

## ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNERS

# Working with a designer

If you're renovating or building from scratch, there are some good reasons to hire an architect or designer.

If it's time to build, you'll need to choose a designer –and it doesn't necessarily have to be an architect.

Obviously, you'll want to find someone whose style or aesthetic ideas are sympathetic to your own. But style is not the core issue.

The most important skill of a good house designer is probably an ability to use the available space really well. To know which rooms should go where, how to link them together, how to allow for changing needs.

They'll be able to take your own good ideas and turn them into better ones. So you want to replace a solid back door with french doors? Maybe there's not much sun there, and it would be better to wall up the old doorway and put your new french doors around the corner ...?

And as the leaky building controversy has shown all too clearly, a good building designer should know what materials and construction methods to rely on.

### **Architects**

Architects are highly trained with registration earned through a combination of academic qualifications, practical experience and examination. A qualified architect or architectural designer should bring vision, design skill, and professional expertise and support to every job.

Expect to pay around 10 percent of the overall job (see "Paying your architect" for more details).

Architecturally designed houses also often have higher resale values than others of the same size and age.

### **Architectural designer**

These designers specialise in building design and construction from conception to final certification. Although they're entitled to practise "architecture", they cannot call themselves "architects".

Professional members of Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) must have either spent at least three years as a principal in an established architectural designers practice and have NZ Certificate of Draughting (Architecture) qualifications or have five years architectural designing/draughting experience followed by five years as a principal in an architectural designers practice, and can show technical ability in building design and construction.

There are also members of ADNZ who are registered architects. In a number of ways, the NZIA and ADNZ are parallel organisations. All ADNZ members must hold professional indemnity insurance to a minimum level of \$250,000.

But be aware there are some architectural designers working in this field who don't belong to any organisation. We suggest not contracting anyone who isn't recognised by his or her professional industry group.

Architectural designers generally charge around the same as architects. There are other options. They include:

### **Architectural draughtsperson**

A draughtsperson will draw up plans from your basic ideas and often has a technical institute background. Expect to pay much less than for an architect- often around 4% to 5% of the total cost of the job. Some are members of ADNZ while others are connected to the Design Association of NZ (DANZ).

This is a good, low-cost solution in many situations. If you want your laundry redone, a draughtsperson can prepare the drawings and instructions for the builder, plumber and electrician.

But don't expect the same sort of architectural style. If you want a sunroom at the front of the house, for example, a draughtsperson's solution may not look so good from the street.

### **Builder**

Many builders are happy to draw up their own designs, and they often have a lot of valuable experience in what works. But for all that, they are not usually trained in house design. You're likely to get stock plans with variations possible depending on the scope of the work. Councils are also tending to expect a higher level of drawing expertise and details on the plans than what most builders can do.

How to get the right result

Finding the architect, or other building designer, briefing them and then keeping enough control of the process to ensure it goes well is not always straight forward. Here's our step-by-step guide to how to do it.

### **1 Look at their other work**

An architect or designer's existing work provides an excellent guide to what they are likely to do for you.

Find out who designed other houses or renovations you like the look of. If you're thinking of using a registered architect, ask the local branch of the NZIA or ADNZ for contact lists. Look at websites – both the NZIA and ADNZ have one, as do many architects.

### **2 Check their credentials**

Ask friends and neighbours for recommendations – word of mouth is hard to beat. Look for someone with professional indemnity insurance, which covers you for serious loss caused by the architect. Make sure they're members of either the NZIA or ADNZ.

Draw up a shortlist of two or three architects or designers.

### **3 Show them your dream**

Be as clear as you can about what you want. Tell them what you'll be doing with the new room/s, how your family uses the house and what building materials you like.

If possible, show them as well – you could make rough drawings, give them examples from magazines or ask them to look at other houses in the area. Give them a written brief, and keep a copy.

### **4 Open your mind to the possibilities**

At the same time, try to be open to their ideas.

One way to do this is to brief them on your underlying needs, rather than how you see them being met. You might, for example, say you'd like to improve the traffic flow between kitchen and living areas, but leave it to them to suggest which walls and doors should be changed.

### **5 Tell them your budget**

Be clear about what you are prepared to spend – in total. Ask the architect if you're being realistic (many people aren't).

Explain that if the architect or designer doesn't think so, you'd much prefer to know now, rather than when it's too late to do much about it. Indicative, construction cost figures are available from The NZ Building Economist trade journal.

### **6 Check with their other clients**

If you've found an architect or designer you like and who seems to understand what you want, talk to some of their previous clients – before you sign anything. This is

essential.

### **7 Get a preliminary design done**

If they still seem right, commission an outline of the design. It's quite common to do this, with a set fee separate from the rest of the job.

This is important because of what you need to do next

### **8 Consider a quantity surveyor**

A quantity surveyor provides a written estimate on the basis of the architect's preliminary design, and they should get it right to within 10 or 15 percent.

For a typical extension involving a new bathroom and two bedrooms, a quantity surveyor estimate will cost around \$500.

### **9 Agree who will be in charge of what**

With the prelim design and the reliable cost estimates, you're almost in a position to sign a contract. But first, you need to agree on exactly how much of the work your architect or designer will do.

The whole process from here on involves several distinct stages:

Preparation of full working drawings and specifications.

Liaison with the council to get a building consent. A list of approved building certifiers is available from the Building Industry Authority free of charge.

Selection of a builder and, with labour only contracts, various subcontractors (plumber, electrician, plasterer, and so on). Builders are commonly employed following a sealed tender process, and they in turn employ the subbies.

Periodic observation of the building process.

Liaison with the council or building certifier over completion of the project – a process called code compliance.

Approval of the finished project from other non-code-compliance points of view.

If you go for a full service contract, an architect will be in charge of these things. It's a good approach, because they are then directly responsible for all the results of their work. But it can be expensive.

You could choose to do some of tasks yourself, or you could get the builder to do

some. But these options may not give you enough control over the building process itself— so you run a higher risk of delays, cost overruns and misunderstandings. And if anything does go wrong, it will be up to you to fix it!

One solution is to employ a project manager specifically for the role. Architects can often advise on who to consider.

Whichever option you choose, it's critical that everyone –architect, builder and you – is clear about who is in charge. And the way to ensure that is to put it in writing

### **10 Sign a good contract**

Do this no matter how big or small the job is. The NZIA has detailed contract documents, which they encourage members to use. These provide a string of useful guidelines, stressing the importance of talking about cost throughout the project. The contract should say every change or alteration from the contract documents should be costed and agreed in writing by the client.

ADNZ members also offer a standard contract between client and designer for the provision of architectural services.

If your architect is not using an NZIA contract, it should be because they have an even better one. If it's not an NZIA contract, ask a lawyer to check it for you.

### **11 Stay involved in the design process**

From the preliminary design stage, your architect will transform ideas into detailed drawings and specifications. These will be used to gain the building consent and in the tendering process, if this is used. They then become the basis of the contract drawn up with the builder.

It's important you know what's in them. You may not want to make every decision, but you should ensure your architect explains all the decisions that are being made.

With a good grasp of what the final result will be, you'll save money and emotional energy down the track. If you find visualising the final result challenging, ask for clear drawings or computer generated images.

### **12 Keep track of the building progress**

Again, you don't have to supervise the builder or be involved in every step. But you should ensure that whoever is managing the project keeps you informed of progress. Make sure any variations are signed off.

### **13 Pay for work done**

Pete of Katikati told us he had an architect design a flat for under his house. The fee (\$4500 plus GST) was to cover drawings and complete project management. Pete paid the whole amount upfront, prompted by the architect's good reputation and also the fact that she had sent an account for the full amount, demanding payment within 28 days.

After the building consent was obtained the architect cited the "current shortage in

builders and tradesmen” as reasons why she hadn’t been able to obtain quotes. After waiting four months, and sick of lame excuses, Pete got on the phone and within days had organised a builder, plumber and electrician to carry out the work.

On hearing this, Pete’s architect said, “You may as well run this from here on in then.” Great –except \$1400 plus GST of the fee had been for project management. Pete asked for a refund and was turned down flat.

Pete could have taken this to the Disputes Tribunal, but decided not to pursue the matter. The lesson here is –make progress payments to your architect, as each part of the agreed work is completed.

### **If things go wrong**

If a problem arises, first try and resolve it with your architect or designer.

If that fails, you may soon have some protection under the recently tabled Architects Bill 2003. If passed, it will repeal the Architects Act 1963, which offered little disciplinary clout.

The Bill introduces ongoing competency testing for architects and the establishment of a public register that includes details of any disciplinary action taken against an architect. We welcome these long overdue changes.

We’re also cautiously welcoming the proposals of the new Building Bill. Expected to pass into law later this year, the Bill requires all building practitioners to be licensed and subject to a new disciplinary regime to be regulated by the Building Practitioners Licensing Board.

The Consumer Guarantees Act says any service contracted by a consumer should be carried out with reasonable skill and care. It should be at a reasonable price, and be fit for its purpose. This law applies to all building practitioners.

If you think you have a case under the CGA, take your case to a Disputes Tribunal (get the details from our website, [www.consumer.org.nz](http://www.consumer.org.nz)).

### **Paying your architect/architectural designer**

There are three common charging regimes for architects and architectural designers: by the hour, as a percentage of the total project costs, and a fixed fee. Combinations of these are also possible.

Hourly rates vary between \$70 to \$100 per hour approximately.

Paying an hourly rate can be dangerous. If it’s a big job, the number of hours involved will be hard to work out. If it’s small, you may as well opt for the simpler option of agreeing on a fixed fee.

Percentage charging is the traditional approach, and still the most common. It's often preferred as a method of charging because it allows for changes to be made along the way.

A percentage approach means the cost of the design service remains proportionate to the final value of the project.

Percentage fees on residential work range from perhaps 1% for a preliminary design, up to 8-10% for full design and administration services. Fees will obviously vary from designer to designer and also depending on the complexity of the project.

Fees are generally calculated by back costing to an hourly rate.

Before committing to an architect, make sure you research the architect's credentials and determine what level of service and protection you'll get for your dollar.

Whatever option you agree on, ask for a detailed breakdown. One Wellington architect told us a typical residential project fee could be broken down into: initial design 2.5 percent; site analysis 2.5 percent; preliminary design 20 percent; resource consent time charge; developed design 10 percent; contract documentation 38 percent; tendering and negotiation 2 percent; contract administration 25 percent.

### **What's an architect?**

Architects are registered with the Architects Education and Registration Board (AERB). This generally means they have gained a five-year architecture degree at university, have had at least three years' practical experience and have passed a registration exam. Their professional body, NZIA, has over 1100 members. The Architects Act makes it illegal for anyone to call themselves an "architect" unless they are registered with the AERB.

Architectural Designers of New Zealand (ADNZ) has around 250 members and its members should also be considered.

#### **MORE HELP**

NZ Institute of Architects 09 623 6080 [www.nzia.co.nz](http://www.nzia.co.nz)  
Architectural Designers New Zealand 03 358 5235 [www.adnz.org.nz](http://www.adnz.org.nz)  
NZ Institute of Quantity Surveyors 04 473 5521 [www.nziqs.co.nz](http://www.nziqs.co.nz)  
Architects Education & Registration Board 04 801 8972 [www.aerb.org.nz](http://www.aerb.org.nz)  
Design Association of New Zealand 04 565 1400 [www.danz.co.nz](http://www.danz.co.nz)  
NZ Building Economist 09 479 5099

#### **MORE FROM CONSUMER**

*How to Get the House You Want*: Published by Consumers' Institute (\$22.95 members; \$25.95 retail).

#### **Thanks**

Many people wrote to tell us about their experiences with architects and other building designers.  
Our thanks to all.