

# Small Project Practitioners

A Publication of the AIA SPP Knowledge Community

# Journal

## Top Issues Affecting Small Project Practitioners

- Litigation and affordable professional liability insurance
- Contracts, documents, and support materials targeted for the small project practitioner
- The need to educate clients and the larger community of the benefits of using an architect
- Design-build as an alternative
- Office management models and profitability
- Successful project delivery models
- Work flow scheduling
- The need for advice and comments in a small practice (there is a need for professional feedback on a daily basis)
- The need for a metric to qualify potential hires and the skills they possess

## The “Wow” Factor

### It’s What Makes Your Projects Stand Out

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## Time and Change

In the early 1990s a small group of individuals submitted a proposal to the AIA to create an entity dedicated to the practice of small project architecture. The individuals had one vision: to gather and disseminate information relevant to all architects who endeavored to practice architecture at a small scale. They realized this practice was unique, that the traditional models of project delivery and architecture practice did not always apply to them or how they conducted their business. The profession did little to recognize these individuals and there was very little information available to these people on how to survive. There were no peers in an adjacent studio to bounce ideas off or offer a critique, to share the trials and tribulations of everyday practice, or to just shoot the bull. Thus, the question was raised, “What if we had a national forum where we could share ideas, support another practitioner

in similar situations, or have a laugh or dream with another practitioner?” This was the start of the Small Project Forum.

Through a few individuals’ efforts, the Small Project Forum grew and a network of more than 30 local advisors from all over the country and five national officers began a national forum for sharing their knowledge and experiences. The medium for this effort was the printed *Small Project Forum Journal*. For nearly 30 issues, the printed journal was shared with colleagues, distributed to clients, framed and hung in places of honor in those offices or living rooms of individuals who contributed to the content, and even carried to the highest thrones of men and women alike. This was the essence of the Small Project Forum, the reason for its being and the reason to belong. Whether individuals contributed to its content or just absorbed what was there, the journal was the reason for being a member of the AIA.

Time and technology, however, have certainly brought change. The electronic medium is now the medium for the *SPP Journal*. Have you handed a client a printed copy of recent eJournals or taken your laptop to that private secluded space for a little one-on-one? The content and information provided is still outstanding but isn’t the feeling just a little off?

Time and change can, however, go in many directions. In fact, they can go full circle. Through the generosity of Victor O. Schinnerer & Company and the efforts of several key advisory group members and AIA staff, we are pleased to present a printed version of Journal #35 of the Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community. Schinnerer’s financial support and shared vision of the value of the printed journal have made this all possible. We

thank all of you who have contributed to this journal. Your time and effort in presenting ideas, details, case studies, photographs, and questions and answers is invaluable and is the essence of the SPP.

Even better news is that you will have another opportunity to contribute to a printed journal. Journal #36, “Getting It Built,” will call for articles and tips in October and be published in December. Gather your ideas, call your clients and your colleagues, agitate those little gray cells, and be ready to contribute. Only with your input will the journal be great. We will again thank Victor O. Schinnerer for its support in the publication of these two printed journals.

The advisory group would also like to toot its own horn on the new format for the journal. It is our wish that everyone gets excited about the new layout, the articles, book reviews, the profiles, and new initiatives to provide greater value to all our members.

Let us know, let the AIA know, what you think of the printed journal and the new format. The new format will continue in the electronic journal (ours may even be a prototype for other knowledge communities), and articles will be added as you let us know what is most important to you.

As the words to my glorious alma mater chime out, “Time and change will surely show, how firm thy friendship ...” We hope your friendship with the Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community will soar with this printed journal, the new format will inspire you to contribute to the effort, and you will just enjoy.

*David C. Hughes, AIA  
2005 Chair  
Small Project Practitioners Knowledge  
Community*

What’s coming in  
the next Small  
Project Practitioners  
Journal

“Getting It Built”

PUBLICATION DATE:

January 2006

## Come on In

By Karen Harris, AIA

**A**lthough one always expects to get a “Wow” reaction to the delight of a successfully finished project, we typically hear “Wow, I never would have thought of that” much earlier in the design process. The decisions and solutions derived at the programming, concept, and schematic design levels make the difference in achieving that rewarding expression of delight in the end.

I find that we receive the most appreciation for the innovative thought an architect brings to the process when we are working on addition and renovation projects for existing buildings. These are the places where people have been living, working, and confronting the limitations of their built environment every day. They wear the blinders of familiarity and find it difficult to see beyond what is there. They often can tell you how the current spaces do not work, and they can sometimes even imagine adding space to fix their problems. They rarely, however, see the possibilities of radically changing the configuration and use of existing spaces or reorienting how you approach, enter, and move through the building.

The reorientation of entry and the rethinking of how space is used have consistently given our firm its greatest success in all sorts of building types and with all sorts of clients, from first project homeowners to more sophisticated facilities managers. And, although it is not rocket science, it is when we are most likely to hear, “I never would have thought of that.”

For instance, a young client with a 700-square-foot house on a tight site needed to

add space to his tiny home after he added a wife to his life. As with almost every residential client I have ever had, he had tried to design the additional space he imagined he needed and was having trouble making anything work. He thought he needed a new master bedroom and a dining room stacked in the footprint that was available to him, simply because those were the two spaces his house did not currently have.

Things fell into place quite neatly when we abandoned his current front door and moved the entry into the new addition. That single move freed us to reinvent almost all of the other spaces in the original house. We turned the old living room into the dining room, opened new access into the current hall, and moved the basement stair under the stair required to reach the new second floor. This kept the kitchen in basically the same place (saving a costly move), yet expanded it into previous circulation space and allowed the couple to replace their small “Barbie” appliances.

In the end, the addition included not only a master bedroom and the displaced living room but also bonus features the client had not even imagined, given our space and budget limitations. He got a new entry foyer, some interesting changes in interior elevations, a feature stair, and a second-floor sitting room. We got our “Wow, I never would have thought of that.” And it was all made possible by a simple move of the front door.

For a small addition to an elementary school the bond issue designated three new classrooms to replace temporary buildings on the site, two ADA-compliant restrooms, and some additional renovation. It was obvious from our first visit, however, that the entry to the school was in the wrong place, and the office and

administrative functions were buried in the interior and hard to find.

Like so many school buildings, almost every person approaches and enters the school from the parking lot. Unfortunately, that usually means an entry sequence past the transformer and the dumpsters, while the more formal “main” entrance remains awkward and unused.

The site designated for the new addition was in an ideal location for a new entry structure with the logical placement of administrative offices directly inside. We proposed a concept design to reallocate space that would allow the office to relocate to the addition, and to reconfigure the current office into classroom space with a science courtyard created at the existing entry.

This proposal was met with one of our most enthusiastic “This is great! I never would have thought of that” reactions. Even though the concept fulfilled all of the space requirements, we were stymied in our ability to actually carry out the far better solution because the bond issue program did not allow that latitude. A sobering lesson was learned and now when we prepare programming tools, we always try to produce a document that allows for the wider possibilities that inevitably arise.

Many years ago one of my studio instructors insisted that we take our drawings off the board and work on them upside down several times during the semester. It forced a new perspective when one was entrenched too completely in the familiarity of a problem. (Unfortunately, that old trick is much harder in the computer age. But that is why we have a plotter.)

The ability to look at a problem in a whole new way is precisely what sets an architectural approach apart from that of the average home improvement builder or even a more sophisticated contractor, who will very competently build what the client asks for without looking beyond that request to discover the other exciting possibilities that most certainly are there.

The opportunity to hear that “Wow, I never would have thought of that” reaction starts very early in the design process. And our experience has shown us that as we enter any project, our first opportunity to explore begins at the front door.

*Karen Harris, AIA, is principal of Architecture Matters Inc., in Denver.*

## “Wow” Mom: Listening to Your Clients

*by Lisa Stacholy, AIA, NCARB*

**T**he best compliment you can ever receive from a client is a heartfelt “Thank you, this is exactly what we wanted.” Going one step beyond that is acknowledgement that you’ve done your job well and the space created will live on into the future.

We’ve always said that the hardest thing in life is to figure out what our clients really want. So a big part of my residential projects are the early discussions and interactions with the clients. I tell them it’s like the “telephone” game you played when you were little. We all talk about what is wanted and by the time the “message” gets back to the original sender (i.e., the client), we will be able to confirm if what we all *heard* is really what they all *said*, and if that is really what they *want*.

One such example was a small, two-bedroom addition and kitchen renovation to a small bungalow in Decatur, Ga. The house was well crafted, built in the 1940s, and had most of its original detailing in place, including mortise door latches with glass knobs. The owners’ parents were very involved in the project as well, providing insight and helping guide the owners. The goal was to produce a project that had the extra space needed, a more functional kitchen with easier access to the car-park area, and a plan for children in the future. That was a tall bill to fill with a modest budget.



A few crystallizing answers resulted from the owners’ answers to such questions as “Where do you put your car keys when you get home at the end of the day?” “What things do you have in your hands when you come through the door?” and “How much and what type of work will be done in the home office?” These folks wanted everything to have its place; they wanted the house to help dictate order;



they wanted to have space set aside for their future children to be a part of the daily living of the house but for all the “kid stuff” not to overrun the house; and the hardest part, they wanted the addition to blend with the original seamlessly.

All solutions were at hand. The kitchen was developed as a U-shape, with a 36-inch deep peninsula counter adjacent to the new side entry door which was perfect for the owner’s scrap booking and for guests to hang out while the owners were cooking. Opposite the peninsula we built two storage cabinets, segmented for the gym bags, briefcases, and yard toys. An entry to the new master suite, new bathroom, and new bedroom were also in this area. Two new openings were cut into the existing bedrooms; the now landlocked bedroom

### TIPS

## A Reminder of Something You Already Know

*By Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA,  
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

The “Wow” moment is about expectations. If you want to create “Wow” moments for your clients, think carefully about what their expectations are. It is not really necessary to become outlandish to create a “Wow” moment. It simply means doing the unexpected. For instance, try placing some standard element in an unusual orientation, placing a window not at the end of the hall but that you have to be at the end of the hall to see, having sources of light where the light itself cannot be seen, or placing a decoration or embellishment in a place where otherwise plain surfaces would normally be encountered—perhaps a tile panel inset into a wall or a piece of exotic hardwood as a short piece of custom trim.



became the home office, with floor-to-ceiling cabinetry and shelving; and we added a skylight (the entire existing portion of the house needed to a new roof so this was a no-brainer). All the areas opened onto a “larger-than-original” sized hallway—affectionately now called “the vestibule.” It is the perfect transition between old and new. It is also the right size for a baby swing or spinning seat, and mom or dad can still walk past with a laundry basket without having to shimmy between.

The oddities were the laundry area and having two doors into one of the original bedrooms. Then the owner’s father had the epiphany: What if the original door to the bedroom was made bigger and the washer and dryer could be there and accessed from the original hallway? The adjacent closet depth was precisely enough to fit both full size appliances in this area. It worked! Further, the owner has reported, now with two kids at home, having the laundry room relocated adjacent to the original bathroom is an ideal beyond her dreams.

When the project was complete, the owners had their first party. Many of their longtime friends looked around the house “ooing” and “aahing” at the result. The fun part was watching their guests cruise around, trying to figure out what was old and what was new. The vestibule was the value added to the project that puts it over the top in terms of “every area is usable,” which is so very important in smaller projects.

The best pat on the back, however, was when the new mom said, “Thanks, I love having the kids where I can see them. They’re out of the ‘danger zones,’ and Renny loves playing here.” Now that he has a little brother, I’m sure that would be doubly fun.

*Lisa Stacholy, AIA, NCARB, is founder and president of LKS Architects Inc. in Atlanta. She is also vice chair of the AIA Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community.*

## Hide Not Your Talents

By Laura Montllor, AIA

*“Hide not your talents,  
they for use were made.  
What’s a sundial in the  
shade?”*

—Benjamin Franklin

Let’s face it, as a group, we architects are talented (not to mention sexy). Architects are considered brilliant, creative, and magical problem-solvers. In books and on film, we are always heroic—think *The Fountainhead* and “*Towering Inferno*.” For the most part, we live up to this reputation. As people we are dynamic personas, artistic and persuasive, and have star quality—that “Wow” factor. I, like most small project practitioners, however, find getting the “Wow” factor into my buildings to be difficult.

As small project practitioners, we take on jobs that are commonplace assignments and perhaps less dynamic than “star” practices. My practice is 100 percent residential renovations. Most of my clients ask for similar programs: additions, new kitchens and family great rooms, and larger master bedroom/bathroom suites. It’s easy to get mind-numbing and repetitive about the designs. Still, I work hard to go past the quick and obvious solution and develop alternative schemes that add drama, are unexpected, and (it is hoped) beautiful. I talk to my clients and ask many questions about their dream house. I always work to incorporate elements of that dream into the final design.

In our portfolio, one project always gets a “Wow!” reaction from potential clients.



Shown here as before and after images, there is a dramatic difference between the run down one-bedroom bungalow and the final product. At my first meeting with the client she said, “I’ve always dreamed of a Victorian front porch but I guess I’ll never get one.” Far from the largest or most impressive house we’ve ever designed, this small Victorian always gets the “Wow!” reaction. It was featured on HGTV’s “Before & After” show and the homeowner has been one of our best sources of referrals.

After 18 years of practice, I am sure of one thing: you need the “Wow!” factor. Force yourself to keep inspired. I’ve had the following quote tacked above my drafting board for many years.

*“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.”*

*—Jack London (1876–1916)*

*Laura Montllor, AIA, is the owner of a two-person architecture firm in Port Washington, N.Y. The firm specializes in residential renovations. She has been an AIA Small Project Advisor for eight years and coordinates a monthly roundtable for AIA Long Island.*

## God and the Operable Windows

*By Camilo Parra, AIA*

**W**hen I arrived they were standing together, daughter, mother, and father, as if ready for their picture to be taken but not smiling. In the background was an empty lot surrounded by ditches and beside the lot was an old home.

Immediately the notion entered my mind that they did not like the area because they looked unhappy. First impressions can kill you in the real estate market.

After we introduced each other, I gave them a tour of three different townhouse models we were building. Then the father said, “You are God sent. I did not think we could find it but we did. We have seen every townhouse in Houston, and I told her one did not exist in which all the bathrooms had windows that open.” The mother was finally smiling and I knew I had just sold a townhouse. “Thank you, now we can stop looking,” the father said.

In this instance, being an architect who believes in operable windows for the bathrooms was critical. I have been developing townhouses in Houston for six years, and customer feedback is very important. Despite all the feedback, it is still difficult to surmise exactly what a homebuyer wants or what the magic formula is.



I recently gave up flat walls for textured drywall. For years, no texture was important to me—the clean wall, the modern look. But customers were actually asking for texture. They did not like the blemishes in the drywall. At an open house one Sunday, a realtor brought some clients to a townhouse where we had installed a corner fireplace. The fireplace was attractive in the middle of the white drywall. The realtor went straight to a blemish above the fireplace and said, “These finishes are awful. Let’s go.”

There appears to be a standard townhouse program in Houston. The program is influenced by the dimensions of the two-car garage and density requirements that allow for three units per lot. Simply put, the standard townhouse consists of the garage and one bedroom on the first floor; living, dining, and kitchen areas on the second floor; and master bedroom with second bedroom on the third floor. The overall area is determined by the price point.

The price point is the single most determining factor in whether a potential homebuyer will buy. So regardless of what the finishes are, what the design is, and where the utility room is, the price rules. Location and price go hand in hand. Good design, however, can also sell.

*Camilo Parra, AIA, is principal of Parra Design Group Ltd. in Houston.*

## A Little Bit More... For the Eighth Time

By Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA

The home shown here started as a small cape cod. There were at least seven additions put in place by various owners by the time I came to the project. The exterior materials varied as did the height and proportions of the wings. The front walls of the dwelling defined six different planes. The client asked me for two things: to add a pool building and to rework the exterior to make the home seem to be a single design instead of the mishmash of additions and adaptations that currently existed.

To help unify the design, the owner suggested adding a chimney at the southern side of the south wing. He thought a chimney for each section of the house would make it look more balanced. Unfortunately, the south side of the home is actually over a basement level garage and drive. There would be serious structural implications for complying with the request. He also asked that the building be

refaced in brick and stucco over existing surfaces to unify the façade and improve its street appeal.

My staff and I completed drawings of the existing building. We then built a study model to better look at the integration of the pool and its connecting stair tower. Site limitations at the rear were a serious concern. While determining a unifying element, we decided we needed to create balance and pseudosymmetry to the front façade. We decided to create cross-gabled bays whose frontal planes would match and whose height and form would draw sufficient attention to minimize the differences in length of the north and south wing. The north and south wings are having their roof configurations revised to create living space. This will allow their height to more closely match.

When the owner and his wife were shown the study model, they immediately decided the bays were the solution they had been seeking. This was their “Wow!” moment. They were so impressed with the outcome that when later calculations suggested a reduction in the scope of the project, mostly to keep the property tax

bill from getting out of hand, they choose to keep the bays. The pool and its connecting tower (seen in the study model) were deleted from the project. The bays were conceived as housing spiral staircases for access to the new living space. The owner has chosen to relocate the stairs to preserve the view of his spacious lawn and the boulevard beyond.

The image of the west elevation gives a sense of what this will look like when complete. The first floor walls are brick to the eave. The projecting bays have brick only to the first level windows. From that point up, it is stucco. The north and south gables will have brick on the first floor and stucco above. The rear is a combination of stucco and tile. The band of basket weave brick and tile on the north, west, and south sides ties the facades together. The tile on the rear is expected to match the tile insets on the front. Completion of the project is expected in late 2005 or early 2006.

*Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA, is an at-large member of the Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community Advisory Group. Until recently, he maintained a small practice in Ann Arbor, Mich.*

### TIPS

## Do Unto Others—Consultants and Contractors

By Karen Harris, AIA, Denver

I believe the way to get a consultant or contractor to say, “Wow, I wouldn’t have thought of that,” is to first establish the fact that we have thought at all. Early in the design and construction process, there needs to be some recognition that we are actually thinking when we draw. The burden of proof lies with us as architects, and we need to confirm it with excellent drawings and solid reasons for what is on those drawings.

By the same token, we need to acknowledge that few of us know everything, and that our consultants and contractors have a wealth of knowledge, expertise, skill, and problem-solving capabilities. If we can establishing a working relationship based on this mutual respect, exceptional solutions can be created, each party can acknowledge each other’s contributions, and each can say, “Wow, I never would have thought of that . . . alone.”

## Getting to “Wow!”

By Bud Dietrich, AIA

Every client desires to get the “Wow” factor. In fact, clients seem to expect it. Why else would they hire me instead of most contractors or design-build companies that abound in our area?

This lesson became apparent a few years ago when I was walking a new client, John, through a recently completed project. We



were walking through this project so John could see how we had resolved certain design issues that were of concern to him as well as previous clients. When we walked into the kitchen and breakfast room, John said, “Wow!” He then asked, “My house will have this kind of “Wow” factor, too, won’t it?”



I had to reassure John that his new home would also have the “Wow” factor. I had to remind him that his would be a different home with a different site and different requirements, so the “Wow” factor would be different but certainly there. Of course, John wanted to know where, how, and what would give him the “Wow” he wanted. As we developed the design over the next few months, I produced several drawings and models to assure John that his project would have all the “Wow” that he desired. After almost 24 months of design and construction, John’s house transformation is complete. By his own admission, John is delighted with the “Wow” factor.

Since this incident, I’ve focused on making sure my clients get their share of “Wow.” To do this requires that we explore their dreams and desires in addition to their needs and wants. We explore where their ideal home is and what they would do there. We explore in-depth what they like and dislike about their current living conditions. We have to explore every possibility of the existing house and site. And we have to be attuned to the possibilities that are before us. We shouldn’t rush the design process nor should we let it stagnate. We shouldn’t spend money like drunken sailors nor should we be so parsimonious that we loose out on possibilities. Like Goldilocks, we need to find what’s not too hot and too cold.

### TIPS

## Patience

By Karen Harris, AIA, Denver

My adult daughter called me one night to say, “Mom, you were right.” Knowing that I was right about so many things, I waited for elaboration. Indeed, I had given her some career advice years before that she discounted at the time but actually followed with great success.

I believe we often may have to be just as patient waiting to get that same affirmation in our professional endeavors. Our firm has for some time (often subversively) included as many universal design elements in projects as we possibly can. As our more mature clients age, our best affirmation may come not with a telephone call but, instead, with the fact they don’t even notice their environment is invisibly adapting to and supporting their changing needs.

Potential clients come to an architect expecting and wanting the “Wow” factor. We, as architects, should be accommodating and attempt to get them the “Wow” of their dreams.

*Bud Dietrich, AIA, is the owner of HFD Architects LLC in Deerfield, Ill. Though he has worked on projects across the United States and in Europe and Asia, the last few years have been the most rewarding and exciting with his focus solely on single-family residential projects.*

## BOOK REVIEW

# The Architect's Guide to Design-Build Services

The American Institute of Architects  
Design-Build Knowledge  
Community

By Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA

Can a small practitioner use the same method used for an \$80-million hospital on a \$350,000 home? The short answer is “probably so.” Getting to that answer really involves evaluating how your business is set up.

*The Architect's Guide to Design-Build Services* is really a collection of articles, essays, and informative white papers that address nearly every aspect of implementing design-build techniques on any size project. The book was written by a collection of experts who participate in the AIA Design-Build Knowledge Community. If you are interested in taking on design-build projects, I encourage you to contact the Design-Build Knowledge Community, [designbuild@aia.org](mailto:designbuild@aia.org).

The 14 chapters of the book cover a wide range of information for those familiar or unfamiliar with the process. Like the design process, it moves from the general to the specific and describes the different models of design-build methodology, including both the architect-led and the designer-led models. It also covers critical business issues with whole chapters devoted to insurance, financing, legal concerns, project management, licensing laws, and residential applications. While there is a

chapter on design-build use on government projects, it may not be relevant to small practitioners unless they are willing to team up with firms that have experience in carrying out government-funded work.

The biggest shortcoming of the book is that marketing efforts and their affect on your business structure and methodology are scattered throughout the chapters rather than collected into a single chapter of its own. Knowledge of the production methodology is of little use if there is no client to produce for. Relying on builders or others to bring in business does not lend itself to an architect-led process which, based on the book, is clearly preferable for most design professionals. Perhaps in a future edition of the book this will be addressed.

For the moment, if you are interested in a design-build methodology, you would do well to start by reading this book carefully. Its coverage of the different aspects of the process are more than sufficient for you to be able to create a design-build model for small projects in your firm that works for you. As is made clear in the book, it is not an overnight effort and should be carefully considered. Further, I suggest you plan to spend a significant amount of time examining your current and planned marketing efforts to determine what needs to be changed to incorporate design-build into your firm's business model. This may require other resources or the assistance of marketing professionals such the members of the Society of Marketing Professional Services (SMPS).

*Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA, is an at-large member of the Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community Advisory Group. Until recently, he maintained a small practice in Ann Arbor, Mich. This review is provided in response to SPP member*

*requests for information on the application of design-build methodologies to small projects.*

*The book, The Architect's Guide to Design-Build Services, can be obtained from the AIA bookstore, [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org) or 800-242-3837 (option #4). The Design-Build Knowledge Community Web page is [www.aia.org/db\\_default](http://www.aia.org/db_default). The SMPS has local chapters in most areas of the country. Local chapters can be reached through the SMPS national Web site, [www.smeps.org](http://www.smeps.org).*



## SMALL PROJECT DETAILS

It is indeed rare when an architect has a client who is so impressed with a result that the first reaction is a pause followed by the “Wow” expression. In my example, the “Wow” expression was actually, “Fantastic!” The client wanted the home to have a feeling of an old English manor. Fortunately, the opportunity to construct a 15-foot-high groin vault for the living room presented itself and the result was more than the client expected.

—Richard R. Rekau, AIA, NCARB  
Richard R. Rekau Architects PC  
Savannah, GA

## “WOW” in the Intern

By Amy M. Blankenstein

As an intern architect, I never had trouble with the creative part of architecture, i.e., the overall concepts, process, or design development that most academic institutions primarily focus on. Most of my career-oriented classes and studios had students believing that in order to be successful they had to be the next “great” architect with the craziest, flashiest world-changing designs.

With so much focus on “concept,” though, I thought my educational experience skimmed over the very important element of how to construct a building. Although we studied the basics of structure and construction, I felt ill-prepared when I eventually found myself in a prominent Atlanta firm staring at a computer screen trying to figure out how to put a building together. I had a general knowledge of what I was doing and coworkers who guided my struggle with wall sections, but I wished I had paid more attention on those very brief portions on structure and construction and a little less on the glamour of who designed the best building in the world.

Like most interns who jokingly refer to our own kind as “CAD monkeys,” I spent most of my time “chained” to my computer drafting while trying to understand what I was actually drawing. It wasn’t until I asked one of the partners of the firm if I could be more involved in site visits and meetings with engineers that they paired me with a very construction conscious architect who took my request to heart. Together we spent hours on the construction site following the superintendent around, asking questions, and wanting to know the most recent developments and problems. The superintendent happily toured us around the site many times, but probably cringed when he saw us coming. His efforts were recognized when I watched the wall sections that I agonized over become a reality. I was allowed to return to the site on a weekly basis in order to understand the process and order through which a building is constructed.

Fortunately for me, I have worked with wonderful people who have taken the time to explain in-depth and indulge my wish to be more involved during the construction contract administration phase. Thus, my “Wow” factor showed up, not when I saw the shiny finished product, but a little earlier when I finally saw the insides of the building—the insulation, wires, ducts, caulk, and glue—combined with more prominent elements of concrete and steel that brought together what I had previously only drawn on paper. This portion of my training has made subsequent projects flow quicker and more smoothly. I only hope that more employers understand that this kind of involvement is invaluable to the training of a young architect.

*Amy M. Blankenstein is an intern with LKS Architects Inc. in Dunwoody, Ga.*

## SOFTWARE REVIEW

### IGG Software’s iBiz and iBank

By Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA

Tracking time and expenses on a job and translating them into an invoice have always been difficult tasks for me. When I worked in larger organizations, I noticed there was widespread cheating. There was really no reliable way to keep track of time spent on different projects. I used Quicken and MYOB AccountEdge but I found them clunky and confusing. Recently, though, I came upon iBiz and iBank, courtesy of Apple Computers Made4Mac section.

IGG Software’s iBiz is an unusual program that manages project activities in a single screen. A side bar allows you to list clients. The upper right panel allows you to list clients’ projects. The lower panel allows you to track job events for selected projects. This format quickly allows you to manage multiple clients, multiple clients for that project, and multiple job events. Clients can be associated with Address Book entries to allow for a clean integration with the rest of your life. Project information includes a column that shows whether there is an outstanding amount to be paid or invoiced on the project. Job events can include retainers, fixed price services and timed services, quantity sales, and payments.

An information drawer allows for planning and estimating projects, tracking “to do” items and due dates, and keeping related files and project notes. The “to do” items can be linked to Apple’s iCal to allow it to show up on your calendar. The program comes in single-user and client and server configurations. This enables a small office

to allow multiple people to carry out different job events on the same project.

iBank is a simple accounting program that, again, mostly works with a single screen. The upper left panel allows for creating multiple accounts, including stocks and other investment accounts, petty cash, and checking. Transactions show in the right panel. The lower left shows a graphic analysis of accounting data. Using the tool bar, you can enter transactions and sub-transactions, have transactions memorized, and enter categories (budget accounts) for transactions. The program does not come with predefined categories, however. You may want to use an accounting book to give some initial order to your expenses, income, liability, and equity categories. Categories can be grouped; they can also

be created on the fly as you enter transactions. So you can simply sit down and get started. Better results occur with some planning, though.

The two programs are configured to work together. You can synchronize iBank transactions with iBiz. That allows iBiz to generate invoices which show payments made. You can also send iBiz events to iBank. This too allows for a slight reduction of redundancy. It must be done carefully though. The client names must match between the two.

The programs can be bought separately for \$24.99 (iBank v1.5) and \$29.99 (iBiz v2.4.6). They can also be purchased as a bundle for \$39.99. Free trial versions of both programs are available.

The integration with Mac OS X and its applications, the clean and spare interface, the simple but effective functionality, and low price merit a close look at these programs despite the sparse documentation. They clearly are designed for the small project practitioner, although larger offices could use them as well. Experience in management and accounting will allow you to get the most out of these programs. If you are ready to move your accounting from paper to Powermac and want to keep your investment low, these may be the answer for you.

*Louis B. Smith Jr., AIA, is an at-large member of the Small Project Practitioners Knowledge Community Advisory Group. Until recently, he maintained a small practice in Ann Arbor, Mich.*

## TIPS

### Reaching for the WOW

*By Lisa Stacholy, AIA, Atlanta*

I frequently employ intern architects, recent graduates, and college students. One of the biggest challenges I have is teaching “how to draw what you don’t see in a finished product.” We take field trips to some of our favorite general contractors’ other projects (in addition to our own field work). If we visit when a project is in the 40 percent to 60 percent complete stage, I find it most helpful for the interns.

As architects, we’ve been doing the detailing for a while and sometimes forget how to convey the idea of figuring out what is behind the finished product in order for an intern to detail it. We have some general contractor friends who really like showing off how they build what other architects draw. In addition, hearing objectively what works and doesn’t work well helps us all understand building methodology better.

Because these field trips are nonbillable time, we ask general contractors if we can

visit at lunch time—and bring lunch! The contractor likes showing off the latest challenge, there are less folks at the site so we don’t interfere with their work, and it’s a great “team building” exercise among our office staff. We’ve left these field trips many times saying, “Wow, now I know how we can better detail that window sill” or “Wow, I can’t believe I didn’t get it before; that detail was really a bear to build.”

### Skip an Unnecessary Fee; It Could Pay Off in the End

*Gary Schubert, Lenexa, KS*

I do quite a bit of land planning, and clients always ask for advice on what will fit on a site. The traditional approach would be to lay out the site in detail and, if the amount of building and parking coverage didn’t meet the client’s pro-forma needs, the project would die. My fees could range from \$1,000 to \$4,000 for a detailed layout. While this drives fees for me, I saw the developer spending money that might be avoided or reduced.

In just a few hours, I was able to gather past site planning projects and recap all of the critical data a developer needs. On an Excel spreadsheet, you can list site area, building area, building use/type, parking spaces, and detention area. Use the spreadsheet to calculate such data as how many square feet of land per parking space. From this you can recap key planning attributes on a one-page “cheat-sheet” and provide developers with a rough snapshot of how a site breaks down. What you may lose in initial fees by going to the trouble of laying things out, you make up for in being seen as an expert.

This also enables the architect to charge a pretty high hourly rate for the reduced time spent. Charging \$250 to \$300 per hour for an hour or two determining rough site data is better for the developer, and my expertise is valued at a higher rate than that of someone doing a drawing. I’d rather spend a day assessing several sites and get paid one-half of what could be earned in a week of traditional planning/drawing work. Then you can spend your time on more profitable tasks. Ultimately more opportunities are passed your way with more meaningful work and fees.

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