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| HOW TO: CHOOSE AN ARCHITECT |

Draft pick: Design a relationship with your architect

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

With the right architect, a client can gain a partner for the life of a project — often a span of several years — and one that will guide them to wise decisions about much more than a building's design.

"A typical engagement could be five years or more, when you start to factor in planning, programming, design, construction and moving," says **Tim Marsters**, managing principal at **Perkins & Will**, a Boston firm with 40 architects on staff specializing in life sciences, higher education and other types of work. "Ultimately, it's all about chemistry."

Marc Margulies, of **Margulies & Associates** in Boston, says, "For a project to go smoothly and for people to collaborate effectively, everyone needs to like, respect and understand each other."

Those hiring architects for commercial projects often start with a rigorous winnowing process that leaves only the most qualified and interested firms vying for a job. That can begin with a request for qualifications, which establishes the ability of a firm to handle the prospective work.

From there, firms that qualify are invited to submit proposals. From those proposals, a client chooses firms to in-



Tim Marsters of Perkins & Will says a typical working relationship with an architect can last more than five years.

terview, which is where the decision is often sealed. "If you've gotten to the table for an interview, they know you can do the job. Then it's a matter of how you will work with the key people involved," Marsters says.

Like many fields, architecture is becoming somewhat specialized, with firms highlighting their experience

FROM THE GROUND UP

- The American Institute of Architects and the Boston Society of Architects are both solid starting points for making a selection, and the BSA's Web site (www.architects.org) has several suggested steps to follow.
- Architecture is becoming increasingly specialized by industry, and experience in a given sector can be key in the permitting, planning and design stages.

in higher education, biotechnology or medical buildings, or in creating office space for specific uses, such as law firms. That type of relevant experience can be key not only when designing and overseeing construction, but also in the earlier stages, when permitting and planning takes place.

"As the world of design and construction becomes increasingly complex and specialized, clients should look to their consultants to have intimate knowledge about their own fields," says Margulies. "But experience coordinating the expertise of other consultants is also the function of the architect on complex projects, so the expertise may be less important relative to a specific

building type than to a process."

Many architects offer to handle the myriad details that come up during a project, keeping the owners in the loop on a predetermined schedule that helps minimize their need to micromanage.

Architects note that choosing a residential architect is often a vastly different and scaled-down process, but say the same types of industry resources — the **American Institute of Architects**, which handles professional accreditation for architects and, locally, the **Boston Society of Architects** — are solid starting points for either type of project. The BSA's Web site (www.architects.org) includes a step-by-step guide to choosing an architect.

Steve Fox, a partner in **Corporate Project Partners**, a Boston-based project and relocation management firm, says soft skills can be critical to the success of a project.

"Every company has different decision criteria," he says. Fox, who helped choose a school architect in his role on the Swampscott Building Committee, says he includes factors such as fit with the rest of the project team as well as listening skills, verbal and written presentation skills, attention to detail, and a comfort level that the final candidate has a clear understanding of the client's goals and objectives.