

Special Report

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**A DO- IT-
YOURSELF
DESIGN GUIDE
FOR THE HOME
RENOVATOR**



Australian
Institute of
Architects

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A DO- IT- YOURSELF DESIGN GUIDE FOR THE HOME RENOVATOR

Every year, thousands of Australians renovate their homes and unfortunately many are unhappy with the finished result. Some find their homes look different to the way they pictured them, are poorly planned, hard to heat or keep cool, cost far more than they thought, or took far longer than they expected. These problems invariably come about because they didn't do their homework.

Thousands of Australians have started their renovations with an Archicentre design concept and this guide has been developed from their successful experiences.

Move or Improve

This is the hardest decision for many people to make, but if you follow a logical process the decision becomes easier:

- Calculate the cost of moving. Stamp duty, agents' and legal fees, mortgage establishment costs, moving costs and bridging finance can cost \$40,000 to \$80,000 or more.
- Assess the structural integrity of your house and determine what basic repairs are needed. These could add \$10,000 to \$50,000 in unexpected costs. Download a free **Do It Yourself Checklist** from www.archicentre.com.au or better still, have Archicentre inspect it and prepare a list of necessary maintenance items for you.
- Make a realistic assessment of the likely cost of your renovation. Download a free **Archicentre Cost Guide** or obtain cost estimates through an Archicentre design concept report.
- Consider whether being an owner builder suits you. You may save 10% to 20% in costs but you assume all of the legal responsibilities and if you make a mistake it could cost you thousands.
- Check if you have town planning restrictions. Heritage, landscape and flood overlays may mean you need development approval (a planning permit), which could take from months to two years and cost thousands of dollars for various specialist reports. You should enlist the help of an architect if you are in this category.

The Measure up

An accurate plan of your existing house is essential if you are to avoid problems later. Your architect will do this for you as part of an Archicentre design concept, or you may wish to try this yourself. At the preliminary stage, approximate measurements may suffice but you may need an accuracy of +/- 10mm, including heights, for accurate working drawings.

- Measure the relevant areas inside, wall thickness included.
- Measure the outside for future reference; this will help determine the accuracy of the internal dimensions.

- Measure and note the position of all windows including height at sill and height at top.
- Note the location of switches, power points, plumbing points and fixed furniture.
- Note ceiling heights, changes in floor levels and the direction in which doors swing open.
- Sketch the roofline with great precision. If possible, get into the roofspace to measure the ridge height. A poorly sketched roofline often results in bad integration of the new and the old.
- Account for the dimensions on eaves, chimneys, porches and floor heights above ground, as well.
- Closely adhere to planning codes. If additions are planned, a site plan should indicate the distance from the house to the boundaries and in many instances, the neighbouring buildings. Renovation designs that conflict with planning requirements can delay projects with expensive, time-consuming planning appeals.
- From this data draw up a plan of existing conditions, at a scale of 1:100 or 1:50.

At this stage, you have measured the tangible. Next is the intangible – the design. The final design will be dimensioned in the same way as above.

The Design Brief

Prepare a comprehensive design brief.

Many renovators who fail to prepare a comprehensive design brief become unstuck because different members of the family had different expectations and no agreement was reached between them. Write down what it is you want to achieve, both now and later and have all of your stakeholders agree to it.

Clarifying your ideas now will help you to avoid an expensive crisis later on, or worse, a completed project that doesn't meet your needs.

- Ask yourself and other members of your family; does the proposed space suit intended purposes? What else is needed?
- Make a list of all of the new spaces you require
- Use existing rooms as a reference for spatial comparison.
- Leave plenty of space for fittings and furnishings, some people fail to do this and then find it hard to get things just right.
- Identify what you need now and what could wait until later if necessary. An Archicentre master plan can be a great way of creating your dream home in stages.
- Features can influence how much energy is conserved, whether you're installing skylights, extending the eaves, building a pergola to block the sun, optimizing a northerly aspect, or using gas or electricity. Again these are only some of the factors.

- On a busy street, a fence and a vibrant garden helps reduce noise transmission. However, the main entry point for noise is through the windows. Have the windows glazed to 7mm. It's not as expensive as double-glazing, but it works effectively.
- Familiarise yourself with energy and water saving principles. Download **Energy Wise and Water Wise** Design Guides from Archicentre on those subjects. Most states now require renovations to meet minimum energy and water saving requirements.

The Design Concept

Create a great first impression! Many people plan their renovations by selecting the finishes and fittings they want without thinking creatively about the spaces they will put them in. This is one of the most common causes of failure. You may over capitalise and end up unhappy with the finished product.

Remember – you get only one chance at a first impression!

- A successful design starts with an imaginative concept and usually doesn't need expensive fittings and finishes.
- Consider the way that windows relate to outdoor spaces. Well planned courtyards can enhance a project.
- Avoid rooms that serve as corridors to other rooms.
- Don't make rooms larger than they need to be, you may need unnecessarily expensive structures to support the roof.
- Draw your concept plan accurately to 1:100 or 1:50 and draw furniture to scale to ensure that it fits and that rooms aren't too large.
- Carefully consider the external elevations. Never construct an extension that appears to be a cheap add-on. Conversely, it is not always necessary to precisely match the details of period homes. Your architect will consider this as part of an Archicentre design concept.

The Cost

Do you like property developers? That is what you will become as a home renovator. You should plan to make a profit from your project if you decide to sell later.

Prepare a basic cost estimate before you proceed with working drawings. The free **Archicentre Cost Guide** will help you here. At this point you may realise that you need to scale down the size of your renovation, use less expensive finishes and fittings or plan to construct the project in stages. Archicentre helps thousands of renovators by producing a design master plan to meet cost objectives.

Working Drawings

Your working drawings must be detailed and accurate. Download the free Archicentre **Working with Your Architect** document to explain in detail the importance of good working drawings.

The working drawings, specifications and building contract form what are known as the “contract documents”. With a good set of contract documents you will be able to do the following

- Reduce the likelihood of variations from unknown or unresolved issues. Variations can add up to 30% to the building cost through poor contract documents.
- Enable you to shop around. Obtaining competitive tenders will show you that builders’ costs can vary by over 50% on the same contract documents.
- As an owner-builder, detailed working drawings and specifications will help you get more competitive sub-contract prices.
- Help you obtain the relevant permits.

The Contract

Choose the right contract.

There are many types of contracts available and some are loaded in favour of the builder or sub-contractor. Choosing the wrong contract could ultimately cost you thousands of dollars. At the very minimum, your contract should include the following

- Start and finish dates
- Liquidated damages (an agreed amount that the builder will pay you if the project is late)
- Rates for variations
- A defects liability period
- A dispute resolution process
- An unambiguous contract price
- A list of prime cost allowances

As part of an Archicentre design concept, your architect can give you advice on this most important area.

Builder or Owner-Builder?

Decide whether you want to be an owner-builder or have a builder build it for you.

As an owner-builder, you may save 10% to 15% (a builder’s normal profit margin) but you may pay more for materials. You are also legally the builder, so you take on responsibility for the following

- Occupational Health & Safety on the site
- Insurances
- Owner-builder’s warranty
- Building and planning regulation compliance

- Responsibility for the work of sub-contractors

If you choose to have a builder build for you, undertake the following checks

- Check that they are registered
- Check that they have builder's all risks insurance
- Check that they have builder's warranty insurance on your project
- Check their references

Getting It Built

Be prepared for inconvenience, dust and to spend time checking the work. The construction stage of a project is generally referred to as "contract administration", because that is what you are actually doing, administering a building contract. This is a very complex stage of the project and you should either have an architect assist you or download **Working With Your Architect** from the Archicentre website to give you more information. You will need to do the following:

- Check the progress of the work to ensure compliance with the contract documents
- Assess the builder's progress claims and approve payment
- Assess variations and approve payment
- Determine when the project reaches practical completion

Archicentre can provide Construction Advice Reports where an architect can check the work if you don't already have an architect involved. This will help you resolve disputes.

Protecting Your Interests

Renovating and home improvements can be costly, time consuming and complex. They can also give you great joy and return a good financial gain if you do it correctly.

Archicentre has implemented its Design Concept Service as a low cost way of starting you on the road to a successful result.

Archicentre runs free seminars on buying and renovating homes. Details are provided on Archicentre's website.

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