



# architect interviews

In Fall 2008 Peter Cirillo of Habig & Cirillo, Middletown, NY, spoke to us about how architecture and construction is changing.

## **Trends**

The first important, clear trend is toward energy efficiency for both new construction and renovations. How an owner approaches it has to do with whether the perspective is more speculative and short term focused, or longer term, hold and operate focused. The longer timeframe of organizations like municipalities, churches, schools, and even non-profits makes them more energy conscious. This supports higher R-value insulation and more efficient HVAC equipment and lighting.

LEED principles encompass a lot of common sense ideas about energy efficiency, and have a larger goal of sustainable design. Whether to go for LEED certification is not always a clear decision for most owners. The initial cost of LEED certification being higher is a barrier that has to be overcome for most owners. The key benefit of LEED at this point is to get people to think the right way. Peter reports that incorporating some LEED principles improves the project.

The bidding atmosphere has changed. It used to be that everyone was busy and contractors put in bids and expected to have choices among jobs. They could afford to be “heavy handed.” Now bids are more carefully prepared to win them. While labor and materials haven’t gone down, Peter thinks the profit charged by contractors has gone down.

## **Successful Project Launch**

The kick-off meeting has to set the tone and agenda for how the project will run and what’s expected. There has to be strong teamwork among all parties. Peter recalls something Tom Brennan said at a contractor meeting for a public client that really impressed him about the right attitude to have: “I want the GC to think of me as a subcontractor.” For public jobs, there are usually multiple primes and Tom Brennan was the mechanical contract prime. It impressed Peter that Tom Brennan knew he was part of a team and that someone had to be in charge and that all of them had to work cooperatively and collaboratively.

## **Project Warning Signs**

Peter said that there are easy tests to apply during the project to see if there is trouble. One is to simply ask subs if they’ve been paid. If one says ‘no’, it’s a major red flag to investigate.

## **Keys to Success**

Peter says that some factors contribute to successful running of projects. One is the architect remaining involved throughout. While some clients may resist paying for this, it adds continuity and value for the owner. There are latent issues on most projects and the architect is valuable for dealing with these.

Another factor is thinking ahead and planning to phase in desirable features later. This can keep first costs affordable, and by planning for them, it’s possible for them to be added later. Examples are keeping alternative energy options like solar a future option by situating the building with this in mind.

*“The finest structures we build are relationships”*



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## **Thoughts about Picking a GC**

Peter recommends that the architect is familiar with all the GCs who get on his bidder list. He says he's familiar with them about "95% of the time." Exceptions may be public bids or when the owner brings in a contractor Peter hasn't worked with. Here is some of his perspective on picking a GC with more "on the ball." He recommends that you look into these things:

1. How well organized are they?
2. How good are they with paperwork and understanding drawings?
3. Do they keep good records of project meetings for follow up?
4. How well do they coordinate with subs?
5. Do they work in a team atmosphere?
6. What's their record with change orders?
7. What's their record for finishing on time?
8. Are they financially stable?

*"The finest structures we build are relationships"*