



Architects Advisory Service

Home Design - Working with your Architect

At every stage of the process, an Architect can help you to reduce costs and add value and style to your home. Here's a guide as to how you can work with your Architect to achieve the best results.

STAGE 1: Concept Design

- Your Architect will consider in detail, site orientation, people circulation in the home, energy efficiency and sustainability, furnishing, cost and many other matters.
- Your Architect will make preliminary enquiries of Council and a general assessment of authority regulations and requirements pertaining to the property.
- Your Architect will provide recommendations for the appointment of other necessary consultants and prepare the design briefs for their components. They may coordinate the services of a cost consultant if this is required at this stage.
- Your Architect will also begin to discuss materials and finishes.
- In this stage, your Architect will aim to refine the original sketch designs, and taking all the above into consideration, will be able to prepare a preliminary building estimate.

STAGE 2: Design Development

- "Should we have a concrete or timber floor? What areas do we tile? Will timber-lined ceilings in the family room be worth the extra expense? What are the best systems for heating our house, or keeping it cool?" are the types of questions answered in this stage. Your Architect will work with any specialist consultants involved with the project, regulatory authorities and local council, to prepare a set of preliminary documents which effectively explain the design they have developed to achieve your brief.
- Unexpected cost-savings may be made at this stage, as your Architect may be able to offer less expensive alternatives to the building materials, fittings or services you originally thought you would use.
- Your Architect is well-informed on building material suppliers but isn't allowed to accept any commissions from them so they are completely impartial and can freely advise you as to your best options. This may not be the case with other design consultants or building companies, where their profit may be the main driver of the advice or design you receive.

STAGE 3: Town Planning/Development Application

- Are you building on a small block, in a heritage area, on a block with planning overlays, intending to sub-divide or build several units? These days many projects are constrained by Town Planning or Development Application requirements and considerations.
- If this stage is required, your Architect will prepare the plans, diagrams, analyses, studies, report and other information necessary for the application.

STAGE 4: Construction Documentation

The stages of an Architect's thorough contract documentation are:

- a) Contract development or review
- b) Working Drawings
- c) Specifications
- d) Liaising with Authorities

a) Building Contract:

There are a number of pro forma contracts that are in common use in Australia, but none should be entered into without being checked by both your lawyer and your architect. A contract supplied or recommended by a builder or Construction Company may not be one that is in your best interests. It is critically important that the Contract that you enter into both protects your legal interests (lawyer) and is consistent with the needs of the particular works (architect). The latter includes making sure that it is consistent with the Specifications and with the working drawings. Inconsistency between these documents can be a source of much dispute and costs.

b) Working Drawings:

These drawings should spell out in precise detail exactly what you are 'buying' from the contractor. This will reduce risk for the contractor in having to guess what is required and potential disputes when you do not get what you were expecting. They will cover such items as the standard of materials, the workmanship required, finer construction details such as, set-out dimensions, set-backs from adjoining properties, window and door locations as well as structural details and mechanical installations if relevant.

The benefits of good working drawings are:

- The drawings create more certainty about the building contract. In the case of vaguer working drawings, a contractor may claim, for example, that the standard of materials you expected are not shown on the drawings, and what you are now asking for are "variations" which will cost you more. Or worse, he/she may be halfway through building the wrong way and charge for undoing the work already begun, as well as for the cost of constructing to your (now) more precise requirements.
- The drawings enable you to 'shop around'. Detailed drawings will help you obtain accurate price comparisons and quality comparisons from a number of builders. It is not uncommon for the highest tenderer (who may have been the one you were originally going to select) to be 50% higher than the lowest tenderer in the case of home renovations. Or you may obtain better quality for a similar price. Many clients find that their Architect has managed to save them several times the architectural fee on this stage alone. If you have committed yourself to a design-and-construct

company, you do not have the option of "shopping around" for a better price or quality, because you are locked into using the building company that provided you with your "free" design.

- The drawings can also help owner builders. If you intend to select your own tradespeople and oversee their work (to save the cost of the builder's markup) then the working drawings will help you direct the tradespeople's work more confidently. Similarly if you are building or finishing off the work yourself, the detailed drawings will help you construct in line with good building practice.

c) Specifications:

These set out the materials to be used and the standard of workmanship required of each trade. The headings in a typical specification set out the stages of building and the tasks of each tradesperson such as what is required of the excavator, bricklayer, carpenter and so on and the materials that they are to use.

d) Liaises with Authorities:

The local building authority or private relevant building surveyor will require a number of sets of your drawings and specifications, which will be checked against relevant regulations before you are issued with approval to build. Your Architect will liaise with the relevant authorities to provide any additional information that may be required and to negotiate in your best interests. Your Architect is familiar with their procedures and, as a consequence, can usually speed up the granting of approval.

STAGE 5: Contractor Selection

Your Architect can usually suggest a number of contractors whose work is of a good standard so that you can be more confident that the work will be carried out in a professional manner, and advise on the most effective way for you to select the one most suitable to meet either your budget and/or time constraints.

• The Contract

It's recommended you choose a contract recognised by the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA). Many other types may not be in your best interests as they have been prepared by the builder or by organisations that exist to look after the builder's interests. Also make sure that the contract defines the responsibility of your Architect in the building process. It is best for example to ensure that any payments are subject to an architect's assessment of the works. A quality contractor will have no reason to not agree to this if they are building to an acceptable quality standard.

Should you wish, your Architect can assist with the tendering process and in negotiating the best outcome for your building contract.

An Archicentre Australia Home Design Concept can help establish the viability of your project at the outset, after which your Architect can help you navigate the complexities of the construction process.

If you would like to talk to an Archicentre Australia design architect about a particular matter please call Archicentre Australia on 1300 13 45 13 or go to www.archicentreaustralia.com.au

STAGE 6: Contract Administration

The areas that the Architect can help you with in this stage are:

• Starting on Site

Set aside time for regular contact with your Architect to discuss the progress of the works - for example whether or not the contractor is on schedule and whether he/she is entitled to any time extensions or variations for unforeseen matters.

• Progress Payments

Many building contracts stipulate that the contractor is paid progressively throughout the contract works. In some states, this is required by law. Your Architect will assess the progress of the work against the contractor's claims and advise you on the payments to be made. Make sure you only pay only according to the Contract and that you have received exactly what you are being asked to pay for.

• Variations

A variation is any deviation from the original contract. Your Architect's work up until now will have avoided many areas of confusion that normally lead to variations however a few may still exist. Your Architect can mediate between you and the contractor on variations, reducing on-site friction and making sure that what is being asked is reasonable. They can also help you negotiate a fair variation amount.

• Completion

Your Architect protects your interests during the final stages by issuing a 'Notice of Practical Completion'. This notice defines the date the building is handed over to you for your use and defines the start of the 'defects liability period' where an amount of money is retained by you to provide safeguards against defects arising after the building work is completed. It also defines the date that the contractor ceases to have responsibility of the works for insurance purposes.

• Defects liability Period

During the 'Practical Completion Inspection', which may take many hours, your Architect notes any defects (such as jamming doors and windows, structural cracks in concrete and plaster, gutters incorrectly leveled and so on) and may also discover faults that you weren't aware of. The contractor remains liable for fixing these changes until your Architect issues a 'Final Certificate' which states that the works under the contract have been satisfactorily completed. This is where your Architect's services will be complete - often they will want to stay in touch to ensure your project was a long-term success.