

Most people who renovate or build their own home can't wait for the process to end. But while the destination is often a lot more fun than the journey, following a logical route can save you time and money.

SIX STEPS TO SANITY

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An artist's impression of your home design can bring your plans to life.

Did you know...

If you're building a new home, or renovating in a place where knocking down and rebuilding from scratch is an option, then it's at this stage that you might decide between a custom build and a project home. The latter will usually be cheaper. If you do decide on a project home, some of the steps in the next section are relevant, but once you have a design brief, it will be a case of finding a builder with designs that are similar to what you have in mind. This is because project home builders tend to offer pre-designed homes and although these designs can be varied to a certain extent, it's one of the reasons this option costs a little less.



STEP 1: SETTING YOUR BUDGET

WHERE DO YOU START – THE MONEY or the design concept? By all means start with the design if you're rich or utterly unconcerned about money. For most of us, however, money is an issue. So how much do you need to achieve what you want?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How much can you afford to spend – that is, what's in the bank or what can you borrow?
2. What's your ultimate goal, what are your accommodation needs and what will it roughly cost?
3. How much should you capitalise on the house?
4. Match up 1 and 2, then compare to 3 to check that it's feasible, logical and financially viable.

HELP!

The Archicentre Cost Guide at www.archicentre.com.au gives a good indication of what kind of dollars you're likely to spend on your renovation or build. Archicentre is the building advisory service of the Australian Institute of Architects.

While a basic design brief would outline all your accommodation needs, a good one will also describe your aesthetic likes and dislikes.



Working with a designer or architect may be a good investment.

STEP 2: CREATING A DESIGN CONCEPT

By now you've probably been looking at magazines for so long that you might even think you're a designer. However, between daydreaming over kitchens, tapware, tiles and vanities, take the time to develop a good design brief.

While a basic design brief would outline all your accommodation needs, a good one will also describe your aesthetic likes and dislikes. It should also outline how and when you want to use each of the spaces.

When you have a good design brief, it's probably time to find an expert. This is particularly important if your project is more than a small renovation. The right designer should be able to make a space work in ways you'd never thought of.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Do you need a designer? If so, what sort?
2. What are the key credentials you need to check?
3. Have you written a good design brief that doesn't just list the rooms you need but outlines how and when you intend to use them, as well as aesthetic likes and dislikes?

CHOOSING YOUR TEAM: DESIGNER

When it comes to the designer on your team, how do you choose between an architect, building designer, interior designer, draftsman, builder or a combination thereof? The differences are not clear-cut. If you think you'll want to restrict your changes to the existing building structure, then an interior designer

could be the best option. If you want a design for the demolish-the-back-of-the-house-and-build-a-new '?' scenario, then an architect or building designer might be more appropriate, although an architect would often be a little more expensive.

A draftsman is another option, or you could go directly to a builder. Typically, builders have an arrangement with a designer or draftsman to do the plans rather than doing the design themselves.

HELP!

If you're looking for a designer/architect, you should look at their previous work. Check out projects featured in *Look Home* (of course), as well as the searchable websites of members' details at www.architecture.com.au and www.bdaa.com.au. ⇒

STEP 3: COUNCIL APPROVAL

Everyone seems to know someone who has spent months – or even years – nudging a development application through the council. To do what you can to speed up the process, it pays to understand key regulations, the approval process, how to manage your neighbours and what to do if you're rejected.

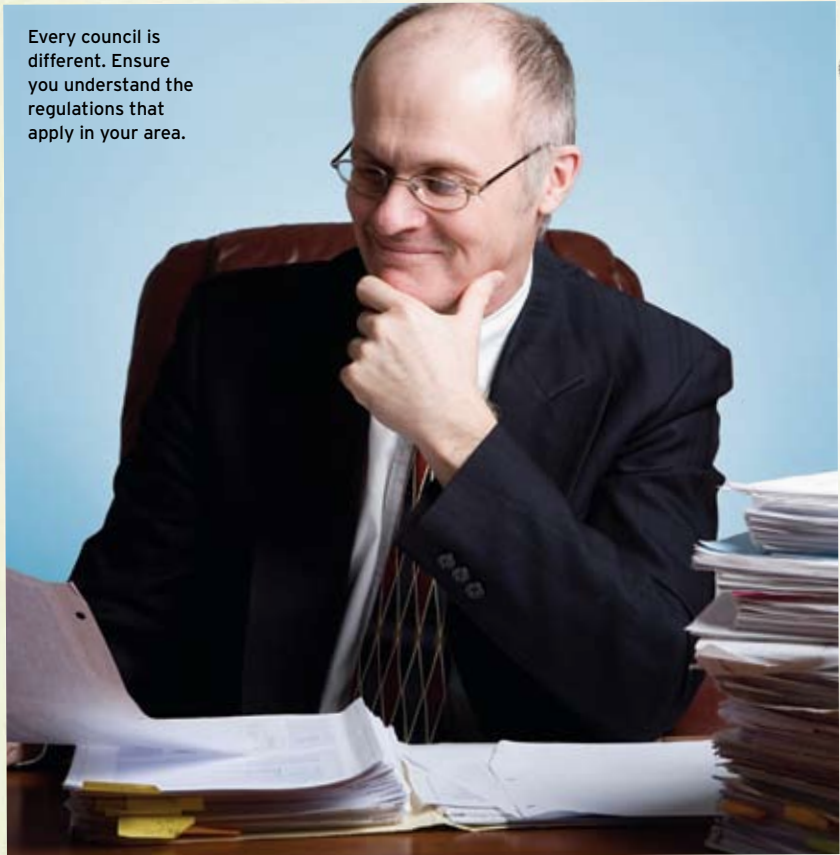
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the regulations that govern your project?
2. How can you achieve what you want while being sensitive to the neighbours?
3. What are your options if rejection looks likely to or, worse still, actually does happen?

HELP!

Not all councils are the same. So ensure that you are complying with the specific regulations in your area. Your local council will usually have planning regulations on its website.

Every council is different. Ensure you understand the regulations that apply in your area.



STEP 4: GOING TO TENDER

Everyone seems to have at least one bad builder story – if you haven't been stung personally, then you'll definitely know someone who has. But how often do we think of ourselves as 'bad' consumers? We should admit our own lack of detailed plans, homework, expertise and/or patient decision making means that we often contribute to problems.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Are your plans detailed enough and is the specification complete?
2. Have you thought about your tender options – fixed price or cost plus?
3. Should you get an expert on the team – aside from the builder? What about a building consultant?

CHOOSING YOUR TEAM: BUILDER

When you have the names of some builders you might use, or even some rough quotes, how else can you assess them? Aside from the basic checks of whether their licence is current, or whether there have been judgements recorded against them, it's worth making the effort to talk with past clients. Check if their jobs were similar to yours and find out how long ago the project was finished. Sometimes, bad quality of work may take a while to show up.

It's one thing to look at a finished job, but as bad workmanship that creates problems can be hidden behind a fit-out, you may get an insight into how the builder works by looking at a job in progress. Take a walk through a job in progress with your building consultant.

CHOOSING YOUR TEAM: BUILDING CONSULTANT

A building consultant can help you carry out quality of works inspections, report and, if there are problems, possibly act as a mediator to assure an acceptable completion of the building works.

The Institute of Building Consultants (IBC) became a Division of Master Builders in 1994 and is made up of a variety of property-related professionals.

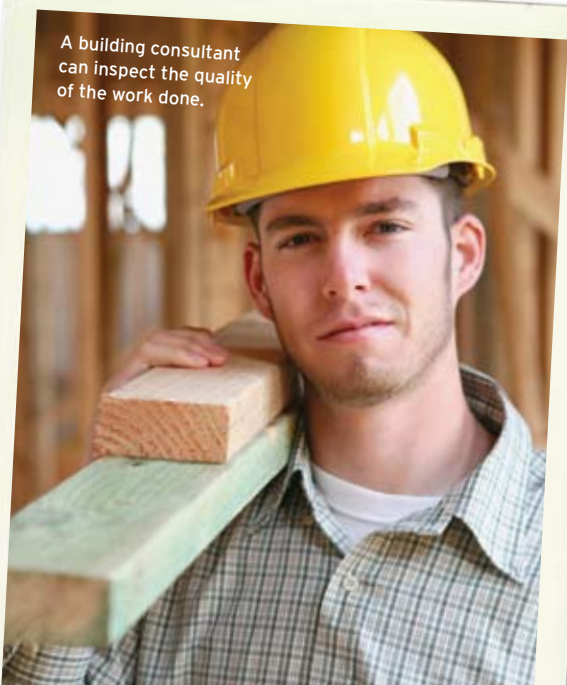
Members of the IBC have met acceptable industry standards for professional competence, professional ethics and client care.

Consumer Affairs Victoria publishes *Building and Renovating – A Guide for Consumers*. It suggests asking the following questions of a builder's past clients:

1. Did the builder start and finish on time?
2. Were they able to communicate regularly and clearly with the builder about any changes suggested by either party or about queries relating to quality?
3. Did the price increase?
4. Was the reason for and amount of the increase reasonable and agreed to?
5. Did the builder place details and prices of changes suggested by either party in writing and get them signed off before making changes?
6. Did the builder's subcontractors arrive on time and do a good job?
7. Did the builder request any changes to the size of stage payments in the contract or ask for payments before a stage was complete? (This can be a sign of cash flow problems.)
8. Were the clients satisfied that the quality of the work matched the details placed in their contract?

HELP!

Walk around your local area to see who's building and then ask the owners about their experiences. This is one way to find a good local builder. Alternatively, you could check out the Housing Industry Association website at www.tradebuild.com.au. For licence checks go to your relevant state fair trading or consumer affairs website, and for an excellent guide to renovating and building go to www.consumer.vic.gov.au.



STEP 5: SIGNING A CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT

While some people say that a contract's only as good as your ability to enforce it, it's not just for when things go wrong. A well-structured contract can help prevent problems – as long as you stick to the rules set out in it. It's important to structure the contract to suit you, rather than the builder. Make sure you get the right advice and document all stages of the process.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Does your offer letter fully reflect the scope of works?
2. Have you worked out your objective on key contract clauses,

taking particular care with the structure of the payment schedule and how variations and delays are dealt with?

3. Have you sought legal advice from a construction law expert?
4. Have you really read and understood your contract, ready to apply it?

HELP!

Go to the websites of the Housing Industry Association (www.hia.com.au), the Australian Institute of Architects (www.architecture.com.au) or the Master Builders Association (www.masterbuilders.com.au) for standard contracts. ⇒





During construction is when it's critical to be vigilant about quality. What you really want to avoid are structural problems, or the most common type of problem, water-related failures.



STEP 6: CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

After all this planning, it's only now that building begins. Hopefully, this is when all your hard work pays off. Sometimes, though, despite the most perfect preparation, things aren't the size you imagined or are going more slowly than you thought. And problems can be discovered in the existing building that weren't previously apparent. During construction is when it's critical to be vigilant about quality. What you really want to avoid are structural problems, or the most common type of problem, water-related failures.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Can you put your hand on your heart and say you'll know a problem if you see it? If you can't, do you think you might need an expert to help you review the quality?
2. Have you bitten the bullet and asked about the things that don't look quite right?
3. You've probably spent a lot of time thinking about the taps and tiles – but have you been involved in choosing things that don't add glamour but do add some peace of mind?

HELP!

If you don't have an expert on the team, then this Guide to Standards and Tolerances, produced by Victoria's Building Commission, is invaluable. Go to www.buildingcommission.com.au for a copy.

OTHER RESOURCES

We've just taken a simple look at the key stages of a renovation or new home build. Of course, the process

has many more steps than this. It pays to read up before you start – and not just the latest issue of your favourite design magazine! Check out the relevant government department in your state as a starter.

- **NSW Office of Fair Trading**
www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au
- **SA Office of Consumer and Business Affairs**
www.ocba.sa.gov.au
- **Building Commission Victoria**
www.buildingcommission.com.au
- **Building Services Authority (Qld)**
www.bsa.qld.gov.au
- **Builders' Registration Board (WA)**
www.builders.wa.gov.au
- **Workplace Standards Tasmania**
www.wst.tas.gov.au/industries/building/bpa/abp_register
- **Building Advisory Services Branch (NT)** www.nt.gov.au/lands/building/index.shtml. 