



# How to Hire an Architect

Where To Start

What to Ask

How To Sort Out Fees

Nothing is more exciting than creating a new home and nothing will affect the success of your project more than your choice of the right architect.



The architect guides you through the design and function of a home as well as the emotional toll and financial costs involved in its construction. Finding your perfect match in an architect is not impossible and the following seven points can guide you along the way. Use these to help analyse the personality, design strategy and communication skills of your candidates. Your goal is to find the right architect for your home design, for your budget and for you.

### 1. Finding an Architect

Like many other fields, word of mouth is the best way to look for an architect. Ask family, friends and professional colleagues for referrals. Is there a particular home you admire? A knock on the door can yield an introduction to your project's potential architect. Professional organisations such as the Australian Institute of Architects are also great sources to find architects. General contractors, and other trade-related people would also be able to furnish some referrals. Be sure to visit the web sites of your candidates. Look at their previous work, references and testimonials. Get a feel for their architectural design style and language – is it about blending into the neighbourhood, or is it about making a bold statement? Then, start a conversation. Make an appointment for a consultation. Meeting face to face will help you decide.

### 2. Your architect's approach

How will the architect approach your project? Let them know the most important aspects of your project and ask how they would incorporate them into their design process. If you are planning a renovation or an addition, start with the aspects of your home you currently like and discuss how they could be improved. If you are looking for a new home, show the architect photos of other projects that you have seen and liked, either locally or images from the internet and ask for their ideas on how they would approach that design style. Even though the architect might have an attractive portfolio and good references you will still want to make sure their design process and approach is right for you and your project.

### 3. Signature Style: Who's got it and do you want it?

It is common for an architect to be known by a certain design style – conservative, ultra-modern, heritage to name a few - though most architects are able to adapt their signature style to what you want. Reviewing their portfolio either in person or online will allow you the opportunity to assess their level of flexibility in design style. Have plenty of examples of the look you want; these can be found in catalogs, magazines or online. Environmentally friendly, sustainable “green” designs and construction however can be applied to any style.

Discuss the importance of these elements with your architect from the outset.

### 4. Meet your project architect

Signing a contract with an architect representing a larger firm does not necessarily mean that person will be your project architect. Actually, outside of single-architect owned operations, it is common procedure for another architect within the firm to be assigned to your project after you have committed to the project. Be sure to meet the **project architect** that will be responsible for your project before making any final decisions. Being able to communicate freely and openly with your project architect is vital to the success of your project. You should share a clear understanding of the project with your architect and feel completely comfortable.

### 5. 3-D modelling: Don't build your home without it

Architects understand how elevations and floor plans translate into actual buildings but their clients do not always share that same level of understanding. I know an established firm that was fired from a project because the homeowner, who approved the plans, thought the roof looked like a fast food restaurant even though the contractor had built per plan. So, what happened? There wasn't a 3-D model of the project. A 3-D model is the best way to see how your new home will look when built.

Software today allows design review from multiple angles and room walk-throughs. Being able to visualise in 3-D helps clients get better involved in the design process. "Walking through" the space before it is built improves your understanding of the project and also helps to maintain your excitement throughout the design process. Don't hesitate to ask for a 3-D computer model before the commencement of your project. Some architects now also have the added advantage of being able to produce a 3-D printed model of your home that you can take home and share with your friends!

## 6. The full-service architectural firm

Conceptual renderings and blueprints are not the only services architectural and planning firms provide. Ask about other services your candidate's firm offers. Ask about benefits of specific services to you and their corresponding costs. Ask your architect if there are any additional services offered and how they could be useful to you for your particular project.

Below is a glimpse into some additional services a typical architectural firm provides:

- ▶ Project feasibility studies & detailed cost estimates
- ▶ Evaluation of building potential
- ▶ Master planning
- ▶ Town planning applications
- ▶ Traditional & computer renderings
- ▶ 3-Dimensional, fly-through, computer visualisation
- ▶ Comprehensive construction documents
- ▶ Interior design service - fittings & finishes selections & scheduling
- ▶ Furniture, furnishings & equipment specifications
- ▶ Landscape design services
- ▶ Construction administration

## 7. Figuring out the fees

Before thinking about the cost of hiring an architect, remember that they are university qualified professionals. Their expertise and experience means they understand all aspects of house design and construction and can guide you safely through a successful project. Architect's rates typically reflect this level of expertise.

Typically, an architect's fee is calculated as a percentage of the project's construction cost. Depending on the services provided by the architect, the rate could range from 5 to 20 percent. However, when you first start the design process for your project, it is difficult, if not impossible to accurately determine the final project cost.

During this initial time period (before a good estimate of the final project cost is possible) the architect may charge an hourly fee or a retainer. The retainer or hourly fee will be credited towards the total architectural fee once it has been determined. Billing monthly is the industry standard.

Your architect may also offer a fixed fee service. This means they provide a project quote at a fixed rate, based on a defined level of service. Others may charge an hourly rate and keep a timesheet to record the time spent on your project. Since all three options have different pros and cons, it's wise to ask the architect how they charge and what happens if you need to change the project specifications or need extra services.

Also, ask when payment is expected and the preferred method of payment, i.e. direct deposit, cheque, credit card, etc. The most important thing about fees is complete transparency. Insist upon it.

The only way to truly work out the cost of an architect is to ask. If comparing quotes, make sure each firm is given the same details and that they are providing you with the same services. Whether with architects or builders prices down the track, you must always compare apples with apples!

These tips give you a guide to help choose the best architect for your project. You will be working very closely with your architect on what may be one of the biggest investments of your life. Not only are an architect's answers to your questions important, but how they are answered speaks volumes, too. Did they take time with the details to clear up confusion? Did you feel comfortable with them? Did they conduct business in a transparent manner? Creating a new home is exciting but can feel intimidating. Choosing the right team can make it an enjoyable process - that team starts with choosing **the right architect.**



**Melissa Fleming**  
Principal Architect & Director  
**Metroworks Architects Pty Ltd**  
Suite 405B • LifeLab Building  
198 Harbour Esplanade  
Docklands • VIC • 3008  
T: (03) 9670 9771  
[www.metroworks.com.au](http://www.metroworks.com.au)

