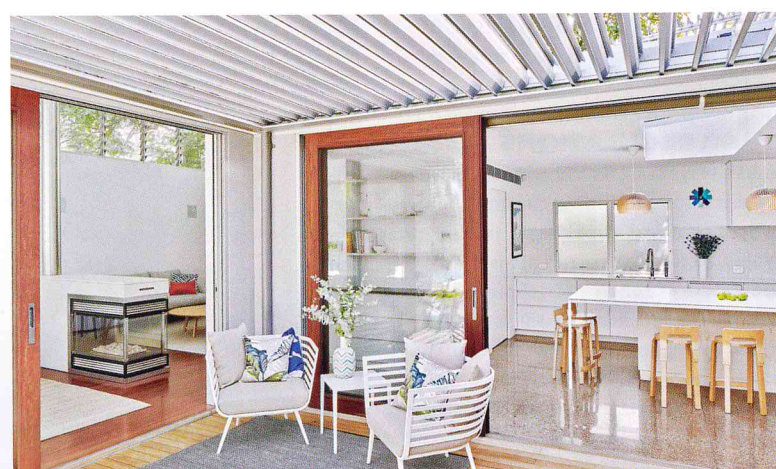


DETERMINING THE brief

The brief between the client and the architect is a vital step in determining the success of any project and sets the parameters in terms of budget and accommodation requirements

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It isn't always easy to define a brief at the outset of a project. As with any relationship, good communication is key to creating trust and confidence. It's a good idea to try and write a brief before you contact any architect about providing professional services. This establishes a framework for discussion regarding timing, budget and process — which are essential items to agree from the outset.

Your list should start with the macro and finish with the micro. All designs start from the big-picture or concept and as they are developed drill down into the detail. So, if you're engaging an architect, remember that designing and building any project is a process that takes a lot of time and happens in stages. A project can take anywhere from 12 to 36 months and will require input from other consultants as well as the architect, depending on the size, complexity and detail of the project.

Typically, the design process begins with conceptual or sketch designs being presented to the client, which in turn are developed into plans suitable to submit to council. Once your plans have been approved, the internal fixtures and finishes are selected as part of the detailed design. Finally, a set of construction documents is produced for builders to quote and eventually build from.

BUDGET

If you start with a list of the rooms required — including number of bedrooms, bathrooms, living spaces, garage, pool — then the architect can and should discuss your budget. In our experience it is definitely *not* helpful to withhold this information. You should seek advice from your architect about the costs of building in relation to the current building market as well as on your particular site, and to assess whether your budget expectations are realistic or not.

Setting a budget also informs the architect of the level of finish and type of products that should be selected — to keep within the budget. Ultimately it is the clients' responsibility as to how much money they spend and the architect's responsibility to keep the client informed as to the likely costs of the proposed work. All of which means there should be mutual agreement as to what is both realistic and achievable.

LIFESTYLE

It's important when thinking about your accommodation requirements that you also describe the way you want to live. For example, describe how you like to entertain and how many people you would like to seat at your dining room table. Do you like to entertain casually, outdoors or more formally inside? What storage requirements do you have, in terms of wardrobes, storing sports equipment, school bags, linen and kitchen appliances? The more information you can give the architect the better to get the conversations started and help determine the size and cost of your project.



Describe how you see the living areas being used; open-plan living areas can still function in many different ways, so considerations such as whether to have a television in the space or in a separate room, including a fireplace and where the kitchen is placed, all help determine the size and configuration of your additions.

ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS

When working with an existing house, especially one that you've been living in, it's really helpful to communicate what works and what doesn't — what are your favourite parts of the house at different times of the day and times of the year and your least favourite areas? Let your architect know where you need more light and ventilation and if there are any latent building issues that need to be fixed, such as leaks, damp, old sewer lines, bad wiring, pools that don't comply, garages that are too small. Allocating part of the budget for remedial work will help you and your architect assess how much you can spend on the new work and the size of the addition that's possible. It's also important to set aside budget for landscaping, sound systems, heating and cooling systems and other sub-contracts, such as pools, joinery, fencing, painting, etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

If you're looking for environmentally sustainable design, state your objectives clearly in the brief. How far are you willing to be taken on this journey and how self-sufficient do you want your project to be? What are your basic needs and your future goals in terms of sustainability? Are there any health issues such as allergies and asthma that need to be addressed in the selection of products and materials?

FUTURE-PROOFING

Part of your brief should include future needs as well as existing. Rooms and spaces can be designed to offer flexibility as your needs change, which can save money and ensure you get the best return on your investment. Rumpus rooms can double as guest bedrooms, circulation spaces can accommodate desk/study nooks or additional storage, and large bedrooms can double as playrooms, with inter-connecting doors when children are young becoming separate teenage bedrooms in the future.

FINE-TUNING

Remember that in the initial stages of the design the brief is a fluid document that should be developed collaboratively with the architect. Communication and trust are key to the success of any project and being clear and transparent about your needs, budget and expectations all starts with the brief.

Prepare a brief and meet with your architect to get a clear understanding of the process and scope of services being offered. A brief defines the ultimate wish-list for any one project; however it may need to be adjusted and adapted to suit your budget, site and the planning constraints. Your architect should explain what these are and what implications they have on the project. Architects are trained to think flexibly and creatively to solve problems, so be open-minded. Sometimes ideas may be presented that challenge your preconceptions — the pros and cons should be carefully considered in order to reach the right solution for you. 🏡

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