

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

The completion of a successful building project is the result of detailed and careful planning.

The building owner's main guide is the architect, who is trained to assist in securing requirements. The architect is the person best suited to interpret the client's needs and to convert them into reality.

Goodwill and trust are the vital ingredients of all successful building ventures. They contribute substantially towards control of quality, performance, and cost and completion time. This co-operation, understanding and confidence works three ways; between architect, owner and builder.

Anyone embarking on a building project, perhaps for the first time, should understand the normal practices associated with building.

These notes are intended to assist such a person in fulfilling his role as an active member of the building team. They do not purport to be an exhaustive statement on the various matters raised.

WHY CHOOSE AN ARCHITECT

An architect is a specialist consultant highly qualified in all aspects of building design.

Architects provide advice on home design and building such as preliminary design, final design,

administration of the building works, interior design and building services such as air-conditioning and electrical design to name a few.

Architects provide original design concepts and building solutions as opposed to mass produced formula designs and standard building practices used by builders and building designers.

Comparing building services offered and design attitudes of architects and builders is advisable when seeking a one off quality home with originality and artistic merit.

THE PROFESSIONAL ADVISER

The consultant architect acts as a professional adviser to (and agent for) his client.

The first function of a professional adviser be they lawyer, accountant, architect or designer, is to provide information and advice on a subject in which they are a specialist. Three points distinguish the professional adviser from others such as commercial firms which can and frequently do supply information and advice.

With no financial interest in any product, process or end result, the architect's advice is not biased as is that of the tradesman or commercial builder.

Given the information, the architect goes on to assist the client in the

process of deciding how to act in light of that information, whereas the commercial firm has no responsibilities for the decision.

With a duty of care to the client, a professional adviser upholds the traditions and codes of the profession.

They are duty bound to perform the job honestly and well.

Building is often a once in a lifetime venture. It involves considerable expenditure and the building owner is well advised to enlist the services of an independent expert.

A building owner may find that in dealing solely with a commercial firm his own best interests are not given priority over those of the builder.

To safeguard their own interests they should have objective expert participation in decisions that only the professional relationship can provide.

The Royal Australian Institute of Architects publishes a pro-forma document known as a "Client/Architect Agreement" and this, with its associated schedules, may be used by the architect as a basis for the agreement with the client.

When completed to suit the particular circumstances, and executed as a contract, it provides a statement of the services to be rendered, the conditions under which they are to be supplied and the fees to be charged.

Before signing such an agreement, however, the client should clearly

understand the scope of the services and responsibilities of the architect.

Fees, or the basis for fees, should always be discussed and agreed upon at the outset of the job. An alternative method of establishing a Client/Architect Agreement is by an exchange of letter.

DESIGN

The architect indicates the nature of the architectural design for both the exterior and interior of the building by means of drawings.

Expert knowledge is needed to relate the impression given by drawings, models or small samples to the proportions, textures and colours of a finished building. The architect will assist in developing this understanding of the scheme.

Before approving a scheme, however, the client must be sure they know what they are approving. Misunderstanding and failing to admit uncertainties can lead to disappointment and perhaps expensive changes later.

PROGRAM OF REQUIREMENTS

For the analytical and design development stage of the work the architect needs a careful and detailed briefing from his client.

This briefing should define the purposes, functions and relationships of the building areas, together with the proposed methods of operation and management.

In addition the requirements for power, lighting, heating, cooling, ventilation and/or air conditioning and other services must be detailed. Finally the financial constraints on the project must be agreed.

If requested, the architect can make investigations and analyses to establish the client's requirements, but this is outside the scope of normal services.

As well as the briefing, the client should supply copies of title plans, legal information, survey particulars etc. of the building site.

Alternatively, the architect should be authorized to obtain this information. Designing should not commence until these requirements (which form part of the architect's brief) are obtained, reviewed and analysed.

Further technical and other requirements, depending on the nature of the project, may necessitate research and the preparation of more detailed programs.

This normally occurs after the client has approved the preliminary sketch design but before the developed design is prepared.

The satisfactory functioning of a building stems, in large measure, from the care and skill given to defining the requirements.

SCHEMATIC DESIGN

Once the program has been established and all basic decisions have been made, the architect can

start the schematic design stage of his work.

This involves the preparation of preliminary sketch drawings and/or reports and preliminary cost estimates.

Preliminary sketch drawings are usually small-scale line drawings defining the architect's proposals for using the site and the basic planning and design solution for the building. There may be alternative schemes.

These designs, together with preliminary estimates and notes on general planning, structure, equipment and finishes, reflect the client's program of requirement, constraints placed on the design by the site and regulations of the relevant authorities.

The client should consider and approve the schematic drawings (with or without modification) and give instructions to proceed with preparation of the developed sketch drawings.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Once the architect's preliminary sketch proposal is approved, the architect commences the design development stage of his services.

This work includes full supporting investigations of the site and site development, further determination of authorities' requirements, finalisation of principles of structural design, or mechanical, electrical and similar service installation, and the selection of principal materials and finishes.

The developed sketch drawings will be sufficient to illustrate and explain the scheme and may include the following:-

- Floor plans;
- Elevation;
- Sections;
- Perspectives;
- Preliminary design of structure;
- Services such as lighting, air-conditioning. Smart Wiring; and
- Estimates of building cost, all as appropriate.

Close interaction between client and architect is most desirable at this stage and will allow progressive agreement as the design develops. This should result in almost automatic approval of final developed sketch drawings prior to the production of tender and/or contract documents.

On simple or small scale work, schematic design stage and design development stage are often combined.

CONTRACT DOCUMENTS

The architect is charged with special responsibility in administering the contract, and obliged to follow the provisions of the contract agreement and contract documents.

The architect must interpret and administer the contract in accordance with the documents and with due consideration to their intent. In some

matters, the architect is required by law and expected by the builder to act impartially.

There are many matters calling for the architect's special adjudication as listed below:-

- Assessing and certifying interim progress payments;
- Issuing, assessing, referring and authorising contract variations;
- Determining acceptability of quality, etc. of materials and workmanship, compliance with the contract, etc.
- Ascertaining losses or expenses by the builder arising from instruction, etc.;
- Assessing and determining any entitlement to extensions of time;
- Determining and formally certifying the dates of "practical" and "final" completion;
- Determining satisfactory remedy of defects and issuing a final certificate of payments.

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More extensive information about architects and their services can be obtained from the Institute and from discussion with any architect of your choice.