

Every year, thousands of Australians build new homes, or renovate and extend their existing homes.

Unfortunately, many are unhappy with the finished result.

Some owners find their home looks different to the way they pictured it, is poorly planned, hard to heat or keep cool, or has cost far more than they thought.

This is where an Architect could have helped.

Working with your Architect

What Can An Architect Do For Me?

If you are contemplating building a new house, or remodelling and extending an old one, an Architect can be of considerable help. People often feel that Architects are expensive without really knowing what they do.

This pamphlet takes ten minutes to read and aims to tell you something of what an Architect can do for you.

The title 'Architect' is a legal one, indicating that a person has demonstrated his or her professional competence by examination and is registered, or licensed by the State to practice architecture.

Architects work in four broad stages:

1. Schematic Design
2. Design Development
3. Contract Documentation
4. Contract Administration

As described in this pamphlet, attention to detail is the Architect's benchmark. No other alternative provides this thorough approach, which helps to minimise worry, and ensure that your building project will turn out just the way you pictured it.

Stage 1: "Schematic Design"

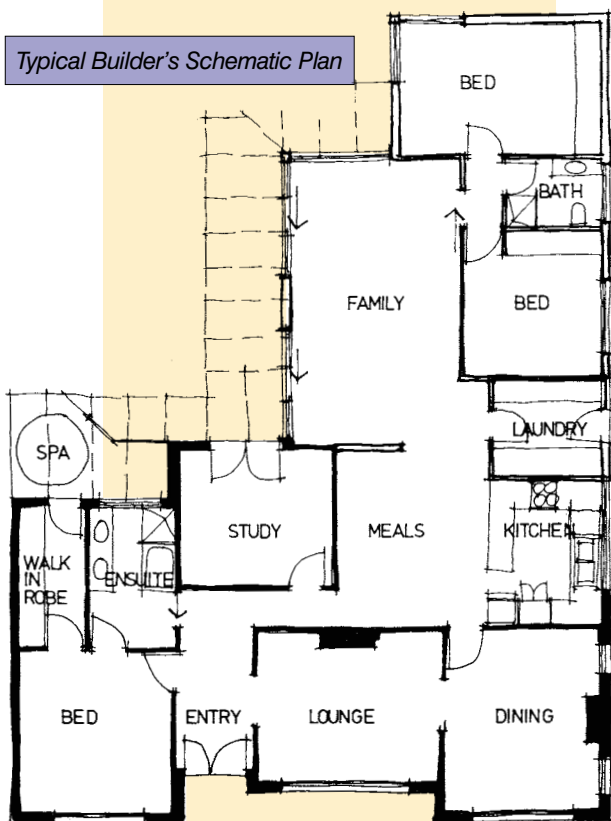
Can we build up? Do we spread out? Do we step down with the block? Where is the pedestrian and vehicle access?

These questions and others are schematic design questions. The best solutions are most often available through consultation with your Architect. By using an Architect's training and experience, you can usually improve your original concepts.

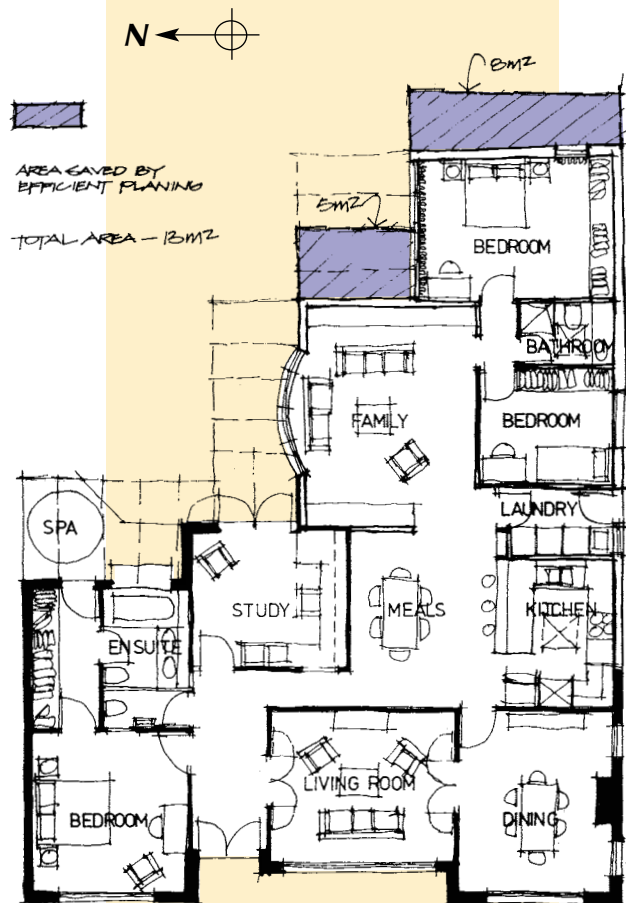
Your Architect considers orientation, massing, circulation, energy efficiency, furnishing and siting. Once these things are decided, you will be able to prepare a preliminary building budget, and your Architect can help. The Archicentre Renovator Report or "New Home" Report is a form of schematic design.

It is not uncommon for an Architect to save thousands of dollars in improving loose designs – for example, combining all that's required into a smaller, more effective space, thereby dispensing with unnecessary building costs. Even the reduction of around 10m² of space will result in several thousands of dollars savings.

Typical Builder's Schematic Plan



Typical Architect's Schematic Plan



Examples of Schematic Design Drawings.

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Stage 2: "Design Development"

This is the stage where the design is developed, where your Architect shows you a range of options regarding choice of building materials. Your Architect can outline the merits of each, determine their likely costs and help you decide: "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?"

Unexpected cost-savings may be made at this stage, as your Architect may be able to offer attractive but less expensive alternatives to the building materials you originally thought you would have. On the subject of building materials, your Architect constantly receives trade literature from suppliers, and because he or she doesn't accept any commission from suppliers, your Architect is 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.

Stage 3: "Contract Documentation"

Now you are satisfied that the design suits your needs and your budget, and you have decided to proceed with the building, a major part of an Architect's work starts.

Contract Documentation is a term which describes the drawings and other instructions needed to make sure that your house is built to your requirements, and to the standard expected by your local building authority.

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

- (a) Working Drawings
- (b) Specifications
- (c) Liaising with Authorities

(a) Working Drawings

The working drawings are technical documents which show such things as set-out dimensions, set backs, materials, levels, wall heights, beam sizes, window and door locations. These drawings may need to be co-ordinated with structural details and mechanical installations where required.

Architectural working drawings tend to be more detailed than non-architectural ones.

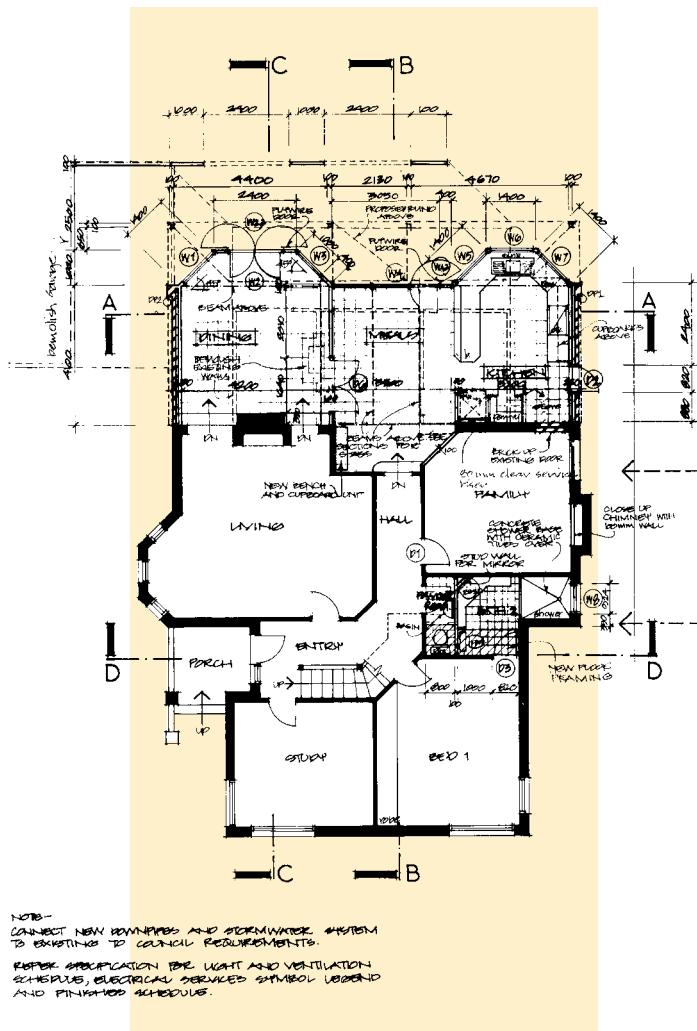
You will benefit from this extra detail in a number of ways:

- **The drawings create more certainty about the building contract.**

Your drawings spell out in more detail just what it is you are "buying" from the builder. They are more precise about the standard of materials, workmanship required and finer construction details.

You'll be more likely to get the result you pictured by using architectural working drawings.

In the case of vaguer working drawings, the builder 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 more. Or worse, he 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.



An example of a Working Drawing.

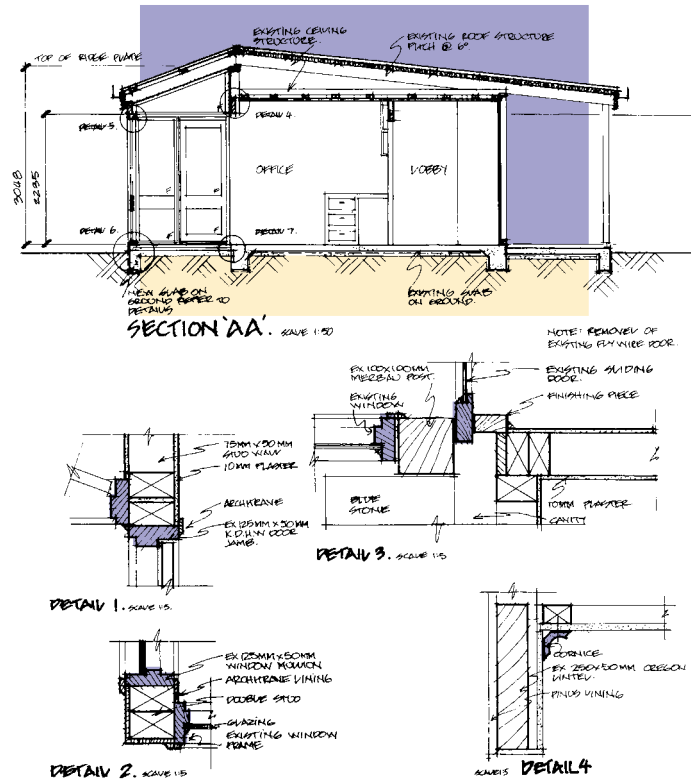
- **The drawings enable you to "shop around".**

Particularly with the assistance of your Architect, your detailed drawings will help you obtain accurate price comparisons and quality comparisons from a number of builders. This is called "competitive tendering", which basically means you now have the ability to "shop around".

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-in to using the building company that provided you with your free design.)

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An example of an Architectural Detail drawing.

• The drawings can also help owner builders.

If you intend to "sub contract", that is, you intend to select your own tradespeople and oversee their work (thereby saving the cost of the builder's markup) then the details present in the architectural 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.

(b) Specifications

The specification component of the document sets 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, eg;

Demolition, Excavation, Concrete, Bricklayer, Carpenter... etc

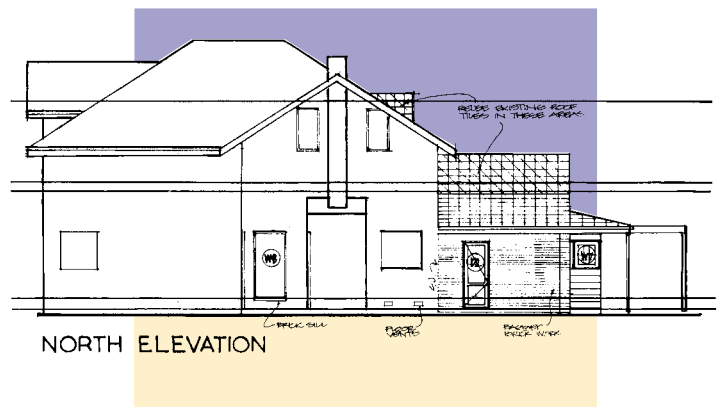
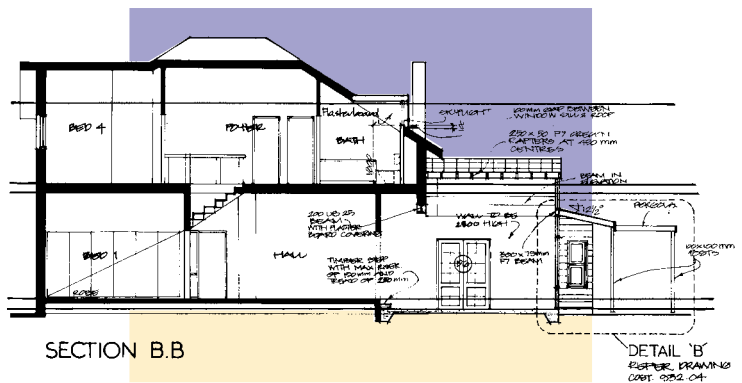
By being more specific about what is required, your Architect establishes high standards from the beginning.

(c) Liaising with Authorities

The local building authority will require a number of sets of your drawings and specifications, which will be checked against regulations before you are issued with approval to build.

Your Architect liaises with the building surveyor to provide any additional information that may be required. Your Architect is familiar with their procedures and, as a consequence, can usually expedite the granting of approval.

The building approval system exists to ensure that the community's standards of health, safety and amenity are adhered to.



Working with your Architect

Stage 4: "Contract Administration"

This is the practical stage of building where once again your Architect will prove to be very useful.

It can be extremely difficult to locate a builder whose workmanship you are happy with, and who is pleasant to work with. You may be fortunate to know a builder who did a good job for friends.

Otherwise, your Architect can normally suggest a number of builders whose work is generally of a good standard.

Your Architect's suggestion in such cases is invaluable, because when a competent builder is on the job, you can be far more confident that the work will be carried out in a professional manner.

The Contract

Once you have chosen a builder, your Architect can help with the selection and preparation of a contract from the many standard forms available. It is strongly recommended that you select a contract recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). Many other types of contracts are heavily loaded in the builder's favour. A good contract will ensure that appropriate methods of dispute resolution are open to you. It is also important to make sure that the contract defines the responsibility of your Architect in the building process.

Then you can sit down with the builder and your Architect to sign the contract documents.

Starting On Site

If you are renovating, be prepared for that quaint little laundry to be irreverently torn apart, that worn-out sink and hot water service to be thrown on to the back of a truck and that dutiful 1950's pink loo to be split asunder.

Holes will be dug and mounds of earth will appear, and your once-settled site will resemble a war zone.

Be patient and set aside time for regular contact with your Architect and builder to discuss the progress of the works, any decisions that have to be made and any changes or improvements to be effected.

It is with this regular monitoring that the Architect can establish whether or not the builder is on schedule, and whether he is entitled to time extensions.



Progress Payments

Most building contracts make provision for the builder to be paid progressively throughout the construction works. In some states this is required by law. The builder submits his claims to your Architect.

Your Architect will assess progress of the work against the builder's claims, and advise you on the amount of the payment to be made. It is most important that you only pay for the value of the work done and materials on site.

Variations

By thoroughly defining what is to be done, your Architect has avoided many areas of confusion which normally lead to variations. However a few may still exist. A "variation" is any deviation from the original contract.

Some unethical builders give low tender prices in the hope of recouping their costs by claiming many variations.

When variations arise, your Architect will mediate between you and the builder, to reduce the possibility of on-site friction.

This is another area where your Architect can save you money, by negotiating an equitable variation amount, if any is reasonable.

If you have contracted direct with a design-and-construct company, their interest will naturally be in interpreting the construction document's details in favour of the builder, (since they are one and the same person). Many people find it hard to be emotionally detached during the ensuing negotiations between themselves and the building company because their home is such a core part of their lives.

Completion

Your Architect protects your interests during the final stages, by issuing a "Notice of Practical Completion". This notice defines the date from which the building is handed over to you for your use. It also defines the beginning of the "defects liability period", during which an amount of money is retained by you to provide safeguards against defects arising after the building work is completed.

Practical completion also defines the date of cessation of the builder's responsibility for insurance of the works.

Defects Liability Period

During a period after the work is completed, the builder will remain liable under the terms of the contract to remedy any defect in workmanship and materials which may become apparent. Your Architect will assist by noting these defects at the "Practical Completion Inspection", which may take many hours.

Your Architect will note jamming doors or windows, structural cracks in concrete and plaster work, tiles loose on walls, gutters incorrectly levelled, and many other irritating items. He or she may discover faults not noticeable to you. This is another area where an Architect is useful in protecting your interests.

At the end of the defects liability period, your Architect will issue a "Final Certificate", which indicates that the works under the contract have been completed.

This is usually the stage at which your Architect's services will be complete. Don't be surprised, however, if your Architect is keen to stay in contact, to make sure that your project has been a long term success for you.