



CHOOSING YOUR site

Building a new home presents numerous challenges and opportunities. Starting by choosing the right site to develop will help determine the overall success of your project

WORDS KRISTIN UTZ & DUNCAN SANBY

There are many different factors to take into consideration when choosing a site on which to build, and these will vary according to the type of building — whether it be a retreat in the country, a beach house, a family home in the suburbs or a more urban development. Here are some of the key things to consider when choosing your site.

SUNLIGHT

Once the location has been decided, and the search for the right property has begun, try to remember to think about aspect. Try to understand where north is in relation to your garden and living spaces — get a compass app on

your phone to determine this. Look at where neighbouring buildings cast shadows during the day, evaluate what the access to natural light is like during different times of the day and different seasons of the year.

VIEWS

If there are views from your property, it's still important to consider how to get the best access to sunlight, breezes and protection from stormy weather and winter winds on more exposed

sites. Get an understanding of the local climate, prevailing winds and best orientation by speaking to locals and looking at weather maps and data.

FIRE AND FLOOD

Flood and fire zones can be confirmed with the local council. If your site has a flood or fire zoning, this will have an impact on the design and budget for your house. Flood- and fire-affected properties will require additional funds allocated to your project, in order to



meet building requirements and planning laws. It's a good idea to seek professional advice in relation to these regulations as they are constantly being updated. It's also important to find out about the fire and flood history of the area and to think about climate change in relation to these threats.

TOPOGRAPHY

When looking at steep or sloping sites, take into consideration the additional construction costs that may be incurred to excavate, build foundations and deliver materials to site. Steep sites present challenges that can be overcome more cost-effectively with the right advice and planning.

PLANNING

Architects can work with builders to determine the best methods of construction during the design stage, so that the design and construction are compatible. For example, minimising the amount of excavation required by considering how and where to locate the building, raising it on piers, building a garage slab first to use as a building platform for a crane or delivery of materials. The design of your home should consider the method of construction and materials available, which will save money and time further down the track.

KNOCK DOWN OR RENOVATE?

We're often asked about whether it's better to demolish an older house and build a new one or to keep an existing house and renovate. There are many good reasons for working with

older homes, referred to as 'alterations and additions' in the profession. Firstly, consider the environment. It's much more sustainable to work with an existing building than it is to demolish and dispose of it, resulting in a lot of materials in landfill. For this reason, the cost of demolition is on the rise and can take out a substantial amount of your budget. By renovating an existing building, you will maintain the existing plumbing and electrical connections, footings and foundations, floor slabs, driveways and pools, which leaves more money for investing in the quality of your build and improving the areas that add value and matter most to you. The other advantage of alterations and additions is that there can be significant planning gains in terms of the size of the home, boundary set-backs and height, compared to new builds that must comply with often more stringent regulations. Planning laws and development codes are made at both state and local government levels and are complex to understand, so it's best to seek professional advice in relation to these matters.

PLANNING REGULATIONS

You should always start with the local council with regards to understanding the limits for development on any particular site. In New South Wales, a planning certificate issued under section 10.7 (2&5) (which replaces the Section 149 (2) certificate) will set out the planning laws and codes that affect the property you're considering. These are usually included as part of the contract of sale and must be up to date as these codes

and regulations change regularly. Further investigation can be done online through publicly available government portals for state planning authorities and local councils. These will outline the development restrictions and calculations applicable to your site, such as height, density, floor area and building footprint. Planning regulations and laws are complex and usually require the help of a professional, such as a planner or architect, to understand what is and is not possible.

NEIGHBOURS

It's really important to consider your neighbours when you're at the early planning stage of any new development, unless you're in a rural area and don't have any who will be affected by your development.

Issues such as protecting views and preventing overshadowing of primary living areas, and maintaining visual and acoustic privacy, need to be carefully considered in the design. A well-considered design, good communication and explanation of your intentions will go a long way towards avoiding disputes, protracted council process time and potential legal action.

The process of design and building your new home is not simple and requires careful planning, expertise and a good deal of your time and patience. However, with the right team to help guide you to make informed decisions, the building process can also be very rewarding and ultimately lead to a dramatic improvement in the way you live in your new home. 🏡

Kristin Utz and Duncan Sanby are directors at Utz Sanby Architects

