

HOW DO I USE AN ARCHITECT?*A Home Owner's Guide*

So, you have decided to build a new home, or to renovate an existing one, and you are not sure how to progress your dream?

Employing someone to design or remodel and build your most valuable asset is likely to be a nerve-racking experience.

If you are wondering how to go about using the services of a professional architect, here are a few pointers that will help you understand what the benefits are to you of setting up a relationship with an architect of your choice.

Firstly, do I really need an architect?

If you want to get the best out of your project, regardless of its size, then discussing your ideas with an architect is greatly beneficial. An architect can help you achieve the best design for the available money and also help you avoid making costly mistakes.

Architects have a very unique ability to see things from the widest possible perspective while simultaneously focusing on detailed elements that will make all the difference to your project. Your architect will deliver an outcome of higher quality, which represents value added through the process.

Architects can present options you might not have considered; design your building to work efficiently through solving problems of space and function, and give your building style. Using an architect also means you get an outcome that is tailored to your specific needs.

Most architects offer one-off consultations and these can be incredibly useful, as you will receive guidance on all aspects of your project, from design and planning, to cost and construction.

In a short space of time, you'll gain an enormous amount of valuable information which will help you, even if you choose not to move forward with engaging an architect.

What will my architect do for me?

Unless your project is very simple, it makes sense to talk to an architect (at the very least) for advice before you get going.

Architects are highly skilled and professionally trained to turn your dreams into reality.

Your architect will apply impartial and creative thinking to your project – whether it is large or small, and whether you are constructing, adapting or expanding a building.

Your architect will add value - whether it comes from maximising the impact, functionality or marketability of your building.

Architects are able to design all kinds of buildings.

Many architects will have experience in working with multiple types of buildings, in different situations and styles. You should review potential architect's portfolios as well as their range of skills and services to ensure they are appropriate and relevant to your desired outcome.

However, an architect is a whole lot more than a designer.

Your architect will guide you through the entire design, planning and construction process from the early stage scenario of 'what do I do?' through to the completion of the project. Architects are differentiated from other providers of design services by their extended university training (usually a minimum of five years), their mandatory practical experience and the requirement to pass a professional registration exam before they can use the title 'architect'. Unlike other building design professions, the practice of architecture is heavily regulated by government legislation and continuing professional development is mandated.

Your architect will guide you through a range of processes, helping you navigate through getting your project started, running and then successfully completed.

At the outset, your architect will help you clarify exactly what it is you want to achieve. They will brainstorm with you to make sure that all your ideas, questions and concerns are addressed and taken into consideration. They will help you set a viable and realistic budget. Your architect will guide you through the town planning and certification process. They will manage consultants such as surveyors and engineers and will help you obtain competitive quotes for the work, as well as monitoring the project budget and administering the construction contract.

Critically, your architect will represent your best interests right the way through the project so that in the end, you are the proud owner of the quality product you have dreamed of and paid for.

You can expect your architect to work with integrity and honesty, and in turn, your architect will expect you to be honest with them and provide accurate information relating to the circumstances of your project.

How will my architect help me get going with my project?

The first thing your architect will do is ask you lots of questions about your project, and then listen carefully to interpret your answers, thereby understanding exactly what it is you are trying to achieve.

Then your architect will work with you to develop your project brief and help finalise your project budget.

It is critically important to get the brief and the budget to be compatible at the outset of the project - it is no use going forward on the basis of wanting to own a Porsche and only having enough money for a beat-up ute!

It is essential that you and your architect agree this between you before you get going.

A good architect will develop solutions and propose ways of reducing costs, whilst still coming up with design solutions that will increase the value of your project.

How much does it cost?

Architects' fees vary depending on the location and complexity of the project and the level of service you require from them. Architects will generally provide a free, no obligation quote for design services on your project if you want to ascertain costs.

You may just be seeking some ideas or advice for your project, or just some small assistance to get things moving. Most architects are open to negotiating a partial service, which is where they offer guidance at certain stages of the project only.

Some architects will charge you on the basis of a total project cost, others on a fixed price lump sum or on a time charge basis. How much or how little you commission your architect is up to you – and this can range from an initial design discussion through to the final delivery of the project on site.

Is it worth it? We certainly believe it is – and typically, clients almost always recoup the amount they spend on an architect through reduced on-site costs.

How do I find and select the right architect?

Every architect has an individual style, method of work and approach to construction. It is very important that you seek out and find an architect whose experience, style and working method is compatible with your needs and with the scale and type of project you are going to undertake. You need to match your architect to your project.

Clients often appoint an architect who is either known, or who has been recommended to them. They may choose a particular practice because they admire their work, and these are sound initial responses but in some cases, a more precise and structured process of selection is desirable. This will be where clients need to match their specific requirements with the range of skills and services offered by a particular professional architect.

You can call each firm on your shortlist, describe your project and ask if they are available to accommodate it. If so, request literature that outlines the firm's qualifications and experience. Ask to see a portfolio of work or visit finished buildings, and research their websites.

Check their credentials. Membership of their own governing bodies usually indicate that architects subscribe to a set code of ethics; are committed to high standards of practice and service; comply with rigorous continuing professional development requirements and that they have access to a variety of professional and technical resources.

Above all, talk to your intended architect. It is important to ensure that you are compatible. Your architect must convince you both of their creativity and their ability to get things done.

How do I appoint an architect?

A good working relationship between architect and client is crucial to the success of any project. Every engagement between a client and an architect should be a positive and productive experience.

You and your architect must discuss and agree on the scope and cost of architectural services before the project begins. It is not necessary for you to understand the technicalities of the work, but before agreeing to proceed, you should discuss and agree exactly what it is you are engaging your architect to do for you. This should be set out in writing in the architect's terms of engagement.

Once you have made your decision, you need to confirm with your chosen architect and notify any others you might have interviewed. A client-architect agreement will form the basis of your working relationship and define very clearly roles and responsibilities going forward.

Your chosen architect will then start the process of realising your dream with you!

And finally, working with your architect should be a positive and productive experience

Every architect aims at completing a project with their client having a wonderful product that has been delivered in time and on budget. A satisfied client is the real end goal of any project.

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