such as a foreman or a lead

person, carrying out the job. Supervision is a key aspect essential to any successful project. When you see a line item budget with the cost separated out for supervision, don't assume that it's fluff or an unneeded expense.

Manage

In a medium to large construction company, the management of the project involves directing the timing, sequence, arrival of materials, coordination of the subcontractors, etc. It also includes general business operations such as making sure that bills get paid. This is the contractor's job. In a very small construction company, the supervision and management are handled by the same person. Both are essential elements to a successful project.

Inspect

A building permit is needed for your project. In addition, a periodic inspection of the job for conformance to code conditions by a building inspector is also necessary. Generally, building inspectors are conscientious and knowledgeable, and they provide a real service to you by protecting you against the most severe deficiencies. Although I've found it to be extremely rare, occasionally a building inspector doesn't do his or her job carefully, possibly resulting in a failure to meet code or even potentially hazardous situations. Also, keep in mind that the building inspector is concerned only with *minimum* code requirements, not with what your contract guarantees in terms of quality of materials and workmanship. Quality is only regulated by the code in a general way. Sloppy and unfinished work, even if reviewed carefully, might still pass a final inspection!

Observe

This is what your Architect can do for you during the course of construction. Observation involves periodically checking in at the job site and making determinations on the general quality of the work and its conformance with the plans and specifications. Quality and workmanship is a key factor here. Note, however, that the Architect *does not* do "inspection" or "supervision" because those terms carry legal definitions that significantly exceed the Architect's actual role and responsibility.

While the Architect tries to guard you against defective work, the limited amount of time spent on the job site makes it impossible to guarantee error free construction.

Monitor

This is the role of the owner. After all, it's your money and your home. You need to make sure that all the people who are critical to the success of your job are carrying out their responsibilities and working to protect your interests and investment.

It takes a team effort to keep *eyes on a job* and ensure the successful completion of your project, while incorporating the quality and features that you bargained for.

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AIA