Architecture Questions & Answers

Q1: What is a weakness you've noticed some architects have and that you don't have?

Ans: It's important to hire an architect who fits your company culture. By asking about weaknesses, you get insight into the candidate's values and priorities. What to look for in an answer:

- The whys of the weakness
- Fit with your company philosophy
- Genuine problem

A good example answer could be, "Unfortunately, some architects see certain projects as too simple for them -- a fast food restaurant, for example, that is slated to look the same as most of its chain brethren. I believe that each and every client deserves the best effort and that all projects can be fun."

Q2: What skill has served you best in your architecture career?

Ans: This question gives insight into what the candidate regards as their top skill. It is also a way to double-check that the candidate understands the essential skills for the position based on your job description. What to look for in an answer:

- Mention of the skills listed in your job description
- Logical answer
- Mention of other top skills candidate has

A strong answer might be, "I would have to say my organizational skills. Of course, I'm extremely proud of my creativity and my communication, but it is my organization that has enabled me to track and assess the many details of each project."

Q3: We have a house blueprint set up in AutoCAD. Is there anything you would do differently?

Ans: If your business needs its architect candidates to be proficient in a specific software program, such as AutoCAD, questions such as this one test their knowledge of the program and their technical ability. What to look for in an answer:

- Reasonably quick response
- Practical and helpful suggestions
- Understanding of essential errors your business flagged

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A strong example response: "Overall, it's a good start. I'd change a few things, though. The first thing I see is that there aren't materials assigned to assembly components. Also, the door style names could be more specific."

Q4: Which architect most influences your work or your work habits?

Ans: With this question, you have the opportunity to learn a bit about the candidate's background. You should also be able to find out more about the values the candidate possesses. What to look for in an answer:

- Deep knowledge of architectural figure(s)
- Why this person is significant
- The influence of this person

An example of a strong answer might be, "Norma Merrick Sklarek. As the first black woman to get a license in California and the first black woman to be elected to the American Institute of Architects, she's taught me a lot about perseverance. She kept giving 100 percent when firm after firm rejected her, and she eventually rose to the top to design the American embassy in Tokyo as well as LAX Terminal 1."

Q5: Tell me about one of your previous projects. What did you do to make it a success?

Ans: This question presents an opportunity for the candidate to discuss one of their projects and what made it successful. Moreover, it gives you more information on how the candidate comes across in soft skills that matter to your company, perhaps collaboration, organization or communication. What to look for in an answer:

- Understanding of the factors that contribute to project success
- Values that reflect those of your company
- How the candidate functions as part of a team

"The most important thing I did was to know my team. That enabled me to delegate tasks based on each team member's strengths while minimizing the influence of any weaknesses. Another essential thing was that I was on the same page with the clients. They wanted an environmentally friendly mall that would stand the test of time, and they were able and willing to pay for it."
Q6: How do you ensure that a project starts off properly?

Ans: Some people approach the beginning of a project differently than others. This discussion point lets your candidate open up about what he or she does early on to ensure success. What to look for in an answer:

- How a project gets started
- Coverage of the basics
- Curiosity

You might look for an answer like, "I'm about the logistics at that early stage. How will the sun, wind and water come into play? What are the legal property boundaries, and are there hills or other features that could be an asset or a hindrance? I also think about the permits I need and the timeline to get them. I'm also mentally assigning different team members to various aspects of the project."

Q7: How do you balance function with aesthetic appeal?

Ans: Some clients don't see eye to eye with architects on what is "beautiful" or what is "functional." You and your architects may not even agree on that either. So, this question gives you an idea of whether there could be future problems. What to look for in an answer:

- Example of aesthetics and function
- Why the method of combination makes sense
- Acknowledgment that client wishes may come first

A good answer might sound like, "Unless the clients demand otherwise, I aim for simplicity above all else -- think the iPhone. It's what passes the test of time. Don't throw in elaborate touches if they're not necessary, because they could be outdated in just five or 10 years."