

# Hiring a Design Professional



Architects, Landscape Architects, Professional Engineers and Interior Designers

consumer *brief*

## HIRING A DESIGN PROFESSIONAL: WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Hiring a design professional – including architects, landscape architects, professional engineers or interior designers – can seem like a daunting process. Does the person I’m hiring have the qualifications needed to help with my project? Will he or she respond to my concerns and work within my budget? Will I be responsible for additional costs if my town requires changes to the design professional’s plans during the permit process?

Fortunately, the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs and its professional licensing boards assist in this process by holding New Jersey’s licensees to professional and ethical standards of practice that are established by State statute and regulation. Architects, landscape architects, professional engineers, and land surveyors must be licensed in New Jersey. Interior designers must be certified by means of a State examination and approval by the Interior Design Examination and Evaluation Committee.

The New Jersey State Board of Architects, the State Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, and other professional boards cannot recommend a specific licensee you should hire. But they can help you verify whether a given individual or business is actively licensed or certified, and whether they have been subject to disciplinary action.

In addition, our “Look-up & Verify” section at [NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://NJConsumerAffairs.gov) enables you to search for licensed or certified professionals or businesses by municipality, and view the current status of their license.

## WHEN HIRING A DESIGN PROFESSIONAL IT PAYS TO FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

- **First, take time to think through your project and your budget.** Have a clear sense of what your

project will include, and the amount you expect to spend

- **Make sure the individual you are considering hiring is actively licensed or certified by the appropriate professional board.** Find out whether the board has subjected him or her to disciplinary action for any reason. You can call the Division of Consumer Affairs at **800-242-5846** (toll free in New Jersey) or **877-746-7850**, or find the specific board’s contact number at [NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://NJConsumerAffairs.gov).
- **Find out whether the person you are considering hiring is reputable, and whether you agree with the quality of his/her work.** Ask for references, and check those references. Just as important, ask to see examples of projects the individual has completed. Check the individual’s website or professional literature to learn about his or her qualifications and experience.
- **Find out whether you will be comfortable working with him or her.** Interview the person. Describe the scope of your project. Does the person understand your project? Is he or she able to listen to your concerns and respond to your questions? (Also important: Learn in advance whether you will be charged for an initial interview.)
- **Make sure to learn about the professional’s fees,** and how he or she will charge you.

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**800-242-5846** ▶ New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs  
[www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov)



- **Before your interview, review this list of “Twenty Questions to Ask Your Architect,”** provided by the American Institute of Architects:  
[howdesignworks.aia.org/pdf/Twenty-Questions-to-Ask-Your-Architect.pdf](http://howdesignworks.aia.org/pdf/Twenty-Questions-to-Ask-Your-Architect.pdf)

- **Once you have decided to hire a design professional, you will have to agree on a contract.** Review the contract very thoroughly, and be sure that you understand all of its terms, before signing.

- **The contract should include the full scope of work;** the project’s specific schedule; the construction budget; and the design professional’s fee. **Make sure that you’re aware of any conditions that may create extra costs.** The contract should include a provision that the price will not increase without your consent. In particular, find out if you will be responsible for paying the design professional to revise his/her plans, if your town requires changes during the permit approval process.

- Depending on the scope and complexity of the project, you may want to **consider hiring a legal professional** to assist you with the contract terms.

- **Protect yourself by keeping copies of all contracts, estimates, receipts and other documents.** This will make it easier to obtain a refund, or work with the appropriate professional licensing board, if a conflict arises.

- **Contact the State Division of Consumer Affairs** or the appropriate professional licensing board if you have a dispute with a licensed professional.

#### LICENSING BOARDS

Architects	973-504-6385
Interior Designers	973-504-6385
Land Surveyors	973-504-6460
Landscape Architects	973-504-6385
Professional Engineers	973-504-6460

### New Jersey Office of the Attorney General **DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS**

#### Consumer Service Center

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P.O. Box 45025  
Newark, NJ 07101

**973-504-6200**

**800-242-5846**  
(toll free within N.J.)

E-Mail: [AskConsumerAffairs@dca.lps.state.nj.us](mailto:AskConsumerAffairs@dca.lps.state.nj.us)

website:

[www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov)

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