



How a Project Takes Shape

(Post 3 of 10 — From Aspiration to Alignment)

Most projects begin with enthusiasm: ideas about how the house should feel, frustrations clients want to solve, and what they want life in the home to be like. Those instincts matter, but they need definition.

A thoughtful project emerges through a guided process in which those aspirations are examined, the values beneath them identified, and both are tested against constraints like financial investment and time. By values, we mean everything from appeal, durability, and indoor air quality to where a client wants to spend money. In practice, this work happens in preconstruction, where the client, design team, and builder define the project together.

In preconstruction, client priorities are explored. The design professional begins translating the project's values into the shape of the home (layout, assemblies, materials, systems, detailing, and construction documents) in direct relationship to cost constraints. The builder consults for feasibility and gut-checks cost and constructability. A design phase untethered from what a client is willing to invest will consistently produce aspirational plans. When a client falls in love with concepts that exceed that investment, a fissure opens between aspiration and financial reality. Left unaddressed, that fissure erodes the project's viability. What is designed must remain grounded in what the client is ready to invest.

This work is iterative and pressure-tested. As decisions are made and plans developed, each party remains responsible for recognizing when the project begins to drift from agreed-upon values and calling it out. The team can then determine whether the client's values have shifted or the project has moved away from them. Drift cannot be absorbed quietly. Changes to values directly affect cost, which in turn constrains all other values. Regular reexamination is necessary because sometimes the project drifts while the values remain stable, and other times the client's priorities change as the implications of the work become clearer.

Sometimes that means increasing investment to preserve values that become more important over time. Sometimes it means reducing scope or phasing the work. What matters is that these shifts are made intentionally. As values are tested, the project takes on sharper definition. Some priorities hold while others change or fall away. It is the process by which a viable target is established—one that reflects both what the client wants and is willing to pay for.

At times, the team faces a critical question: should the project proceed as imagined? If the answer is yes, the work moves forward with alignment. If no, the clarity is equally valuable. The client may reshape the project or determine it is not viable as conceived. In every case, the aim is the same: that these decisions are made before time, energy, and capital have been committed to a direction the client is no longer willing or able to carry forward.