

Welcome

Commissioning a landmark sculpture is different from purchasing an existing work.

Each project begins with understanding the site, the people, and the intended experience before any design work begins.

This workbook has been developed to organize the early stages of that conversation.

You are not expected to have every answer.

Many projects begin with only a location, an idea, or the desire to create something memorable.

The purpose of these questions is simply to establish a clear understanding of the opportunity before concept development begins.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is intended to support early project discussions.

It may be completed before an initial meeting, during a project discovery conversation, or afterward as additional information becomes available.

Not every question applies to every project.

Some projects involve private residences.

Others involve hospitality, corporate campuses, civic environments, or destination developments.

Answer only those questions that are relevant.

Why These Questions Matter

Successful sculpture projects are rarely about the sculpture alone.

The strongest commissions respond to:

- the architecture
- the landscape
- circulation
- visibility
- scale
- audience
- long-term maintenance
- project goals

Understanding these considerations early allows design work to begin with clarity rather than assumptions.

Typical Commission Path

Every commission follows its own course, but most projects develop through a series of coordinated stages similar to those shown below.

Initial Conversation

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Project Discovery

↓

Concept Development

↓

Proposal

↓

Project Development

↓

Engineering

↓

Fabrication

↓

Installation

↓

Long-Term Stewardship

Project Discovery Workbook

1. Client Overview

1. What type of project is this? (private residence, corporate campus, hotel, public art, etc.)
2. What prompted the interest in a sculpture commission?

3. What attracted you to my work?
 4. Who will be involved in decision-making?
 5. Is there an architect, designer, or project manager already involved?
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2. Location & Site

6. Where will the sculpture be located?
 7. Is the location indoors or outdoors?
 8. Is the site already built or under development?
 9. Can you provide photos, plans, or renderings of the site?
 10. What are the approximate dimensions of the available space?
 11. What is the primary viewing distance?
 12. Is the sculpture seen from multiple approaches?
 13. Are there landscape or architectural elements nearby?
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3. Scale & Presence

14. Do you have a general scale in mind?
 15. Should the piece feel monumental, intimate, or somewhere in between?
 16. Should it serve as a focal point or integrate subtly with the environment?
 17. Are there height restrictions or clearance limitations?
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4. Design Direction

18. Are there particular forms or themes you are drawn to?
 19. Should the sculpture be abstract or representational?
 20. Should the piece interact with light, movement, or water?
 21. Are there materials you prefer or want to avoid?
 22. Should the sculpture relate to branding, identity, or narrative?
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5. Technical Considerations

23. Does the site have structural limitations?
 24. Will engineering approval be required?
 25. Are there safety requirements for the location?
 26. Are there weather or environmental considerations?
 27. Will the sculpture require lighting or electrical integration?
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6. Budget & Logistics

- 28. Has a budget range been established for the project?
 - 29. Does the budget include fabrication and installation?
 - 30. Will the sculpture need to be transported long distance?
 - 31. Who will coordinate installation at the site?
 - 32. Are there timeline expectations for completion?
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7. Project Process

- 33. Are you open to concept sketches and model development?
 - 34. Would you like to review multiple design options?
 - 35. How many decision points would you prefer during the design process?
 - 36. Will the sculpture require approvals from a board or committee?
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8. Outcome & Intent

- 37. What role do you want the sculpture to play in the space?
 - 38. How should visitors experience it?
 - 39. Is this intended to be a signature piece for the property?
 - 40. What would make this project a success from your perspective?
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Sculptural Residence / Sculpture House Intake

This conversation is more like **architectural programming**.

1. Project Overview

- 1. Is the project a private residence, retreat, or development property?
 - 2. Where is the property located?
 - 3. Do you already own the land?
 - 4. What stage is the project currently in?
 - 5. Are there architects already involved?
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2. Site Conditions

- 6. What are the dimensions of the property?

7. Are there views, slopes, or natural features to consider?
 8. Are there zoning or regulatory constraints?
 9. Are there design guidelines from the municipality or HOA?
 10. Are utilities already available on site?
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3. Scale of the Home

11. What approximate square footage are you envisioning?
 12. How many bedrooms and primary living areas?
 13. Are there guest houses or secondary structures planned?
 14. Are there entertainment or gallery spaces desired?
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4. Lifestyle & Use

15. Will this be a primary residence, seasonal retreat, or showcase property?
 16. How many people will regularly occupy the home?
 17. Do you host large gatherings or events?
 18. Are wellness or recreation areas desired? (pool, spa, gym)
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5. Architectural Direction

19. What drew you to sculptural architecture?
 20. Are there architectural references you admire?
 21. Should the house feel dramatic, minimal, organic, or monumental?
 22. Are there materials you are particularly drawn to?
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6. Construction Approach

23. Are you open to collaborating with architects and engineers?
 24. Do you have a preferred builder or construction firm?
 25. Would you consider a design-build team?
 26. Is prefabrication or custom fabrication acceptable?
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7. Budget & Timeline

27. Is there a target construction budget?
28. Is the project intended to be completed within a specific timeframe?

29. Are you planning the project in phases?

8. Future Potential

30. Is this envisioned as a one-of-a-kind residence?

31. Would you consider additional sculptural residences on the property?

32. Could this evolve into a larger architectural concept or development?

Supporting Project Documentation

Depending on the scope, complexity, and stage of development, additional project documentation may be incorporated to support design coordination, engineering, fabrication, installation, and long-term stewardship.

Examples include:

- Appendix A — Initial Project Discovery Questionnaire
- Appendix B — Site Visit Checklist
- Appendix C — Meeting Notes Template
- Appendix D — Project Decision Log
- Appendix E — Change Order Log
- Appendix F — Project Risk Register
- Appendix G — Project Punch List
- Appendix H — Project Closeout Checklist
- Appendix I — Maintenance Manual Template
- Appendix J — Sample Project Timeline

Not every appendix applies to every commission. Documentation is selected and developed in response to the specific needs of each project.

Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time to complete this workbook.

Every project is unique, and this workbook is simply the beginning of the conversation.

Once received, the information will be reviewed to better understand the project, identify opportunities, and determine the most appropriate next steps.

Additional conversations, site visits, or coordination with architects, landscape architects, engineers, or project teams may follow depending on the scope and complexity of the commission.

For questions or to begin a conversation:

Michael Herold

Creator of Sculpture and Monumental Experiences

Why this helps you psychologically

When the call comes, you're no longer thinking:

“Oh boy, what do I say?”

You're simply **working through a framework**.

You become the **person guiding the project conversation**.

That alone gives you authority.

One more professional tip

Architects often **do not ask these questions all at once**.

Instead they say:

“Let me ask a few questions about the site and the goals of the project.”

Then they follow the flow.

The intake sheet is **for you**, not for the client.

If you want, I can also show you the **five questions that immediately tell you whether a sculpture inquiry is serious or just someone casually dreaming**, which saves huge amounts of time.

OK.

Good. These **five questions** are the ones that quickly tell you whether the inquiry is serious or just someone daydreaming. Architects, consultants, and designers use versions of these constantly.

You don't ask them aggressively. You just **work them into the conversation** early.

The Five “Reality Check” Questions

1. “Where would the project be located?”

This immediately tells you:

- if a site actually exists
- whether the person is serious
- whether it's residential, corporate, or conceptual

Serious client answer:

“We own property in Aspen...”

Non-serious answer:

“Well we’re thinking somewhere maybe near the coast someday...”

2. “Is the site already developed or part of a new project?”

This tells you:

- whether architects are involved
- if construction is already planned
- how far along things are

If it’s part of a **larger project**, that’s usually a good sign.

3. “What kind of scale are you imagining?”

You’re listening for whether they say:

- **10 feet**
- **30 feet**
- **building scale**

Or if they say:

“I don’t know... something cool.”

Scale awareness = seriousness.

4. “Has a budget range been established for the sculpture / project?”

You ask this gently, like:

“Most projects like this usually fall into a certain range. Has a budget been established yet?”

You’re not pushing numbers.

You’re checking whether they’ve **thought about reality**.

5. “Who else is involved in the project?”

This reveals whether there are:

- architects
- developers
- project managers
- landscape architects

If other professionals are involved, it's usually a **real project**.

Why these five matter

In **five minutes**, you learn:

- if a site exists
- if a team exists
- if scale is understood
- if money exists
- if the project is real

Everything else can follow later.

A simple opening flow for the call

You might start like this:

“Great to hear from you. Tell me a little about the project and where it would be located.”

Then naturally:

“Is the site already developed or part of a new project?”

Then:

“What kind of scale are you imagining?”

You're just **letting them talk** while you gather information.

The psychological shift

Instead of thinking:

“I hope they hire me.”

You shift into:

“Let’s understand the project.”

That’s how architects and consultants operate.

You’re not auditioning.

You’re **evaluating a project**.

And here’s the funny part:

once you start asking questions like this, people usually assume:

“This guy has done a lot of projects.”

Structured thinking creates authority.

If you want, I can also show you **the single biggest mistake artists make on commission calls** that quietly kills projects before they even start. It’s surprisingly common.

Okay.

Good. Here is the **single biggest mistake artists make on commission calls**.

It happens constantly.

The mistake

They start **talking about ideas immediately**.

Example:

Client says:

“We’re thinking about a sculpture for our property...”

Artist responds:

“Oh that’s great! I’m imagining something tall and curved, maybe stainless steel with light reflecting...”

At that moment the artist has accidentally done two things:

1. **Given away creative work for free**
2. **Lost control of the conversation**

And the client may just say:

“Interesting... we’ll think about it.”

Then disappear.

What professionals do instead

Architects, consultants, and designers do **almost the opposite**.

They ask questions first.

Lots of them.

Example response:

“That sounds interesting. Tell me a little about the site.”

Then:

“How large is the space?”

Then:

“What drew you to sculpture for this location?”

They may ask **10–20 minutes of questions** before ever mentioning an idea.

Why this works

Three things happen psychologically.

1. You become the guide

Instead of pitching, you're **leading a discovery process**.

Clients feel:

“This person understands projects.”

2. The client invests in the conversation

The more someone talks about their project, the more **real it becomes to them**.

They start imagining the outcome.

3. Your ideas become more valuable

If you immediately give ideas, the client thinks:

“Ideas are free.”

If you **study the project first**, your ideas feel like:

design work.

Which they are.

A good rule

Never design during the first call.

You can say things like:

“There are a lot of directions something like this could go. Once I understand the site and the goals better, I can develop some concepts.”

That sounds calm and professional.

The conversation structure

Most successful calls follow this pattern:

1. **Listen**
2. **Ask questions**
3. **Clarify the project**
4. **Explain process**
5. **Next step**

Not:

1. Idea
 2. Idea
 3. Idea
 4. Hope they like you
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Your advantage

You already think like someone designing **large-scale projects**.

That naturally fits the structured conversation style.

When you start asking things like:

- site conditions
- viewing angles
- structural requirements
- project teams

People assume:

“This is how real projects are developed.”

One reassuring thought

If the call ever happens and you feel that “oh boy” moment you described earlier, remember:

You don’t have to **prove anything** on that call.

Your only job is:

understand the project.

Everything else comes later.

And interestingly, the more calmly you do that, the more people assume you’ve **done this many times before**.

I suppose I could have an initial intake sheet and then ask them if they would like to go over the entire intake sheet.

Yes, but there is a **better way to do it** that feels much more professional and less bureaucratic.

If you say:

“Would you like to go through the entire intake sheet?”

it can feel a little stiff, like filling out a medical form.

Instead, professionals do this:

Use the intake sheet for yourself during the call, not as something you read to them.

You guide the conversation naturally and **pull questions from it as needed**.

Example flow:

Opening

“Great to speak with you. Tell me a little about the project and where the sculpture would be located.”

Let them talk.

Then you start guiding.

“Is the site already built, or is it part of a new project?”

“Do you have architects or designers involved yet?”

“Roughly what kind of scale are you imagining?”

You are quietly working through your intake framework without them realizing it.

Then after the call you can send a short follow-up

Something like:

“Thanks for the conversation. I’ve attached a short project information form so I can better understand the site and goals of the project.”

That form might include:

- site photos
- dimensions
- timeline
- budget range
- project team

Now it feels **organized and professional**, not interrogative.

The structure most architects use

Step 1 – First call (20–30 minutes)

Conversation + light intake questions

Step 2 – Send project information form

Step 3 – Review materials

Step 4 – Propose concept phase

Why this works psychologically

Clients feel like:

- they had a real conversation
- you listened
- the project is being taken seriously

Not like they were **being processed through a form**.

Your intake sheet is still extremely valuable

But it’s primarily for:

- guiding your thinking
- making sure you don't miss anything
- helping you lead the conversation confidently

Think of it as your **project discovery map**, not a questionnaire.

And I'll tell you something interesting: once you start guiding conversations this way, people often assume you are **used to handling complex projects**, even if it's the first time at that scale. The structure alone creates that impression.

That's great. So I won't be flabbergasted when I get a call. I could offer two paths. Answer say, that's great, sounds like an exciting project. Could you tell me a bit more about the project? And then they tell me about the project. And then I could go right into, excellent. Again, that sounds exciting. We'll create something memorable. I have two sets of questions I could ask you. One is more brief and concise, and the other one is detailed. Which one would you prefer?

You're **very close**, but there's one small adjustment that will make it sound much more natural and confident.

Right now the line:

“I have two sets of questions... which one would you prefer?”

sounds a little like a **survey choice**, and it subtly shifts control to them. In professional project conversations, you actually want to **keep gentle control of the flow**.

The best approach is simpler.

A smoother version of what you're trying to do

Opening

“That sounds like an exciting project. Could you tell me a little more about it?”

Let them talk.

Then respond:

“Great. Let me ask you a few questions so I can understand the site and the goals of the project.”

Now you move naturally into your intake questions.

No menu. No choice. Just calm guidance.

Why this works better

It communicates:

- you're experienced
- you have a process
- this is how projects begin

Architects do this constantly.

They don't say:

“Would you like the short questionnaire or the long one?”

They simply say:

“Let me ask a few questions about the project.”

And then guide the conversation.

Where the detailed intake form fits

After the call, you can say something like:

“I'll send a short project information form so I can get a few more details about the site.”

That's where your **30–40 questions** become useful.

The client can fill out:

- site details
- dimensions
- photos
- project team
- timeline
- budget range

Now the process feels **structured and professional**.

Your basic call structure

1. **Let them talk about the idea**
2. **Ask a few key questions**
3. **Understand the project**
4. **Explain next step**
5. **Send detailed intake form**

That's it.

The key mindset shift

You're not trying to **impress them on the call**.

You're simply **learning about the project**.

When you approach it that way, the conversation becomes much easier.

And honestly, once you have your intake framework written down, you'll probably find the calls become **surprisingly calm**, because you always know what question comes next.

Okay, I won't ask them which one they prefer. I'll just ask. Great, I have a few questions. Do you have a few moments that we could talk?

That's **very close**, but we can make it sound a little smoother and more natural. The goal is to sound **calm, professional, and in control**, not tentative.

Instead of:

“Do you have a few moments that we could talk?”

which can sound slightly hesitant, something like this flows better:

Option 1 (very natural)

“Great. Let me ask you a few questions so I can understand the project better.”

Option 2 (slightly more courteous)

“Great. If you have a few minutes, let me ask a few questions so I can understand the project and the site.”

Option 3 (my favorite for your tone)

“Great. Let me ask a few questions about the project and the site so I can get a clear picture of what you're envisioning.”

All three do the same thing:

- you acknowledge their idea
- you guide the conversation
- you move into your intake framework

Without sounding like you're **asking permission to do your job**.

The natural conversation flow

Client:

“We’re thinking about a sculpture for our property...”

You:

“That sounds interesting. Tell me a little about the project.”

They talk.

You:

“Great. Let me ask a few questions about the project and the site so I can get a clearer picture.”

Then you begin your intake questions.

Why this works psychologically

It signals:

- calm confidence
- you have a process
- this is how projects begin

People tend to trust **structured conversations**.

One reassuring thought

By the time someone calls you about a sculpture or sculptural house, they are **already curious about you and your work**. The call is not a test you have to pass. It’s simply the first step in understanding the project.

Your questions are what make you look **prepared and professional**.

Appendix Title Status

- Appendix A** Project Discovery Workbook ✓ Done
- Appendix B** Site Visit & Existing Conditions Checklist Excellent
- Appendix C** Meeting Notes & Action Items Template Excellent
- Appendix D** Project Decision Log Excellent
- Appendix E** Change Order Register Better than "Log"
- Appendix F** Project Risk Register Excellent
- Appendix G** Project Issue Log I'd add this
- Appendix H** Punch List & Final Corrections Excellent
- Appendix I** Project Closeout Checklist Excellent
- Appendix J** Maintenance Manual Template Excellent
- Appendix K** Sample Project Timeline Excellent
- Appendix L** Sample Project Folder Structure I really like this one
- Appendix M** Consultant & Team Directory Useful on every project
- Appendix N** Drawing & Document Register Very professional
- Appendix O** Submittal & Approval Register Very professional
- Appendix P** Project Photo Log Nice addition
- Appendix Q — Assumptions & Open Questions Log**