

FINANCE AND COMMERCE

Business News

September 26, 2009

Association update: One floor at a time - an introduction to design-build

by Rob Flickinger, Design Build Institute of America, Guest Commentary

Guaranteed pricing, a single resource for design and construction, minimized claims and damages, and extended project warranties. Sound like the ideal construction project? Too good to be true, maybe? Take a closer look at those ancient Greek temples.

In the world's first great civilizations, monumental structures were built by master builders who used a time-honored tradition that works remarkably well, even with today's technology and materials. It's called design-build, and it's been accomplishing astonishing feats for centuries.

Think about the last time you had something built. Were you picking out tile before you even knew what the project would cost, much less who was going to build it? So you knew exactly what you wanted (or at least what you were going to get), but no idea what it would cost you, or how well it would turn out.

With the typical design-bid-build method, that's what you do — complete full design with a design team, typically led by an architect, right down to the cabinets and paint. Then you get the complete price, and start thinking about what you're willing to live without. Much later, after back-and-forth with the builder and designer — who might not even have known each other before your project started — you get the results you asked for ... but maybe not what you deserve.

With the design-build method, you work with a single team. Typically you work with the best elements of both a design firm and a construction company, each very familiar with the other, and both committed to completing your project on an agreed-upon budget.

You start the project with a simple discussion: What do you need the building to do? As the basics are uncovered — how big, how many rooms, where will it be, what structural materials are needed — the budget is also laid out. The estimate is based on a concept, and it sets the expectations for both parties, before any detailed drawings exist.

Still not sure if you want earth tones or pastels in the entry? That's OK; they'll start the excavation and get the foundation laid while you work through the details with the team. Take it one floor at a time. The team will even let you know if they can trim any costs on the way in order to make room for a few of those amenities you decide you can't live without when you're done shopping for light fixtures.

Separating the art of architecture and the science of construction may have seemed like a great idea during the industrial era, but more recently in the United States, construction in the public and private sectors are embracing what Europe and Japan have long shown to be effective. The design-build project delivery system is becoming the method of choice among owners and builders, and it's producing amazing results.

Rob Flickinger is the 2009 president of Design Build Institute of America — Upper Midwest Region. He is also a senior engineer/project manager at American Engineering Testing Inc.

Copyright 2009 Finance and Commerce All Rights Reserved
U.S. Trust Building Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55402 (612) 333-4244