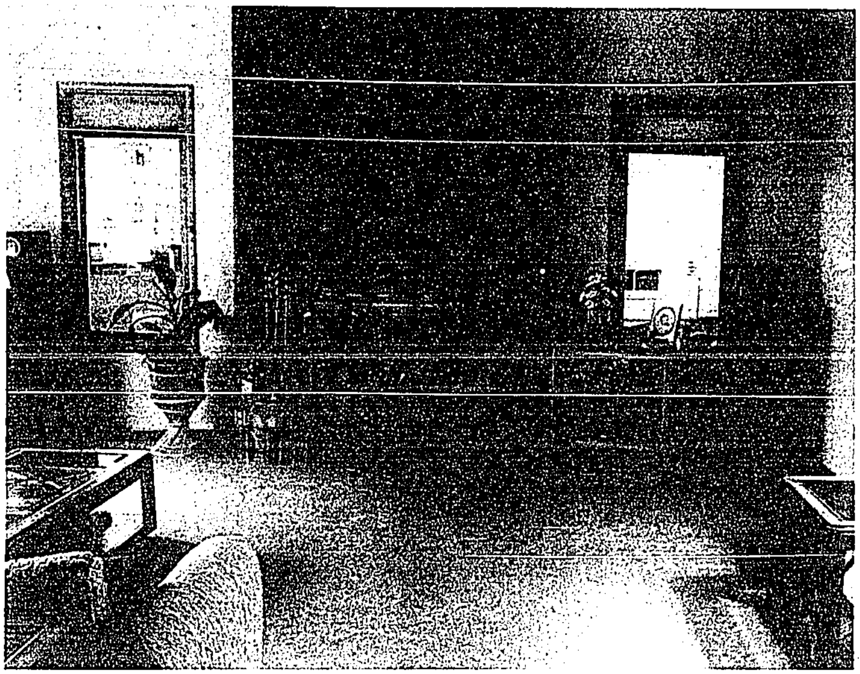


The brick wall and hearth add emphasis to the Lentinis' family room.

Shaping the dream

Continued from Page 1

dream house will be located. Ask the owners of custom-built houses you particularly like for the name of their architect.

Get a list of architects from the American Institute of Architects. The Detroit chapter is headed by Rae Dumke who can be reached at 965-4100. Ask for information about recent architectural design award winners in your area and set up appointments with architects to see photographs of their work.

McCurry also suggests homebuyers read architecture and home fashion magazines such as HOME and Architectural Digest, and architecture trade magazines such as ARCHITECTURE, Architectural Record and Progressive Architecture. These publications will not only help you identify architects whose work you like, but will help refine your understanding of current architectural styles.

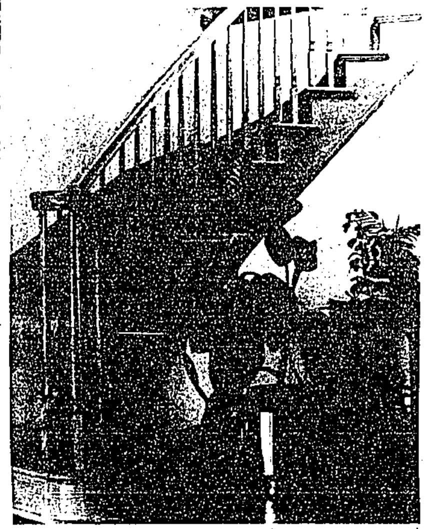
ONCE YOU HAVE chosen the top firms on your list (usually three to five), begin the formal interviews. Describe your dream to the architect. What does he or she see as the most important issues or considerations? Ask to see photographs of projects the architect has worked on that are comparable to yours in size and type. Ask for names of owners you can contact. Ask each architect to explain the specifics of the design and construction process and request to meet any other members of the design team who may be involved.

Don't ask for free drawings. Recognize that the architect is a professional who requires time and effort to develop sketches that adequately express your ideas.

Ask about compensation. Does the architecture firm want to be paid a percentage of construction costs? Or will payment be based on an hourly rate? Or are there other options? Get an estimate of anticipated total hours required to design and administer construction of your dream house.

Designing your dream house is a process that requires hundreds of decisions. To make it rewarding, take the time to find an architect you feel comfortable with, one who inspires confidence and generates excitement about the project.

Once you've done that, you've already laid the foundation on which your dream will be built.



This circular staircase accents the Lentinis' foyer.

House doesn't "suddenly appear'

By Nora Richter Greer
special writer

The finishes on all surfaces of the house need to be selected — from kitchen counters to bathroom floors to living room walls.

You've selected architect, design, builder and location. Now what?

"Don't expect your dream house to suddenly appear," said Don Lutes, an Oregon architect. "Most people who build houses do so once in a lifetime. All their inspirations have to be fulfilled in this one project. That requires an ongoing dialogue between architect and homeowner."

That dialogue will determine the success of your project. It's important to communicate effectively with your architect, from the initial sketches of your dream house to your choice of interior finishes.

First, sit down with the architect and discuss exactly what services will be needed. Basic services include sketches and construction documents but can also include supplemental services — landscape and interior design, for example. The services you and the architect agree upon will serve as the basis of the owner-architect agreement, the formal contract that spells out what both of you expect from the professional relationship.

STANDARD CONTRACT forms listing architectural services are available through the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Make sure you understand all items listed in the agreement.

The design process usually begins when the architect develops preliminary sketches of the interior and exterior of your dream house based on conversations about your needs and aspirations. From these free-hand drawings, you and the architect can discuss the design elements that work best for you. Is the porch large enough for entertaining? Should the master bedroom be closer to the stairs? Do you need an additional entrance to the kitchen from outside?

It is important you pay close attention to every detail. Once you've approved the design concept, the architect will use the sketches to prepare detailed construction documents the contractors will use to build dream house.

The contractor is usually hired once you've selected an architect. Some homeowners choose their own contractors; the architect often recommends contractors who have provided good service in the past. In either case, check references and inspect the contractors' current projects. By doing so, you'll be able to judge the quality of their workmanship from the laying of the foundation to the installation of interior moldings.

Meanwhile, you and the architect will be choosing interior finishes for your house. The finishes on all surfaces of the house need to be selected — from kitchen counters to bathroom floors to living room walls.

It's your business to be involved in each phase of the project. Design and budget decisions will have to be made jointly to keep the project on track. A key to success, Lutes said, is a strong working relationship.