

ENLIST THE EXPERTS

Designing your dream home begins with finding the right architect

WORDS CARROL BAKER

A rural abode that sits comfortably in its locale. Coopworth House by FMD Architects. Photography by Dianna Snape. fmdarchitects.com.au

Our homes are an integral part of the human experience. They're where we share our lives with those we love and where lasting memories are made. Your home is a place of refuge and respite, a place to play in and, in the last number of years, a place to work in.

Architects are design professionals who gather information and draw up plans. They liaise, consult, create, envision and negotiate. Qualified architects have had five years of university training, as well as met requirements of mandatory practical experience and a registration exam. Kirsty Hewett, director of KHAB Architects, says architecture requires a particular set of skills. "It's the right mix of pragmatic, creative and idealistic thinking to come up with clever and interesting solutions to needs and to solve problems," she explains.

Pick of the crop

There is a diverse array of architecture firms, so how do you choose the right one for you? Daniel Lane, Tasmanian Chapter president of the Australian Institute of Architects and director of Preston Lane Architects, says when choosing an architect to design your dream home, there are some important aspects to keep in mind.

First, sourcing someone who will stick with you the whole way is especially important during construction services, says Daniel. "For the architect, this includes regular site visits, contract administration, and making assessments of the payment claims made by the builder and sub-consultants," he explains. "These services performed by an architect create quality control and assurance that what is being built is what is specified in the original design, and you get what you are paying for."

Another important consideration, says Daniel, is having a thorough understanding of your timeline and budget.





LEFT

A project that unites nature and a built environment. Tiara House by FMD Architects. Photography by Dianna Snape. fmdarchitects.com.au

BELOW

Inside is a celebration of beautiful materiality. River of Life by Sandbox Studio. Photography by Katherine Lu. sandboxstudio.com.au

“Find an architect who can help set realistic expectations about how long things will take and how much it will cost,” he says. “You need someone who can balance your vision with what’s possible within your budget.”

When chatting with a prospective architect, there are some key questions to ask. Anthony Burke, Professor of Architecture and *Grand Designs Australia* host, says it’s a good idea to ask about how the architect approaches a design and what is important to them. “Listen to the answer and that will give you a sense of the values of the architect,” he says. “Whether they start with family, design, the neighbourhood or the environment, you can pick up on their priorities.” Architects will have different areas they specialise in; finding one that aligns with what is important to you is a great way to start.

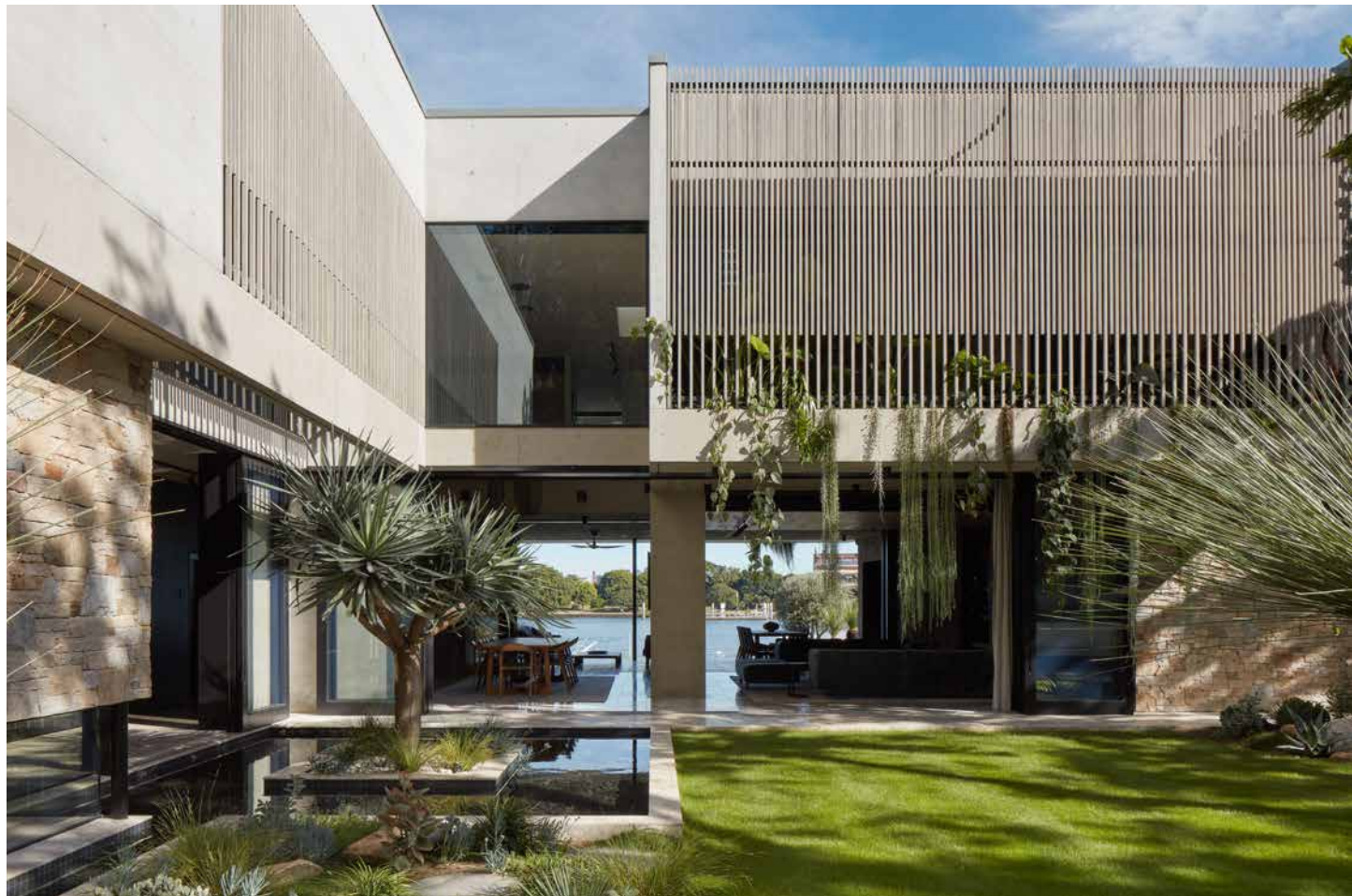
It’s also important to know who you’ll be working with. As part of your due diligence, take a look online at some of their previous work. But when sourcing an architect, Anthony says you need to go deeper than that. “Those first impressions online are crafted — it’s marketing oriented. You want to get a feel for their architecture, not just a look at their architecture,” he notes.

When you chat with an architect you’d potentially like to engage, Anthony says to be direct, to ask about their latest designs and what worked and what didn’t. “See how candid they are about learning through their own design process and sharing with you so you can see the architect is thinking through each job on its own terms,” he says.

Kirsty suggests talking to more than one architect before you decide. “You’ll get a feeling if they’re going to listen to you, and whether they’re curious about you,” she says. “You’re looking for the signs of what might make a good working relationship.

The principal architect you speak with initially may not be the only person you will be dealing with. Anthony suggests setting up a meeting with the team so you can get a feel for all of the key players. “Eyeball the project architect and other members of the team; a level of comfort early on is important,” he says. Before you choose your architect, also check to see if they are registered with your state or territory Architect Registration Board.





The design brief

This is what you want your home to feel like. It goes beyond bricks and mortar. Anthony says the best type of brief expresses how you like to live. You might love to gather the gang together around the kitchen island on a Saturday morning and cook pancakes, for example. “It could say, we have a gorgeous library, we really want to find a place to celebrate our books in our house,” explains Anthony. “Or our kids are growing up and we need spaces to allow for that.”

Anthony adds that the right type of brief is practical as well as beautiful. “Yes, an architect will put a roof over your head, but what they really want to do is build a place you feel happy and at home in,” he says.

Let’s talk money

Getting an architect on board costs money. Typically, it’s a percentage of the build cost. There are no hard and fast rules and costs do vary. Kirsty says

for some, the costs can be confronting.

“From the outside it might look like a big chunk of money that could have gone into the build, but your architect can potentially design something with a smaller footprint of a higher quality that does everything you need it to do,” she says. “An architecturally designed home will typically also add a large amount of capital value to the property.”

Stages of engagement

The first stage is Concept Design. Kirsty says this includes collecting the brief from the client. “This stage is gathering information about the site and the project, as well as council rules that need to be followed,” she says. “It also takes into consideration any constraints and also opportunities that exist on a site.” Note that some companies will offer you the option of just engaging an architect for this first stage, or other stages throughout the process.

ABOVE

A contemporary abode that speaks volumes about good design. Dilkera by Shaun Lockyer Architects. Photography by Christopher Frederick Jones. lockyerarchitects.com.au

OPPOSITE

Architecture embraces quality finishes and styles designed to last. Morgan by Shaun Lockyer Architects. Photography by Brock Beazley. lockyerarchitects.com.au

The next stage is Design Development, where a submission to council for the first stage of approvals is made. Kirsty says this is called Planning Approval or Development Plan Consent. “It’s good to get a preliminary costing by a qualified professional, so if it’s significantly over budget you can change it before you submit it to planning,” she advises.





ABOVE

The lines are blurred between indoors and out in this design.
Photography by Aaron Citti. khab.com.au

BELOW

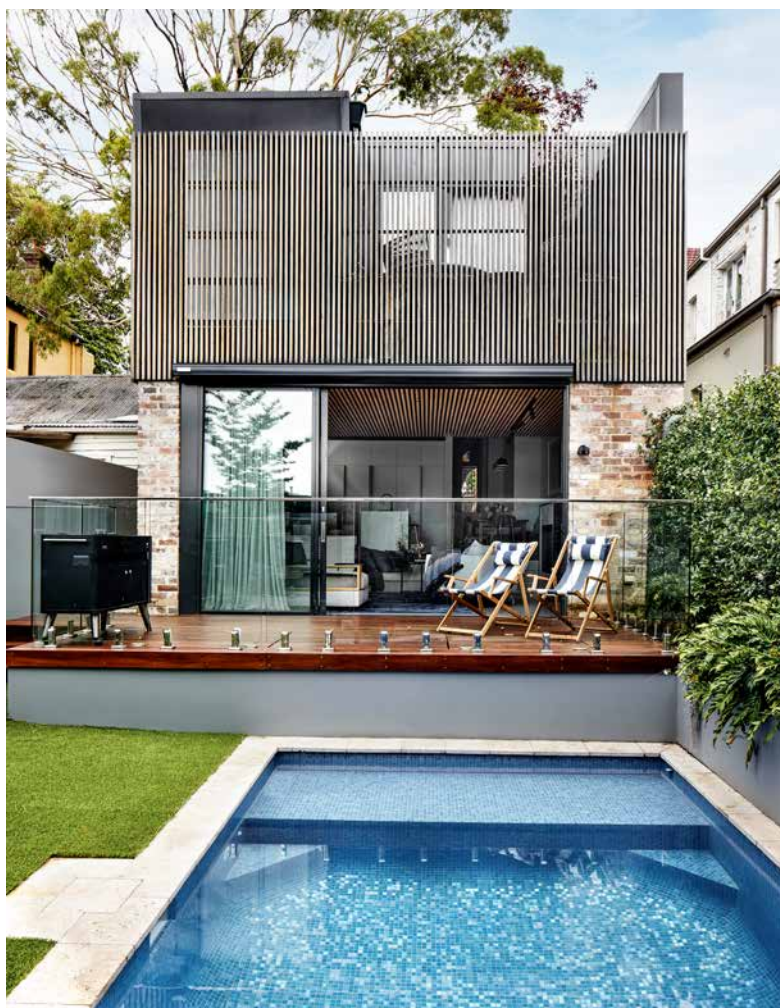
A contemporary exterior with cool clean lines. River of Life by Sandbox Studio. Photography by Katherine Lu. sandboxstudio.com.au



After this is the *Working Drawings or *Documentation stage of the process. The third stage is where you are working towards another approval which is called Building Rules Consent or Building Certification. At this stage your architect could be consulting with a structural engineer and energy assessor. “This is where the architect works to resolve any energy requirements. It’s also where they make decisions as to what goes into the build,” explains Kirsty. This can range from things such as what sort of flooring you’d like, to smaller items such as choosing the handles for your cabinets.

During this stage of the process, it’s all about gathering information and making decisions. “A dense amount of information is resolved,” says Kirsty. “At the end of this stage, you’re not only getting a building certification, but you’re also ready to issue for quoting or tendering to builders. Your architect will assist clients in issuing for tender and construction contracts. A word of advice from Kirsty is to always get more than one quote.

Stage four is called *Contract Administration. “This means the architect can administer a construction contract between an owner and a builder.” After this stage it’s important to note that the architect doesn’t pass the baton to the builder — they are still actively engaged in processes.



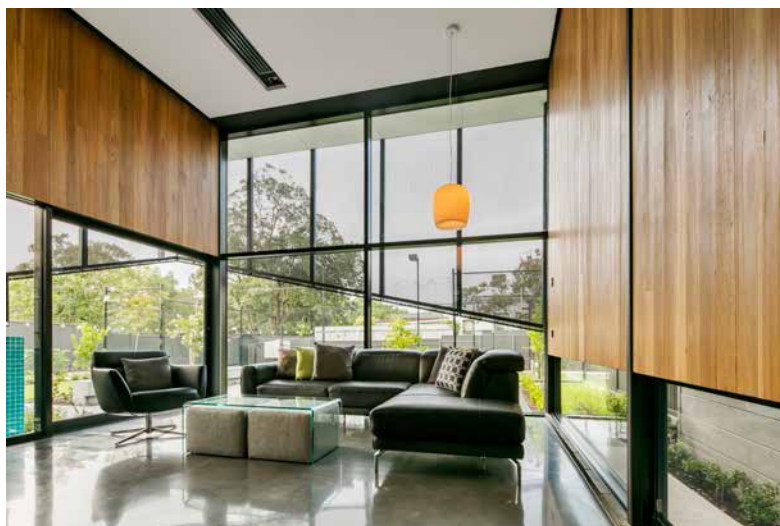
ABOVE

A stunning exterior that showcases good design principles. Annandale Residence by Brooke Aitken Design. Photography by Ryan Linnegar Photography.

brookeaitkendesign.com.au

BELOW

Soaring ceilings and plenty of glazing create light-filled spaces. Photography by Aaron Citti. khab.com.au



When the build is finished, it's at the *Practical Completion stage. Kirsty explains this means it's fit for habitation; it might be 95 per cent finished. This is where the possession of the site passes from builder to homeowner again. "At this stage we prepare a list of any outstanding works or defects that need to be completed for the builder to fulfil the contract," notes Kirsty.

In a typical contract, Kirsty says the architect's role is to ensure the builder completes what was stipulated in the contract, even if the client is living there. "It's usually 12 months for defects liability so the house goes through summer and winter, as things can move and shift."

* Note the actual terms used can change from state to state or territory to territory

Understanding copyright

The concept of copyright might seem a little confusing when applied to the plans drawn up for your project. You've paid for them, they're yours to do as you please, right? But that is not how copyright works. As Daniel explains, architectural copyright is protected under "artistic works as defined in s10(1) of the Copyright Act 1968 to include items such as sketches, models, and the completed building. When you hire an architect to design something, they still own the copyright for the project on the site," he says. "You automatically get the right to use it for the project it was made for, but only upon payment of all fees due under the contract and an 'additional fee' if specified."

In a nutshell

An architect does far more than create well-designed, innovative and beautiful spaces.

Here's a snapshot of their role:

- **Concept Design:** Understanding your needs and helping you prepare a brief that is in line with your budget.
- **Design Development:** Translating vision by developing concepts that are cost-efficient and add value to your project.
- **Town Planning and Development**
Application: Assisting in the preparation and submission of applications to local councils for approval.
- **Construction Documentation:** Processing building permits and overseeing documentations of other consultants.
- **Contractor Selection:** Helping in contract negotiations and the selection of reliable builders.
- **Contract Administration:** Assessing the builder's quality of work and compliance to agreed specifications.

(Courtesy: The Australian Institute of Architects) ♡