

# John Kirk Wilson

Customer Success Story

Autodesk Architectural Desktop



## Small Firm, Big Designs

How Autodesk® Architectural Desktop helps one practice realise its ideas

*“...we are now looking at larger commercial projects as well as developing our residential portfolio. The way ADT has increased our productivity has played a key role in this.”*

***“Not so long ago, if many people wanted a house or extension built they would just have asked a local builder. Now this type of client is far more sophisticated,” says architect John Kirk Wilson. “They are much better informed about architecture and want to be involved in the design process.”***

The John Kirk Wilson practice is typical of a new breed of small architectural firms that are using 3D modelling to work more closely with clients. In doing so, they are producing designs that are creative and exciting, make the most of their surroundings and reflect more directly the aspirations of their owners. And, as a result, they are attracting a growing number of clients at the top end of the housing market wanting either a new individually-designed home or to substantially extend or renovate their existing one.

At the heart of this new approach is Autodesk Architectural Desktop (ADT). Wilson has used the software since he set up the practice two years ago and says that it has played a key role in his success. *“I now have three architects and an interior designer – and we are now looking at larger commercial projects as well as developing our residential portfolio.”*

*“The way ADT has increased our productivity has played a key role in this,” he says.*

### High ideals

Wilson’s practice is based in Farnham, Surrey, a town known for its Georgian buildings and also for the work of much later architects such as Lutyens and Harold Falkner. So could it be that his clients are generally more aware than most of good design?

Wilson thinks not. *“It’s a major trend. We focus on the domestic market and have found that people are more confident about what they want these days – in some ways, thanks to TV programmes such as Channel 4’s Grand Designs.”*

*“Not only do programmes such as this show ordinary people that they can have the houses they want – but they also feature the latest visualisation technology with virtual models and walk throughs. Clients begin to expect that you can do these things too,” he says.*

*“Also because of high house prices they are prepared to spend large sums of money on improving and extending their homes and so want to get the best from their investment.”*

Wilson himself first used ADT in his first job after college.

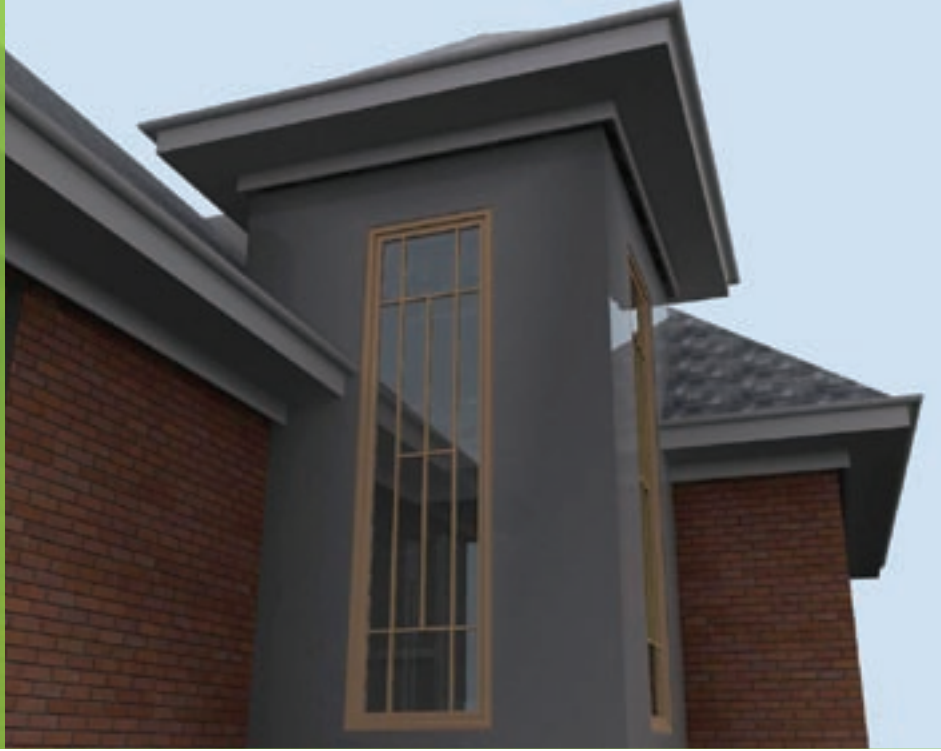
When he set up by himself he began working with Autodesk reseller Universal CAD – and came to highly appreciate their support and knowledge over the years. *“They showed me the latest version of ADT and how to maximise productivity using 3D models. From a designer’s point of view it was ideal as you can always get a view of the whole building, even if it is only in wireframe.”*

However, as time has passed, he has discovered that the impact a 3D model has on the customer is one of the most valuable benefits of the software.

*“Plan drawings don’t mean very much to most clients. They find them difficult to interpret and they don’t fire the imagination.”*

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*“With the first design, we realised that at certain times of the day – and earlier than we had expected - the back of the house was completely shaded. So we were able to alter the shape of the house so that it got as much sun as possible throughout the day.”*

John Kirk Wilson, The John Kirk Wilson practice.



*“On the other hand, if you can show them a 3D model, they can see immediately what you have in mind. For a designer it has the advantage that if you have an idea that’s, say, a little bit different they can actually see what you are talking about.”*

*“You can reassure them that it’s not outrageous and complex, and that it’s going to look good. Otherwise they will naturally tend to go down a more conservative route. This way, they end up with a far more interesting design – resulting in a happier customer and a much more satisfying project for us too.”*

Also, having a 3D model makes it easier to help realise a client’s own ideas and experiment with design alternatives. Consequently, the process becomes a two-way operation.

Wilson says that not only are his clients now more knowledgeable about what they want – but they are also far more aware of the immediate surroundings. For example, they are interested in the relationship between the inside and outside environment.

*“Increasingly, the garden becomes a fundamental part of the whole design. People are also very keen these days to make the most of natural light and we like to show them how views through the house will work.”*

To illustrate this he points to one specific project for a large new house on an awkward site. The ground sloped steeply towards the south-west and the building had to be at the front end of this. *“Using ADT we were able to create a model and then do a 3D shadow study within it.*

*“Then without very much extra work and using VIZ Render which is part of ADT, we were able to produce 3D animations and videos with walkthroughs showing the shadows. With the first design, we realised that at certain times of the day – and earlier than we had expected - the back of the house was completely shaded. So we were able to alter the shape of the house so that it got as much sun as possible throughout the day.*

*“The whole process had been very effective. And, importantly, the client was very happy.”*

Of course what an architect and a client wants is not always what the planners have in mind. But Wilson believes that, if anything, using ADT has made the process of getting permission more simple.

*“Undoubtedly, it has helped planning. Again using the VIZ Render facility we are able to produce photo-match renderings so we can do photo montages showing the site before and after. Again that’s all using exactly the same model – it makes it extremely easy.”*

However, doesn’t this mean more time spent creating visualisations and getting each project just right? Wilson believes the opposite is true.

*“The way ADT has increased our productivity is superb. We find that the rendered model can actually be fairly basic. From this, we can pull off elevations and sections that we know are up-to-date and current, almost instantly.*

*“Then it is easy to embellish these using straight AutoCAD which is part of the ADT software – rather than trying to get all that detail into the model.”*

Because the software speeds up the process, Wilson is now considering returning to do more commercial work. *“Although we are only a small practice, ADT enables us to be very competitive.*

*“For example, what I think is particularly useful for a small office is the way that it organises drawings and the huge detailing database is linked to NBS clauses. As we subscribe to NBS Building we are able to produce fully co-ordinated production information with automatic audit trails. That’s a huge time-saver.”*

David Shepherd of Universal CAD agrees with Wilson that the market is becoming more informed and demanding – and this is leading to a gradual migration to solutions such as ADT among smaller firms.

*“ADT is sometimes thought of as the tool for larger practices designing big public buildings such as schools or blocks of flats. However, here’s an example of a small firm that has really been able to grow its business through this approach.”*

*“It enables a real interactive process – encouraging the participation of the client but still enabling the architect to retain the integrity of the design. After all, it has been known for clients to spend up to half a million pounds just on an extension.*

*“If you are spending that amount of money, you really want to see what you are getting first.”*

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