

# Working with an Architect

A building project is a significant commitment and investment. It's also a great opportunity to create spaces designed specifically for you. Your needs and circumstances drive the project; your hopes and dreams are invested in it. As are a considerable amount of your resources. An architect is a valuable partner, providing innovative, technical and practical skill and support that will make sure your project meets your needs and stands the passage of time.

This guide is designed to help you understand how to get the best out of your relationship with your architect and how they will contribute to the success of your building project.

## Architecture in New Zealand

New Zealand architects are passionate about their work and uphold longstanding traditions of creativity, innovation and professional excellence.

Our architects' professional status is protected by the New Zealand Registered Architects Board. Only registered professionals can call themselves architects. Registration is earned through a combination of academic qualifications, significant practical experience and examination.

The majority of New Zealand architects are members of the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), a professional body which supports its members and promotes outstanding practice in architecture.

NZIA architects have access to ongoing professional development and training opportunities and support in policy developments and practice issues.

The NZIA is responsible for encouraging excellence in New Zealand architecture. We strive to ensure that our member architects uphold the philosophies and values of architecture and design, and work to create an exciting, innovative and sustainable built environment in New Zealand.

## An architect's skills

An architect's work is driven by four fundamental elements – technical skill, practical understanding, analytical ability and creative flair.

Good architecture is about more than just buildings – it is also about the people who use them and the environment they reside in. With that in mind, your architect will apply a range of disciplines, including aesthetics, planning, structure, sociology, psychology, construction, economics and business when they are designing your building.

This combination of talents allows your architect to create a highly personal and technically

sound design that meets your goals. Architects never replicate design solutions – so your project will be unique to you.

Your architect will be interested in what motivates you, and how that translates to your chosen surroundings. They are expert communicators and have the skills to translate your vision into a practical solution.

## An architect's services

Understanding the full range of services that an architect can provide will help you get the most out of the relationship.

Many people think that an architect is engaged for aesthetic reasons only. In fact, an architect's role goes far beyond design and they will oversee all the significant technical and administrative components of your project.

Ultimately, your architect will add value to your building project. You will work as a team to clarify your vision, budget, the feasibility of your ideas and your architect may utilise the expertise of other contractors or professional experts as required.

Your architect is a creative and technical specialist and will provide you with a comprehensive service.

Prior to starting work on creating your building you should negotiate terms and conditions with your architect. You are entering into a business partnership which, if clearly defined, will be mutually rewarding.

You should expect to sign an Agreement for Architect's Services which will outline the scope of work, the scope of services, how fees and costs will be charged and any special conditions of service.

## The architectural process

Every architectural project follows a series of clear stages. While creative design is one of the most tangible aspects of an architect's work, an architect can be involved in your building project every step of the way to ensure the best possible quality result.

From concept to finished project, an architect applies a mixture of analysis, creativity and problem solving to help your building dream become a reality.

### **The project brief**

The initial meetings with your architect are important for sharing information and discussing your vision for the project. Creating a project brief is about defining what you want and how you want to live. The brief sets horizons and creates the foundation for helping you reach your

design goal.

When you first meet your architect to develop the project brief it is important to articulate your needs clearly. Why are you embarking on this journey? What are your expectations of your architect? What do you like and dislike? How do you see your building being used in the long term? What are the priorities you will or will not compromise?

Time, quality and cost are important factors to consider prior to your first meeting. These elements drive every architectural project and ultimately shape decisions. It is up to you to determine and share with your architect which of these matter the most in your case.

Open, honest communication will help create a brief that is satisfying for everyone and will form the basis for a successful ongoing relationship with your architect. Take your time on the brief and don't be afraid to think outside the square. Your architect is trained to turn a creative idea into a practical solution.

### **Pre-design**

From the initial meeting, an architect will gather key information about the project. They will work with you to allocate responsibility for finding information and may engage with other professionals and the Council to gain a full understanding of the requirements for your design.

Identify clearly who is responsible for sourcing which information. There may be details about the site that are easier for you to relate. It can be useful to confirm in writing which elements of the pre-design phase you or your architect will oversee.

### **Concept design**

When an architect has the facts they need, they will progress to concept development. The concept for your project will come to life as an architect considers the project's scope, budget and any special requirements.

During concept design, your architect is essentially offering a range of solutions to the brief. Concepts may be developed through a series of drawings, floor plan and perspective sketches, computer renderings or physical models. During concept development, an architect will play with ideas and it is not unusual to receive several different visions for your project.

Your architect will be thinking about broad issues and they may challenge your thinking during concept design.

Communicate clearly what you do and don't like about each concept. Revisit your brief and assess whether all your needs have been considered and responded to appropriately, and discuss these with your architect.

At the end of this stage your architect will pull together a mixture of ideas into a concept for further development.

### **Developed design**

When you have agreed on a concept, your architect will test the ideas and refine details to shape the final design of your building. Developed design is a key phase – at this point you need to communicate any further needs or requirements as it is the last opportunity to refine the overall nature of the design before project planning commences.

Your budget will come into play during the developed design phase. Think about your priorities in terms of time, quality and cost and allocate authority for final decision-making.

At this stage your architect may engage a Quantity Surveyor to estimate costs. While it is enormously difficult to predict the final cost of a building, your architect and the external specialists they collaborate with are trained to identify all potential costs and will form an estimate based on that knowledge.

Be honest about your budget and work with your architect to find solutions to suit your needs.

### **Planning approval**

Your architect will play a role in securing resource consents for your building, if required, but may engage with specialists or consultants to secure the requisite consents for you.

### **Detailed design**

When your resource consent boundaries are defined and approved, your project will progress to the detailed design phase. This means that your architect will advance your design to the level of detail that allows a construction contractor to assess the full scope of the project prior to tender. This will include construction details, materials, components, systems and finishes.

Be sure to revisit the Agreement for Architects' Services to make sure all aspects of the contract are included in detailed design. Some architects may add additional design elements, including landscaping and interior design ideas, which you may or may not choose to adopt, according to the scope of your agreement.

### **Building consent**

Because your architect is at the heart of your building project, they are best positioned to understand the relevant codes and standards and articulate to the Building Consent Authority the particulars of your project.

An architect is trained to understand the building consent process – they know the jargon and technical issues which you may not fully grasp. Often an architect will communicate with the Building Consent Authority and foster understanding of your project from an early stage.

### **Project procurement**

Often, your architect will have an in-depth understanding of the current state of the construction industry and can be an invaluable guide in choosing a quality builder and other contractors to execute your design. Your architect can help with the tendering process and

can take your particular needs into consideration when choosing a contractor.

## **Contract administration**

Your architect is well trained and supported to manage contractual and financial transactions during the construction of your building. Projects do change and there are always unforeseen elements that may require contractual consideration – your architect is well placed to help with such developments. Let your architect know if you have any particular preferences about the contractual nature of your project or issues with financing.

There are comprehensive guidelines as to how NZIA architects should charge their own fees and administer payments for others. It is important for you to read and understand these recommendations. Generally, you will pay fees monthly or at set stages of the design process. Architects will set their fees according to the level of involvement they have in your project, as defined by the Agreement for Architect's Services.

## **Project observation**

Your architect can play an important role in overseeing the construction phase of your project with onsite visits and monitoring the construction contracts that are in place. Your architect knows best practice and can observe the quality of construction, as well as point out any potential issues that may arise.

It is your choice as to how deep your architect's onsite involvement is. When determining their role onsite, take their relationships with other contractors into consideration. You may decide it is necessary for your architect to work onsite regularly, or it might be sufficient for them to visit and monitor the project periodically.

## **Completion**

Your architect plays a key role at the end of the construction phase. When the main contractor advises your architect that the project is practically complete (some minor details may remain) your architect can assess the construction and provide a detailed list of remaining work.

Your architect will collect all trade warranties from the main contractor and will secure a Code Compliance Certificate for you. At this point in the project, your architect will also help administer final payments to contractors and issue the main contractor with a Defects Liability Certificate.

To find an architect in New Zealand, visit the website of the New Zealand Institute of Architects: [www.nzia.co.nz](http://www.nzia.co.nz).

