



Stage 4. Developing the design

With needs and budget addressed, the architect now moves the design one step closer to construction. This includes outlining plans and elevations, providing drawings at proper scale and issuing additional documents and details to further articulate the design.

The architect will present material options and at the same time suggest viable construction techniques, outlining the merits of each, while considering costs. If cost savings can be made, they are likely to be made here. Architects keep up with all the latest in products and materials and can advise homeowners on practical alternatives. For example, would the homeowner prefer a concrete slab ground over a raised timber floor; or ceramic tiles over polished floorboards; and what is the best and most economical solution for heating and cooling?

Sometimes (perhaps to create a large open-plan living area, for example) the architect engages a structural engineer. Building structures can vary and often depend on the nature of the site – for example, a home on a sloping site can have strip footings that are dug into the ground, or an elevated platform supported on poles of steel, concrete or timber. These structural issues influence planning and design, as well as the materials chosen. The clever way in which structural details are resolved (the way that a beam connects to a column, the way a new roof connects to an old roof, for instance), is one difference between what an architect designs and a more 'pedestrian' solution.

For kitchen and bathroom design, the architect can assist with tile selection, bench tops and advise on flooring and lighting. The architect can also decide about what joinery units to include in the overall contract – whether the robes and kitchen will be sub-contracted and if the linen cupboard and entry display unit will be installed in this stage. Locating doors and windows to maximise views, light and cross-ventilation is another way an architect can add planning skill and functionality. As always, it is important to keep checking the scope of work against the budget. Obtaining a more accurate costing from a builder, cost estimator or quantity surveyor is useful.

Some level of approval is usually necessary for the work you are carrying out depending on the extent and type of project. Your architect's knowledge and experience will enable the proposal to go smoothly through the sometimes complex approval process. The architect will also consider the detailed planning and building controls affecting the proposal. With the developed design signed off, the architect will start meeting with building authorities to discuss the detail of the plans in preparation for Stage 5. Obtaining a Planning Permit/Development Approval.