



You Don't Have a Target Yet

(Post 2 of 10 — From Aspiration to Alignment)

What happened in that project is not unusual. The problem's origins are much earlier than the proposal - when most projects still feel like they are moving in the right direction. In reality, though, a project design won't be on track until a client's values (how they want the home to feel, perform, and what they are willing to invest) have been clearly identified. Until that work is done, what exists is not a project, but an aspiration. Compelling, but unanchored.

Aspiration is a wonderful starting point. Clients bring images, past experiences, and language to convey what they have seen that they love and hope their project will accomplish. These expressions fuel the creative endeavor. In our experience, the work of understanding and distilling those values should take place between the client + contractor and client + design professional as a team. Each brings a different way of seeing the project, and when those perspectives are compared regularly, they begin to add depth and clarity to what is being pursued. Builders ask different questions than architects.

Before schematic design begins, client values should be thoughtfully considered, clarified, and tested against the constraint of dollars. An early expression of what a client is willing to invest is the single most important value under consideration, and it needs to be common knowledge among the team. It's one thing for a client to say they want a 2,500 SF new luxury home just outside Portland with several key architectural moments, a quiet and thermally efficient envelope, and creatively woven design details with special meaning. It's entirely different for them to say they want this for \$1M. A thoughtfully considered set of priorities, including financial investment, creates the tension that forces those values into a clear order. For example, is the client willing to relinquish the desire for an architecturally designed and constructed home to meet their expressed budget? Or can they increase their budget to \$2M in build costs plus design fees to better achieve their other stated values? You can imagine what happens if this conversation is delayed.

This only works when three parties are in conversation. The client expresses their partially formed wants, knowing their design and build teams will help fill in the details. The design team interprets those priorities creatively through form and space. The builder tests those ideas against what is buildable, how the work will be sequenced, and what it will cost. Each perspective brings something the others cannot. Without early, triangulated values discovery, there are no meaningful targets. And without these, there is no reliable way to determine whether a project should proceed—or whether the team is the right one to deliver what is being asked.

Without targets that reflect value under constraint, every project design remains aspirational, a state that carries risk.