

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT:

This is an introduction on ways to choose, engage and work with an architect, and work through the process of achieving Council Approval.

Creating a custom-made home or renovating an existing one can be difficult – but it can also be both exciting and satisfying. Architects are for people who don't want to be architects themselves. The architect's role is to be your designer, your advocate and your trustworthy companion – to guide you every step of the way – from what advice you need, to how much you should spend, to what is likely to be approved, how it can be built, and how it can be best used when it is complete!

The process of getting to the occupation phase of your project is a journey and it encompasses considering: your misconceptions and fears, what to consider before you start, what is an architect and what do they do, how to find the right architect, how to discuss your project, architect's fees and terms of engagement, what to expect during the design phase, how to control the building cost and live within your means, the approval process and what to expect, councils, neighbours and keeping the peace, the certification process, and preparing to build.

Other than drawing up a design, what do architects do?

Architects are trained to come up with their own designs for you, rather than redraw the design of a similar building which already exists. It is estimated that only about 15% of all new housing is original and not simply a repeat, with minor variation, of another design. Architects not only draw and design, they assemble your brief, they advocate for the design at Council, document the project and obtain competitive bids from builders. They know about colours, where to get lights and white goods, and source furniture.

These are the key questions which you need to think about before launching into any building project, with or without an architect.

Is the project for investment or actually for personal enjoyment?

Is it better to significantly alter or rebuild?

What about leasehold and strata-title?

What about covenants placed on land titles?

Is the site in a conservation area and heritage listed?

What is my total project budget?

While word of mouth is a very selective and circular reference system, the most powerful method of seeing an architect's work will be through the RAlA website architecture.com.au

The architectural process:

The first step is a **site analysis**, more of a bubble diagram, which collects together the principal ideas and relates the main spaces to the context and the orientation.

A **concept diagram**, which could be either a plan or a section begins to give scale to the principal spaces and relate them to a grid or some other form of structural solution.

The **sketch design** is often used to communicate the first ideas to you. It brings the concept into a basic reality where areas can be measured, heights can be appreciated and structural systems understood. These can be either freehand sketches or computer drawings.

Once the sketch design is approved by the client, it is developed into a **Development Application** submission. This is The Statement of Environmental Effects which accompanies the drawings and assesses the design's compliance against the planning regulations and explains the circumstances behind any aspects of the design which departs from the codes.

Following a smooth approval or council room drama, you should receive a determination, which may be accompanied by anywhere between 30 and 100 conditions of consent. Some may require amended plans to be re-lodged, which is called a Section 96 modification, named after Section 96 of the EP & A Act.

Section 96 applications do not allow the Council to revisit the entire application, as they must confine their attention to the modifications. Recent changes to the EP&A Act allow the Council to compare subsequent Section 96 modifications to the original approval to determine whether a new DA is warranted.

There are two types of **neighbours** – good and evil! Consultation is important because there is no way of going around your neighbours – they are the first to be notified. Some complaints are of course unavoidable and you must be prepared for some protest whether you believe it is unwarranted or not.

The **Construction Certificate** (CC) is an approval for detailed building plans. When applying for the construction certificate it will be necessary to lodge building plans, specifications and engineering drawings either with council or with an external accredited certifier. The purpose of this certificate is to ensure that the drawings and specification are consistent with the approved development application and relevant construction standards such as the Building Code of Australia (BCA). The CC should also address all conditions of the development consent and clearly illustrate how resolution of council concerns or requests have been addressed.

Once you have your construction certificate you are ready to **prepare to build**. Architects often have preferred builders that they recommend to their clients. A preferred builder is familiar with the architect's modes of construction and good relationships have already been formed.

Architects do more than design, and they are certainly trained to do more than draw. A good architect will combine talent with practice competence. Working with an architect is an exciting and rewarding experience.

Tone Wheeler
Principal Architect

environa studio environmental architecture