

Small Project Practitioners

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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

Getting It Built

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Building the Banque in Beirut

By Aram K. Yeretizian, Intl. Assoc. AIA

Owner: Banque du Liban et d'Outre Mer

Architect: Prime Design

Electro-mechanical: Pierre Dammous and Partners

Interior design: Dada and Partners

Project: Bank branch in Beirut, Lebanon

CONTEXT

The project is situated on a busy street in a suburb of Beirut. The program consists of 600 square meters of office space and two basement levels, each of 1,000 square meters, consisting of car parks and storage space.

DESIGN PROCESS

Functional and environmental parameters dictated the shape and form of the building. The introduction of the first vehicular ATM in Lebanon and the provision of adequate daylighting to the office spaces are main features of the design. Our office prepared all design drawings as well as the construction documents. Because it was a small project, the contract documents we prepared were brief and custom-made for this particular project. As we later found out, they were not as elaborate as they should have been.

CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

The owner analyzed the bids and awarded the contract to the contractor with the lowest bid without our advice and involvement. The owner's choice was based mainly on financial concerns, without taking execution capabilities into account. This issue was the cause of our problems during construction supervision because the project had fair-faced concrete components, which was not a strong asset of the contractor's experience.

Because Beirut still has no bylaws governing the procedures to be followed in a construction process as such, it is left to the owner's discretion to devise and adopt a construction strategy that tends to reduce the financial burden.

During construction, the contractor found loopholes in the general conditions that we had prepared. This would have been avoided had we used the general conditions of FIDIC (Fédération Internationale des Ingénieurs Conseil).

The contractor would short-circuit the contract's requirement that samples be presented for approval before execution. Although our office would issue site instructions requesting such samples, the owner would accept to

continue with the work due to time constraints. This created a precedent for the contractor by encouraging him to sacrifice other issues relating to quality and workmanship.

Disputes between the architect and the contractor caused significant delays in the construction schedule. Because of the owner's commitment to a completion deadline imposed by pertinent authorities and the consequent need to speed up progress, certain undesirable compromises were made, unfortunately at the expense of workmanship quality.

CONCLUSION

The transformation from concept to object is the combined responsibility of the owner, the architect, and the contractor in charge of construction. The synergy of the

three parties creates a platform for either success or failure of a project's execution, and we learned the following lessons from this project:

1. The contract documents should be comprehensive.
2. The competence and qualifications of a contractor should be compatible with the vision of the architect's design team.



View of the building from the main street

3. The skills of workmanship should correspond to the quality of the specified materials.
4. The owner and architect should establish and maintain constant coordination and communication or else a contractor may take advantage of any deficiency in this regard, to the detriment of the project.

The building as a final product is a satisfactory addition to the context, although it almost took twice the construction time estimated initially.

Aram K. Yeretizian, Intl. Assoc. AIA, is a partner in Prime Design, an architecture firm practicing in Lebanon and the Middle East. The firm advocates the integration of climatic and environmental parameters in architectural design.