

## Let 'Em See You Sweat



Architects struggle constantly with how to communicate to their clients the value of what they do. The quality of the work should settle the value argument on its own merits and yet that's seldom what happens. If your design solution is so stellar as to seem inevitable, you may have also made it appear too easy. And if it looks effortless, how do you properly charge for the very real time and labor it took you and your office to get it to that point? Maybe the answer is to let your clients see you sweat.

CCY Architects, based in Basalt, Colorado, pulls back the curtain for its clients, letting them see the rough edges, the riffs, and rifts of idea generation. For *Parti Shot* (page 82), the design team made a pilgrimage to the property their clients had earmarked for a new vacation home in the mountains, a 75-acre parcel accessible only by snowmobile in the winter months.

They spent the next few days brainstorming with the clients at their current home nearby. The clients knew the contours of the property extremely well, having owned it for 18 years. And they were adamant about protecting its natural beauty. In fact, they had already decided exactly where they wanted to build their new house—on the ridge of a subtle bowl backed by towering Engelmann spruce trees.

The clients' deep understanding of the site might have been intimidating to some firms. Already, CCY was coming to the project with an important portion of the value they bring—site selection—fully cooked. But principal John Cottle, FAIA, principal in charge Todd Kennedy, AIA, and project architect Jenny Trumble were undaunted. Theirs is a collaborative practice, not a top-down one, so they brought their process directly to the clients.

They conducted a full-blown charrette with everybody at the table arguing for and against each other's ideas—and coming up with new ones together. “We worked at their dining room table for three days,” John recalls. “I’m a firm believer that things get better when you work together and you question each other. Our clients said, ‘We love listening to you argue with each other.’”

This investment by all stakeholders really paid off later when the team discovered that the constrained site couldn't accommodate their clients' full wish list. Not only was the ridge tight, but everyone was committed to preserving 100 percent of the trees on site. “As we presented the things they asked for, we found the house didn't quite fit,” says John. “But they were active participants in getting rid of things they wanted or thought they needed.”

Sharing ownership of the ultimate goal can defuse the adversarial tension when unfortunate surprises arise. The design team doesn't have to play “dream crusher,” a role some architects feel forced to take with clients, because clients understand better what it takes to make those dreams come true. It isn't magic, it's value.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Claire Conroy'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

S. Claire Conroy  
Editor-in-Chief  
claire@SOLAbands.com