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# TERMINOLOGY

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## *Common Terms Used by Architects*

**Blueprints** is an archaic reference from an earlier time when an architect's original vellum or paper drawings were reproduced on photosensitive paper and developed with ammonia. Even though it has been well over fifty years since blueprints were dark blue sheets of paper with white lines, many architects and contractors continue to use this term or simply the term prints to refer to reproduced sets of the original drawings. Also, increasingly uncommon today are the results of a subsequent technology that produced blue lines on white paper. Reproductions are now commonly printed out on large printers and photocopiers as black lines on white paper.

**Contract documents** consist of the actual contract (agreement) between the owner and contractor for the construction of the project, the conditions for that agreement (sometimes these conditions are outlined in a separate document called the General Conditions), and the drawings and specifications. Detail drawings are even closer depictions of selected assemblies and parts, such as window sills or roof eaves. Drawings for very detailed trim pieces, like baseboards or decorative moldings, are sometimes drawn at full scale to clearly convey an architect's design intent.

**Drawings** can refer to the original documents or, synonymous with blueprints, to any reproductions. In our technologically advanced world of computer-aided drafting (CAD), an architect's original drawings often exist only as electronic files. The architect can reduce and enlarge the scale and "cut and paste" together a complete set of construction drawings. There are several types of drawings that architects combine to convey information to the contractor. Drawings employ various graphic keys and notations to weave the drawings together in a well-established format common in the construction industry. Drawings are commonly printed at scale as accurately scaled-down representations of a full-size design. Notations that identify the drawing and scale are now commonly placed directly below each drawing on a sheet.

**Elevation drawings** are straight-on views of either the exterior walls of the building (façade) or of selected interior walls. These drawings illustrate the locations of doors and windows and roofline configuration. Elevation drawings also give detailed information about wall finishes and decorative details.

**Floor plan drawings** are more detailed diagrammatic representations of each floor illustrating the size and relationship of the rooms and other spaces and including detailed dimensions. These drawings depict a horizontal slice through the building, and much like a CAT scan in medicine, illustrate the interior assemblies of the walls and other elements as cut sections as well. Typically, the "cut" is made several feet above the floor so that the windows and doors can be illustrated in relation to the plan. Floor plan drawings can indicate the floor finishes as well. Floor plan drawings or specially annotated electrical plan drawings also identify the locations for electrical receptacles, telephone and data ports, and the like.

**Foundation plan** drawings establish the locations for the foundations, or footings, and can include the floor plan for a basement, if any.

**Reflected ceiling plan** drawings are the mirror image of floor plan drawings (imagine lying on the floor and looking up at the ceiling). These drawings show detailed ceiling elements as well as the location of recessed and decorative lighting fixtures.

**Lighting plan** shows graphic lines tie a series of light fixtures together on a common circuit and connect them to a light switch. Take time to carefully "walk through" each of the spaces on the plans with your architect to get a clear understanding of how the furniture might be arranged and how you might live in the space. This visualization will help

you to consider whether the placement of light switches and receptacles is effective.

**Schedules** are detailed lists referenced to the drawings that specify finishes, materials, and products. A typical project might include schedules for room finishes; door, window, and other hardware; plumbing fixtures and fittings; and lighting fixtures.

**Specifications** are commonly bound into a booklet, sometimes called a Project Manual, which is separate from the larger drawings. However, in their most abbreviated form, the specifications can be printed together with the drawings. While the drawings convey information to the contractor about quantity, dimension, and location, the specifications spell out the details of the construction materials and the methods and techniques for installation. These documents can be so detailed as to identify every screw and nail for each application in the construction of the house by manufacturer and model number. Less detailed variants afford the contractor multiple choices that meet certain performance criteria.

**Section drawings** are more detailed views of horizontal or vertical slices through assemblies, such as footings, floors, walls, and roofs. They provide dimensions and identify the locations and relationships of building materials.

**Site plan drawings** establish the location of the building on the lot and frequently identify the property lines and the locations of utilities. These drawings also show driveways and other paved areas and include instructions for grading the land.