

CHEESEBURGERS OR ARCHITECTS?

If you're not into food and don't care about your health, then eat cheeseburgers. If you appreciate restaurants with good food, wine and excellent service, you should be using an Architect! - Nov 2010



I've often found myself educating clients about what architects do. Not because they are uneducated, but because there seems to be common misconceptions about us. This is especially so with regards to our fees for houses and unit developments. People think we are expensive. They tend to ask "Why hire an architect when a draftsman can get the job done at a fraction of the cost?" It's a bit like comparing apples with potatoes. In the main, it takes an average of 10 years to become an architect compared to just a few years to become a draftsman. The architectural journey is long and varied, and cannot begin without first having achieved very high VCE scores to gain entry into an architectural degree. It then takes an average of 6 years to complete a Masters degree in Architecture.

A graduate must work under the supervision of a Registered Architect to gain sufficient experience across a broad range of areas before undergoing a final series of exams. This can take many years to gain sufficient experience to undergo registration exams. Only by passing these final exams can one be invited to register with the Architects Registration Board. Such essential learning combined with practical experience compared to that of a draftsman makes the two roles very different. So what is it?

After a decade of education and training, an architect will have accumulated a massive amount of intellectual property and design skills, yet that still does not seem to strengthen their position in the industry as being the first point of contact with regards to a new house. Why see an architect when there are so many build and construct companies offering design as a freebie?

I find the easiest way to explain it, is by comparing architects and draftsmen to restaurants. There are restaurants and there are fast food outlets. We know that a restaurant will always be significantly different from a fast food franchise with a drive through. If you think of the menu as a portfolio of design work, you may already know most of what is available at KFC or Pizza Hut for example. The food will generally be affordable, fast and the same wherever you go. A cheeseburger in McDonalds is comparable to a cheeseburger in Hungry Jacks. It's not surprising then, that all the cheaper houses in our suburbs look the same. Some houses

may have a little more sauce than others but they are all just cheap cheeseburgers.

Given the choice, most people would prefer a restaurant. Looking at the menu in restaurants can be an exciting experience as one drools over the possibilities. An excellent meal with excellent service leaves one feeling content and fulfilled. It takes a lot more to be a great chef than it does to flip a burger.

There is a lot of training, practice, and experience needed to become a competent chef. A great chef will also be highly skilled, creative and able to coordinate a team. Architects don't just draw lines. Like great chefs, there is a lot that happens back stage to make a masterpiece.

"AN ARCHITECT UNDERSTANDS THE FINE INGREDIENTS NEEDED TO MAKE A HOUSE FUNCTION PERFECTLY, LOOK GREAT WHILE AT THE SAME TIME BEING SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE TO THE ENVIRONMENT".

If you're into fast food then by all means go with a draftsman. But if you care about your health and want something better you have to use an architect. There is no comparison. It is justified that Architects charge the fees that they do. You can ask to pay for an extra slice of cheese in your burger but don't ever think of asking for a medium rare eye fillet steak with mushroom sauce in a Hungry Jacks. However, many of the best restaurants can accommodate almost any request.

What an Architect delivers is like a tailor made Italian suit. There's nothing better than a tailor made suit but it's hard to convince someone who's never tried one on. Sadly many people these days prefer to bypass the architect and pursue their dreams via a builder or draftsman – seeking a cheaper option, only to be disappointed with the end results.

I want to make it very clear that I'm not against draftsmen or fast food. There are times when I need to grab a quick bite, and a drive through serves its purpose well. Drafting is an important part of our industry. Let's just be clear on the distinction between a firm comprising of draftsmen and a firm with registered architects. I am aware of nurses who can do stitches but never would I assume a nurse to perform any kind of surgery. Why would anyone assume that good

design can be achieved without a competent architect? Looking at images from glossy magazines and getting a draftsman to emulate it is like trying to dance professionally after watching it on Television. The result would almost always be a very superficial interpretation - a cheap copy - even comedic. Architects are the only qualified professionals who understand buildings and our environment in a deeper overall sense.

“ARCHITECTS HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO CREATE A VISION FOR A CLIENT. THEY HAVE THEIR CLIENT’S BEST INTEREST AT HEART, AND ALWAYS LOOKING AT THE BIGGER PICTURE TO AVOID RISKS AND DANGEROUS SHORTCUTS”.

It’s not unusual for builders to focus on their bottom line and always opting for cheaper materials and easier building methods. Architects will always want to help their clients save costs but are able to do so whilst maintaining the integrity of the design.

In this industry you get what you pay for: so if it seems very cheap - it’s going to be a cheap product and you’ll end up paying for it later on somewhere down the track. I’ve

seen it happen over and over again with clients wishing they had an architect on board from the start. Architects are trained to keep projects on track with both budget and time. They are instrumental in avoiding costly mistakes and damage to our environment.

Unfortunately there will continue to be developers trying to squeeze as many cheeseburgers onto a block as possible for a quick buck. Such developments don’t encourage happy homes or beautiful neighbourhoods. As a result, we live in suburbs of fast food. Sadly we all know what happens when we eat too much fast food. As our arteries get clogged up with junk food, our built environment can also become increasingly intoxicated.

Ironically it is the architecturally designed houses that make record sale prices and profits. You may invest a bit more initially but the increase in value at the end of the day will be substantially more than any cheese-burger. So if you’re thinking of building anything - please do yourself and the world a favour by investing in an architect!

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