

Working with an architect for your home

Whether you are planning to build a new house, to alter or extend your present home, to employ a builder or just do it yourself, it makes sense to consult an architect



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This guide is designed to show how an architect can help, the benefits to your project, and how working with an architect can pave the way to a successful project.

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Front cover and above: Stealth House, London SE5 (Manser Medal award winner), Robert Dye Associates.

An RIBA Chartered Architect will provide you with much more than just the drawings for your new home or alteration. You will be fully involved in creating a totally tailored solution for your living needs. An architect has the experience to see your project safely through to completion, overseeing the design, the planning and building regulations, the builders and your budget.

You can hire an architect to manage any or all parts of the design and construction process. All architects are trained to:

- help you to **define your objectives** for the project, identify the risks involved and interpret your ideas imaginatively and expertly
- work with you to **develop a design** that will interpret your ideas imaginatively, maximise your investment, be economic to build and run, and, of course, bring you years of comfort and pleasure
- help to **secure the approvals** that will be needed before your project can go ahead, including the preparation of applications to the local authority for planning consent (which certifies that the project meets rules governing the use and form of buildings) and for Building Regulations certification (which covers the functional requirements of buildings to safeguard the health and safety of the people using them)
- be able to **manage the construction phase** by helping you to select suitable builders, obtaining competitive prices for construction, monitoring progress, standards and safety on-site, arranging the input of other design specialists, and overseeing the co-ordination of the construction through to its successful completion.



House in Arthur Road, Wimbledon, Terry Pawson Architects. © Richard Bryant/Arcaid

Setting your brief

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Adobe, Newhall, Harlow, Essex, Proctor Matthews. © Tim Crocker

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Your brief should be clear and unambiguous and it should enshrine a common understanding between you and your architect.

Seek the architect's help in formulating the brief. The process may involve a number of discussions and help to establish the dialogue between you that the project needs. Above all the project brief should describe:

- **The functions of the finished project**
Who will use it, and for what? Have you visualised how these activities will be accommodated and provided for in the new space(s)?
- **Your motivations and expectations**
What do you hope to achieve by this project, in the short and long term, for yourself and others?
- **A design direction**
Contrasting or in keeping with existing buildings? Contemporary or traditional? Are there certain materials, fixtures or finishes you favour? Is sustainability an issue for you?
- **Authority for decision making**
Who will sign off decisions about design, about costs and about day-to-day matters on-site?
- **Timetables and budgets**
When should key stages be completed, how much should they cost, and how will they be financed?

A good, thorough brief will form the basis of the professional agreement you sign with your architect.

You are likely to be making a large financial and emotional commitment to your project, which makes standards and performance from others all the more important. Using a Chartered Architect provides you with extra safeguards to ensure that your designer acts with integrity and gives independent advice in support of your interests.

Only qualified architects registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB) are entitled to call themselves “architects” in the UK and only registered architects who are members of RIBA and adhere to the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct can be called “Chartered Architects”. If you are uncertain about the credentials of anyone claiming to be a Chartered Architect do ask them for their RIBA membership number or check with the RIBA.

Architects are required by UK law to be registered with the ARB and to comply with the Board’s *Standards of Conduct and Practice*. The ARB also has an obligation to represent consumers’ interests and in the final resort architects are subject to the disciplinary sanction of the Board in respect of “unacceptable professional conduct or serious professional incompetence”.

The requirements of the RIBA and ARB codes of Professional Conduct include:

- maintenance of professional indemnity insurance cover appropriate to the scale and type of work undertaken
- provision of adequate competence and resources
- a written record of the agreement with the client.



VXO House, Hampstead, London NW3, Alison Brooks. © Dennis Gilbert/View

The client/architect agreement

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Cobtun House, Worcester (RIBA Sustainability award winner), Associated Architects LLP. © Martine Hamilton-Knight

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Once you have selected your architect, the responsibilities of each party and the services to be provided by the architect should be set down in a formal agreement.

When you have work done to your home, you are acting in your private capacity, i.e. as a ‘consumer’, which is where the Unfair Terms of Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994 come into play. Your architect will discuss these issues with you so the terms of your agreement are fully understood and “individually negotiated in good faith”.

The agreement will record:

- details of your project and the services to be provided by the architect
- the calculation of fees and expenses
- the appointment of any other consultants
- the amount of the architect’s insurance cover and period of liability
- dispute resolution procedures.

You may find the RIBA Conditions and Schedule for a Domestic Project will be suitable for this purpose. This states, in plain, simple terms, the basic responsibilities of the architect, which include:

- to perform the services required using reasonable skill and care
- to act as your representative
- to advise you on compliance with statutory requirements
- to keep you updated on progress and on issues affecting time, cost or quality
- *not* to make any material changes to the services or the agreed design except in an emergency and
- *not* to sub-contract any obligation under the agreement.

When you have discussed and agreed all the details, your architect will draft a Letter of Agreement which you both sign to complete the contract.

There is no standard or recommended basis for this calculation and the fee is usually a matter for negotiation. The fee will reflect the degree of personal service and bespoke design that your project involves. Other factors will include the location and size of the practice, its reputation and specialist skills.

In 2006, an independent annual survey of fees by Mirza & Nacey Research recorded the general level of architect's fees for providing a full service for mostly new private houses to be between 8% and 12% of the construction cost. On projects to refurbish or extend houses, or for repair and conservation work on historic buildings, the fee can be a larger percentage of the building cost.

Fees for preparing the design and submitting the planning application are generally between 3% and 5% of the construction cost.

Fee options

An architect will usually quote their fee as a percentage of the building cost or as a lump sum. In cases where the scope of their work is harder to predict, or for services such as surveys or party wall advice, the quote will usually consist of an hourly or daily rate together with an estimate of the time required.

Expenses

These will generally be added to the fee and will be charged for items such as the costs of travel, copying drawings and documents, and for making planning or Building Regulations applications.

Payment

An architect who is retained for the entire project will typically invoice about one third of the fee during the design stage, the same at the construction information stage, and the balance during and following construction. Invoices are usually issued monthly, but regular payments can be budgeted over a period. Alternatively, fees might be paid on completion of each work stage.



Slice House, Porta Alegre, Brazil, Procter : Rihl. © Sue Barr, Marcelo Nunes (bottom right)



House in Aberdeen Lane, London N1, Azman Owens Architects. © Keith Collie

Legislation

It is important before you start your project that you are aware of the approvals that will be needed from the local authority for Planning and Building Regulations, as well as legislation that might affect your plans, such as party wall regulations.

Your architect can guide you through all of these matters as they develop the design. They will also be able to make the necessary submissions for approvals and handle negotiations with the statutory bodies.

The building contract

This is a vital document – the legally binding commitment between your builder and you as the client to deliver your project. Your architect can administer this contract on your behalf.

As we all know, it is not uncommon for building projects to contain hidden surprises – structural quirks or unexpected ground conditions, for example – that can impact on the design and possibly on the building cost. The best way of preparing yourself is an adequate written contract, designed to manage such events fairly from each party's point of view.

There is a range of standard forms of contract tailored to different size projects, and your architect will be able to advise you on the one best suited to your needs. They can also explain your rights under the *Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994*, and how these might influence your decisions about certain terms in the building contract, particularly payment procedures and dispute resolution.

Finding an architect

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Regardless of the type or size of your project, if you are looking for an architect, RIBA Client Services offers a variety of ways of finding the right architect for your project.

Free Nomination Service

Contact RIBA Client Services to obtain a free shortlist of RIBA architectural practices with the appropriate resources, skills and experience, drawn from our national database of over 4000 firms.

Online directory of registered practices

Our directory of practices can also be searched online. Go to www.architecture.com/useanarchitect and enter one or more search criteria: project size, practice location, service required and sectors of expertise. Or use the advanced search and a wider range of criteria to hone your options still further.

You can also access the RIBA Nomination Service online by submitting details of your project and requesting a “tailored search”.

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Private House, Gloucester, Jamieson Associates Architects. © Nick Meers

Selecting the right architect

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Ightham Mote, Sevenoaks, Stuart Page Architects. © Christine Page

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Do a little research

Visit the websites of your shortlisted firms and look at their entries in the RIBA's online directory – www.architecture.com/useanarchitect Listen to recommendations and contact their previous clients to discover what they are like to work with. If possible, visit finished projects or ask to see a portfolio of work.

Talk to your intended architect

Choose an architect whose work you like and speak to him/her. You need to be sure of their creativity and ability to get things done, as well as your ability to work together. Good architecture needs collaboration and dialogue. You have to respect each other's views. For clients, that may mean banishing the commonly-held but misplaced idea that architects will impose their own tastes and ideas on their clients – on the contrary – your architect's aim will be to follow your brief closely and reflect the aspirations it contains.

Further information

Free nomination service

To use the RIBA's free nomination service, either visit www.architecture.com/useanarchitect, or contact one of the RIBA Regional Offices:

RIBA Headquarters and London cs@inst.riba.org 020 7307 3700

RIBA East riba.east@inst.riba.org 01223 566 285

RIBA East Midlands riba.eastmidlands@inst.riba.org 01522 837 480

RIBA North East riba.north@inst.riba.org 07875 492 659

RIBA North West riba.northwest@inst.riba.org 0151 703 0107

RIBA South riba.south@inst.riba.org 0118 969 8051

RIBA South East riba.southeast@inst.riba.org 01892 515878

RIBA South West riba.southwest@inst.riba.org 01752 265921

RIBA Wessex riba.wessex@inst.riba.org 01225 874700

RIBA West Midlands riba.westmidlands@inst.riba.org 0121 233 2321

RIBA Yorkshire riba.yorkshire@inst.riba.org 0113 237 8480

Scotland (RIAS) info@rias.org.uk 0131 229 7545

Northern Ireland (RSUA) info@rsua.org.uk 028 9032 3760

Wales (RSAW) rsaw@inst.riba.org 029 2087 4753

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