



# get it right from the start

When it comes to renovating, the end result is only as good as the initial planning and briefing process between you and your architect or designer

WORDS Luisa Volpato

**A**sk anyone who has renovated and most will tell you things don't always turn out as they thought they would. Some find their home looks different from the way they pictured it, or that it's hard to heat or keep cool; they've grown out of it quickly or it cost far more than expected.

The best way to avoid such issues is to take the time to prepare a good brief for your architect or designer about what you want for your home, keeping in mind any potential future plans and, importantly, being realistic about budget. Get it right from the start and you could save yourself time, money and heartache; and, best of all, you'll love living in your home for years to come.

## Best-laid plans

"Prepare a written wish list with as many details as possible together with pictures or ideas you have discovered in magazines," suggests architect Richard Malcolm from Design Studio 22. "Don't bother with structural ideas — leave the actual design and concept to the architect. After all, that's what you are paying them for."

Architect Philippa Randall of Studio 3 Design usually asks clients to create not one but two separate briefs. "One is the technical brief, which is the number of rooms, room sizes, any particular needs or furniture they have that they want to include — things like that," said Philippa, "while the second brief is more to do with their likes and dislikes about the house they live in, what works and what doesn't, how they like to live, what they're aspiring to and what their tastes

are. In this case it's more about their feelings. By separating the two you can actually get quite different pictures from people and then it's our job to bring the two together."

It's also important for partners to agree on what they want. After all, it's not the role of the architect to play marriage counsellor. "If you have a third party involved, such as an architect or designer, then issues are more likely to get ironed out at the beginning," Philippa said.

## Time and money

One of the main things to get right from the very beginning is budget, and to be clear about this with your architect. "You can't have champagne tastes on a beer budget. You need to be realistic about how far the money will go and what you can achieve," Philippa said.

You also need to be happy to make some compromises and be mindful of not over-capitalising. Whether you can stay at home or need to move during a renovation is also an important question to ask yourself.

Budget and timing are closely linked factors in any renovation and you need to be clear on both from the start, said Richard. "Building work always takes longer than expected and you need to factor this in regardless of how good the builder is, as he is very reliant on other contractors," he said.

While we can't always predict what the future will hold, at the briefing stage you should also give some thought to the length of time you plan to live in your home as well as any future family plans.

## The big picture

"As part of the briefing process, we encourage clients to look at the big picture or the master plan," said Philippa. "Even if they are only doing one or two rooms now but are thinking of renovating again later, you start with the big picture first and then step back and home in on the current details.

"This way, you can stage work, achieve something initially and build on that in the future if necessary. So you are not doing work needlessly now and in a few years end up destroying \$20,000 or \$30,000 worth of work because, for example, you put the kitchen in the wrong place when you first renovated," advised Philippa. Similarly, if you think you might go upstairs in the future, any current renovations need to factor in room for a future staircase.

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"If planning to further renovate in the future, include this in the brief so approvals can be applied for up-front," suggests Richard. "Right now, you may get on well with your neighbours and this will help with the approval process. Once there has been substantial commencement of works there is no time limit on completion."

"Good design doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg," said Philippa. "If you get the bones right, you can build on that. Good planning can make such a big difference and you will achieve a better result in the end."



### Be prepared

Before you consult an architect or designer, you need to differentiate between what you want, need and can afford to renovate. Ask yourself:

- **What is my budget?** Renovations always cost more than you think, so don't overstretch yourself.
- **What are my priorities?** Especially if you can't afford to do everything at once or it's not practical to.
- **What are my immediate versus future family needs?** Planning with the future in mind may help save you money down the track and prevent you undoing some of your good work.

### Going green

The briefing process is when you need to think about how environmentally friendly or energy-efficient you would like your renovation to be so this can be factored into the design and planning.





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"There are a lot of clients who are very environmentally aware and educated about what they want but don't know how best to implement it," said Philippa Randall of Studio 3 Design. "We help them weigh up the pros and cons so they can make an informed decision."

This may include things like:

- Passive heating and cooling rather than air-conditioners
- A solar hot-water system instead of gas or electricity
- Installing a rainwater tank or reusing wastewater in the garden
- Energy-efficient lighting, skylights, window glazing
- Using recycled construction materials and internal finishes

**Above:**  
Images courtesy of Studio 3 Design, photography Andrew Worssam