



BLUEPRINT for SUCCESS

Building or renovating a home can be a fraught process, especially if you're going it alone or have never embarked on a building project before. Thankfully, **Neil Cownie** and architects like him are on hand to take you step by step from the drawing board to moving day.

By GABI MILLS

IT'S AN EXCITING process, building your own home or modifying an existing structure, but it's also a process which should be handled with care. For too many, it's an experience that can break budgets, bust deadlines and ultimately leave homeowners with a sour taste in their mouths.

To help people through the buying, building, renovating and maintenance of their home, a new website has been launched by the Australian Institute of Architects - askanarchitect.com.au.

As an independent source of information and advice, the website aims to help consumers understand what's involved in renovating and building a home from the perspective of the very people who design homes - architects.

It's a treasure trove of guidance, tips



and tools to help make the house-building process for even first-timers less stressful, and is designed to promote the use of architects in the first instance, potentially even before the land for the new home has been purchased.

For local award-winning architect Neil Cownie, the website is a much-needed introductory resource for those new to building and potential clients who already recognise the benefits of working directly

with an architect.

"As an architect, I've got a very rounded experience, having been the director of Overman & Zuideveld Architects for 10 years before running my own practice for the past six years," says Neil.

"I've found that people often don't appreciate what they are missing out on when they don't engage architects when starting out on the process towards home-building. It is sad to see some of the resulting misguidance resulting in homes completed without an architect's involvement."

Neil cites a recent conversation in which a graphic designer said it amazed him how many people go, in the first instance, to a printer and then through the printer arrange for graphic design work rather than working with the graphic designer first on the custom design before arranging for the printing through the most competitive quote based on the graphic design provided.

"I can see a parallel with this in the building industry where many people seem drawn to seek the advice of a builder in the first instance rather than obtaining the



design for their custom-designed house from an architect prior to discussions with builders," said Neil.

To some people embarking on the design of a new home going directly to a builder may seem to them to be a 'one stop shop' solution.

In contrast starting the process of designing a new house by engaging an architect first provides the advantage of considered specific design solutions for the owner's circumstances and lifestyle, and specific solutions to suit the site and climatic factors along with providing an independent design of a new home that can then be tendered between several builders to ensure the most competitive current market cost for the construction of their home.

"Seeking the advice of an architect can start even before the property has been

purchased as they can advise on the most suitable available site from which the clients are choosing on which to build," says Neil.

Many people are surprised to learn that not only can an architect's service commence before the land has been purchased, but that it can also extend beyond the completion of the home when the architect carries out a construction contract maintenance review of the building



input in the form of imagination, technical knowledge and experience, to the final reality of the built form.

"Firstly the client's brief is determined which includes a 'wish list', states the lifestyle, how the family will relate in the house and provides an indication of budget," says Neil.

"Then I talk to the client about their budget, what they require from the house and where they are in their life journey - it's all relevant to what kind of house we create together."

From there the architect will determine the specific parameters of the site which would include council regulations, climatic factors of sun and wind orientation, views, levels, vehicle traffic and the neighbouring properties. With all of this information the architect is then equipped to commence the design of a home that will suit all of these parameters.

"The design of the home is shaped by the

DESIGN FOR LIFE Neil Cownie (opposite) has worked on some of the city's most prestigious buildings, both domestic and commercial. Left, the brief to create a holiday home on the Mandurah marina has been a rewarding project.



six to 12 months after the construction has finished.

At that time, the architect compiles a schedule of any outstanding items that are required for rectification in accordance with the building contract thereby ensuring the best outcome for the new home owner.

Architects develop relationships with each new client and guide the way through the journey from a blank canvas, with

site's parameters and the client's requirements making each new home unique."

After that initial briefing session, Neil puts together a sketch design which, once agreed upon, proceeds to design development and more detailed plans and elevations incorporating the various materials which will be used throughout the new house, both inside and out. At this stage the anticipated construction cost is



touches which will undoubtedly make your home unique.

“My client for the Mandurah holiday house wanted an iconic building to suit what they rightfully saw as an iconic site given its exposure to public spaces on three sides and the marina.

“I didn’t want to directly reference nautical features but looked back instead to a wharf-style of architecture to deliver a design for the building of substance.”

Neil created a design for the house that incorporated colourful blinds which respond to climate conditions, resembling flags or sails as well as a bold 3D grid infilled with pre-weathered driftwood, realising his client’s vision of a true one-off holiday home by the water. The building makes the most of the marina view while sensitively addressing the climatic conditions of the seaside location.

determined by a quantity surveyor.

“The benefit to the client in working with an architect and a quantity surveyor as a team is that they can have reassurance that as they develop the design of their new home it will be to their budget.

“I’ll then submit the plans to the local council for development approval - and some councils have more stringent specific requirements than others,” says Neil, who has worked on some of Perth’s most notable residential builds, including a new three-storey home on Mandurah’s marina and the prestigious corner restaurant development, Duende, in Leederville.

Once development approval has been obtained, the detailed working drawing stage commences in which drawings and supporting documents are produced from which a building licence can be obtained and from which a builder can build the new home.

Once a building licence has been approved, it’s time for the architect to tender the construction of the new home with several builders.

“Tendering ensures the best market rate is obtained for the cost to construct the house - another benefit to initiating the process with an architect.”

“It can take 12 months from our first meeting before building begins depending on approvals,” says Neil. “During this time the architect will have designed all of the cabinetwork, selected all of the internal and external materials and finishes, lighting and tapware etc.

“In some of my completed homes the design service was extended to include the selection of soft furnishings and artwork”



ELEGANT DESIGN
Engaging an architect like Neil Cownie ensures that a build will proceed from the start with an expert’s eye over the entire project.

“Because the client and I have worked together from the very start, the same thread of creative thought follows through from the initial design to the last detail.”

An architect also brings extra creative

The concept too of having a design professional ‘in your corner’ from the outset cannot be underestimated, says Neil.

“Building a home, after all, is a huge investment and the design of the home must maximise the benefit to the home-owners before it develops into reality.”

Visit neilcowniearchitect.com.au for information about Neil’s practice and examples of his work. Visit askanarchitect.com.au for more information about engaging an architect, a renovation cost guide, Pinterest tools to help you start scrapbooking ideas and details of architects in your area. **PL**

•• Read Neil’s new *Ask an architect* column in 2015.



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