

MAGEE DESIGN, TAOS, NM.

The Design Process

How do we start?

Being involved in your property selection always helps, but if you already have one I like to evaluate it and understand what you most like about it and identify potential challenges as well as site driven design opportunities. I like to show clients my work both in images and in the real, as homes have a sense that can't always be captured in a photograph. These visits allow us to spend some time together so that we can size each other up and confirm that we are a good fit. If we intend to work together I have a design questionnaire that helps to bracket dreams against realities and set the framework for a budget and a project description all of which I use as a basis for my Design Agreement.

We start at a conceptual phase with broad strokes, a detailed site evaluation and very general building concepts. Sketches, collages, and some basic CAD studies are what are delivered. Conceptual Design and Schematic Design usually blend together, the strokes get smaller and begin to zero in on specifics, and a floor plan starts to evolve along with building elevations to support an emerging vertical presence.

The Design Development Phase does just that, we develop the design to the next level, we start talking about materials and finishes, and we get more detailed on the floor plan and elevations and begin cutting sections through the building to investigate how it will be built.

Construction Documents, this is the nuts and bolts of the project, by now we have designed the visual and tangible things and the rest is about foundations, framing details and other things that the average client doesn't usually care much about.

The Design Agreement

I have a short form agreement that outlines the project scope of work, the fees, and the terms and conditions. Everything I do is open book as comfort levels must be maintained at all points along the way; this is your home after all so we need to trust each other at every step of the way.

Fees

On new construction I work on a fixed fee and any agreed reimbursable expenses. Every project is different so the fees are negotiable and range from 6-8% of the total project cost. 90% of my clients ask me to continue with the project throughout construction to facilitate the design-build relationship. When this happens I charge an additional fee that we would negotiate depending on my level of involvement. Projects that require third party consulting for engineering or special systems are charged at cost.

When can we start?

I'm usually pretty busy so starting a project depends on timing; so I need to visit that question on a project by project basis. Signing my agreement and giving me a deposit gets you firmly on the schedule and usually by the time we have gotten this far the wheels have already begun to spin and a mental picture has already started to form.

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How long does design take?

6 months is a good average for design time on a typical single family home, but some do take longer. It's important to take the time that is needed to make sure it's right. Paper is one thing, concrete; well you do the math...

Under some circumstances things can be expedited and if that is the case we work that out before we come to an agreement for how things will work.

How often will we need to meet?

It all depends on the project, these days so much can be handled electronically that the need to meet face to face has diminished. In the beginning we might meet more often as we get the juices flowing but as the project develops we can transfer information via e-mail, fax and mail almost as easily as in person.

When do we choose our builder?

I prefer to keep that door open until we have developed a design and a relationship with each other. After we have a design that sticks and is on budget, we review the timeline and start looking for the right builder. It is a decision that is entirely up to the owner but since I have a relationship with a variety of builders I often know the right fit for the specific project. Builder-Designer-Client relationships are really important and I match people based on a handful of things and sometimes it takes a while to find the answers.

How long will it take to build my house?

A typical single family house without unique conditions usually takes 8 months. The primary variables are size, seasonal start times, and degree of difficulty and the site. A big house with many unique features might take a year to eighteen months.

What about current construction costs?

As of March 2010, there hasn't been a better time to build in several years. Material costs have come down, and builders are eager to get projects under contract. Below is the anatomy of a typical mid-range custom house built in Taos, NM.

| | |
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| Typical utility package (builders cost): | \$25,000 |
| 2,000 sq ft. home @ 250/sf (builders cost): | \$500,000 |
| 300 sq.ft. portals @ 125/sf (builders cost): | \$37,500 |
| 500 sq.ft. Garage @ 125/sf (builders cost): | \$50,000 |
| Subtotal: | \$612,000 |
| 15% Profit & Overhead | \$91,800 |
| 8% Gross receipts tax | \$56,304 |
| Grand total: | \$760,104 |

These are not hard and fast estimates but they set the stage for a preliminary budget conversation. Budgets are something that I take very seriously. It's my job to establish one and keep the design in line with it at all times. I provide project costing exercises along the way to ensure that the budget is always being considered. Most of the time a custom home is best built on a time and material basis or a negotiated bid, a number of little things often surface during construction so it's best to be prepared, rather than surprised of changes along the way. Every builder has their preferred method for how to contract a project but it ultimately has to work with your comfort level.

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Additional Considerations

- Financing can be a little tricky these days, I encourage people to allow at least 3 months to wrap-up that process, which means if you want to break ground in March we better get design finished by the first of the year. A preliminary appraisal set can jump start that process. It takes about 4-6 weeks to estimate a project and most loans require a signed contract with your builder.
- Make sure we identify any issues that require additional review before it's too late, those items include; locations within the historic districts or neighborhood associations, steep slope areas, land with a high water table or other design drivers.

More about Jed

Most of the time I'm a one man show, if I need help I usually subcontract drafting services, but normally I do it all. I find that the best way to manage quality is to do it myself. I have a nice spacious office with a big conference room for meetings and I welcome clients visiting from out of town to use the space for their own needs while they are here.

I love e-mail and it's how a lot of communicating happens but I caution my clients of the potential pitfalls of communicating in that mode because sometimes emotions get misread, so if there is something that needs a human element I encourage speaking directly and try to make myself available to that anytime that is reasonable. I'm a great communicator and a man of patience; and I base all of my design relationships on trust and transparency. I've never had a client relationship go bad even when we experience turbulence, we are in it together and that is part of the job. Some of my closest friends are people that I met across the drawing board.

I grew up in here in Taos in a design-build family, my father is a designer and my brother is a builder and I've been part of the trade since I was a kid. I know the local climate, traditions and subtle nature of Taos. I've worked both ends of the spectrum, from digging trenches as a young boy to project management of multi-million dollar projects. I have a BA in Architecture and have been working in the trade of Architecture-Engineering and Construction for over 20 years. In the end, houses are my thing, I like to work with people and designing a home is a relationship that goes beyond design creativity. Because of my extensive experience working on the jobsite I bring a pragmatic understanding about how a building is built from start to finish, resulting in better function, efficiency and budget management.

I look forward to working together.

Jed