



RIBA

For more information and advice on the selection of RIBA Chartered Practices please contact:

**RIBA Client Services**

66 Portland Place  
London  
W1B 4AD

T: +44 (0) 20 7307 3700

F: +44 (0) 20 7436 9112

E: [cs@inst.riba.org](mailto:cs@inst.riba.org)

[www.architecture.com/UseAnArchitect](http://www.architecture.com/UseAnArchitect)

**RIBA Bookshop**

All the latest books, guides and documentation on architecture and construction – everything to help you select an architect and run a successful project – are available for your order at [www.ribabookshops.com](http://www.ribabookshops.com)



# Working with an architect for your home

If you're thinking about building,  
an architect is the best investment  
you can make.

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. This guide highlights the benefits an architect can bring to your project and how to find the right one.

## CONTENTS

- 4** What an architect can bring to your project
- 7** What an architect can do for you
- 8** How to find the right architect
- 10** Setting the design brief
- 12** The Client/Architect contract
- 13** Legislation
- 14** Fees and expenses

**Cover:** Trees, The Street, Ubley, Bristol by rdarchitects  
© Nigel Rigden  
RIBA Award 2007

**Left:** 115 – 117 Whitecross Street, London by Project Orange  
© Gareth Gardner  
RIBA Award 2010

## What an architect can bring to your project

An RIBA Chartered Practice can help you realise your ambitions and guide you through the design and construction process. Architects provide a service that extends well beyond producing a set of drawings – they can handle the paperwork, bring value for money, imagination and peace of mind to your project, whilst keeping it on track and on budget.

### Value for money

Architects are professional problem-solvers. Their experience and insight can help stretch what can be achieved within your budget and add value to your project. They can suggest new ways of utilising space and light, enrich the palette of materials, finishes or fittings, find a builder at the right price, and propose design solutions that will reduce your overall running costs whilst maximising the energy efficiency of your home. At a fraction of the cost of your project, an architect's fees will prove a sound investment.

### Imagination

An architect can lift your project out of the ordinary and help you achieve your aspirations and vision. They are trained designers who will explore your needs and desires and find inventive and practical ways of enhancing your living environment.

**Right:** Tyers Gate, London  
by Richard Dudzicki Associates Limited  
© Robert Parrish



### Peace of mind

When you hire an architect, you have a professional on your side who knows the construction industry inside out. You are working with someone who has undertaken seven years of architectural training – no other building professional is trained in design and construction to such a high level of expertise.

The term “Architect” is a protected title and UK law requires those that use it to be registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB). \*Only architects registered with the RIBA can be called “RIBA Chartered Members”.

Architectural practices which meet certain eligibility criteria, including requirements for the ratio of chartered architects employed in the practice, can register with the RIBA Chartered Practice scheme. “RIBA Chartered Practice” is a mark of excellence and an assurance of the practice's quality, design excellence and service. There are more than 3000 RIBA Chartered Practices in the UK, from sole practitioners to large practices, working all over the world. By appointing an RIBA Chartered Practice you can be assured that they have been accredited in meeting key quality standards such as appropriate Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII), an effective quality management system, a comprehensive health and safety policy and a sound environmental policy.

*\*The Architects Registration Board (ARB) is the independent registration body for architects in the UK. For more information, visit [www.arb.org.uk](http://www.arb.org.uk).*



## What an architect can do for you

An RIBA Chartered Practice will provide you with much more than just drawings, they have the experience to see your project successfully through to completion. They can oversee the design, assist with the approvals process, manage the build and keep track of your budget.

### Preparation

Consulting an architect at the earliest stage will allow them to get a real feel for your needs so that together you can establish a clear brief and a realistic budget. This will help reduce the overall design costs and help ensure the project comes in on time and on budget whilst identifying and reducing any potential problems early on.

### Developing the design

Your architect will work with you to develop designs that will interpret your ideas imaginatively, maximise your investment, ensure your project is cost effective and can help add real value to your home. An architect will come up with a range of ideas for you to discuss, develop and refine together.

### The Approvals Process

Your architect can help with the approvals required before your project can go ahead, including preparation of applications to the local authority for planning consent (where needed) and for Building Regulations plans approval (which covers the functional requirements of buildings to safeguard the health and safety of the people using them, energy conservation and access and convenience for people with disabilities).

### Construction Phase

Guiding you through the construction phase your architect can help you select suitable builders, obtain appropriate prices for construction, monitor progress and standards, supervise safety on site, liaise with other specialists and oversee the construction through to successful completion.

Left: Piper's End, Hertfordshire  
by Niall McLaughlin Architects  
© Nick Kane  
RIBA Award 2009

## How to find the right architect

All building projects are different, every client, every site and therefore every brief is unique. There is no single solution to your project and there is a range of architects able to offer their own approach. Selecting the right architect is one of the most significant decisions you can make – the RIBA can help you make this decision.

So how do you find the right one?

Before you start looking, consider the demands of the project you are undertaking and ask yourself a few questions:

- What are the challenges of your project?
- How much do you want to spend?
- How important is it for the practice to be local to you and your project?
- What specific experience or areas of specialisms would you like your architect to have?
- Is there a specific approach or philosophy of design (e.g. traditional, contemporary, green etc)?

The RIBA offers different ways to select your architect, such as:

- Online and printed directory of RIBA Chartered Practices
- RIBA Client Services Referrals

### Online directory of RIBA Chartered Practices

Our directory of over 3000 RIBA Chartered Practices has full contact details as well as project examples and images. Search by location of practice, services offered, overseas knowledge and areas of expertise to quickly narrow down a list of likely practices. Links are provided directly to the practice website, where you can view further information and make direct contact.

### RIBA Client Services Referrals

If your project requirements are complex and your demands specific let RIBA Client Services search for you. The RIBA database holds information on more than 3000 practices and 40,000 projects and we can quickly compile a unique shortlist of candidates with the right skills, experience and resources for your project.



**Above:** Brotherton Barn, Oxfordshire  
by The Anderson Orr Partnership  
© David Stewart



**Below:** House in Belsize Park, London  
by Eldridge Smerin  
© Lyndon Douglas  
RIBA Award 2009

Register online at [www.architecture.com/UseAnArchitect](http://www.architecture.com/UseAnArchitect) and complete the form, giving as much information as possible, and we will come back to you with a shortlist. We can also contact them on your behalf, obtain profiles, request literature and provide guidance on appointing and working with your chosen architect.

### RIBA Chartered Practice – a mark of quality

RIBA Chartered Practice accreditation exists to raise the standards of the architectural profession. Through this accreditation initiative we aim to encourage not only the highest levels of design capability, but also better working practices and improved customer services for the benefit of practices, clients and architecture.

When you are commissioning an RIBA Chartered Practice, you can be assured that you will receive the quality, design excellence and service you are looking for. That is why, when you come to us for assistance in finding an architect, we only ever suggest RIBA Chartered Practices.

## Setting the design brief

A brief is your wish-list, it will cover everything an architect needs to know about what you want from your project. A well-written design brief is essential to success. It should be clear and unambiguous, setting out key requirements, outlining the vision and communicating your aims and aspirations. The brief should describe the main function of the finished project; outline motivation and expectation; design direction; establish a single point of contact and set a realistic timeframe and budget.

One of an architect's most important skills and roles is helping to formulate the brief. They can point out what is possible in terms of cost and design, asking you questions and making suggestions. Your architect can be well placed to help identify the best and worst spatial characteristics of your home and to offer ideas that will enhance your living space. Your contribution at this stage is vital and will involve a number of discussions which is essential for the success of a project. The brief will form the basis of the professional contract you sign with your architect.



**Above:** Shandon, London  
by studio octopi  
© Julian Love

**Below:** Wimbledon Residence  
by Jay Salero of Gregory Phillips Architects  
© Darren Chung

## The Client/Architect contract

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 contract, usually referred to as an agreement.

When you have work done to your home you are acting in your private capacity, i.e. as a consumer, which comes under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999. 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 services to be provided; calculation of fees and expenses; confirmation of appointment of any other consultants; the architect's insurance cover and period of liability; and dispute resolution procedures.

You may find the RIBA Domestic Agreement 2010 will be suitable for this purpose, or for very small projects the agreement may be set out in a self-contained letter of appointment. 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 in certain instances
- to advise you on compliance with certain statutory requirements
- to keep you updated on progress and on issues affecting quality, cost and time
- not to make any material changes to the services or the agreed design without your consent, except in an emergency
- not to sub-contract any obligation under the agreement without your consent.

For your part, the client should be prepared to:

- advise on the relative priorities of requirements and to provide necessary and accurate information
- take decisions and respond promptly to questions asked by your architect
- pay the fees, expenses and disbursements due and VAT where applicable



## 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 matters as they develop the design. They will also be able to assist you in making the necessary submission 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.

It is not uncommon for building projects to contain hidden surprises – structural difficulties such as unexpected ground conditions, for example – that can have an impact on the design and 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.



**Above:** Listed Building, Hovingham  
by DESIGN 4 architecture  
© DESIGN 4 architecture

**Below:** Sun Room Interior, New Forest  
by Witcher Crawford  
© Witcher Crawford Ltd

## Fees and expenses

Architect's fees are a matter for negotiation: there is no "standard" or "recommended" basis for calculation. The fee will reflect the degree of personal service and bespoke design that your project involves, and will be affected by the complexity of the project. For instance, projects involving house extensions and refurbishment can be significantly more resource intensive than new builds and the repair and conservation of historic buildings even more complex leading to fees being proportionately higher.

### Fee options

An architect may 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 feasibility studies or those not relating to construction work, the quote can 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 cost 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 tender stage, and the balance during and following construction. Variable invoices may be issued monthly, or regular payments can be budgeted over a period.

### Being a good client

Good architecture needs collaboration and dialogue from the outset – you have to be sure that you have chosen an architect whose work you like and that you are able to work with. Be ready to add your own views and banish the misplaced idea that your architect will impose their own tastes and ideas on the project. On the contrary, your architect's aim will be to follow your brief closely and reflect the aspirations it contains.

**Left:** Wise House, Andalucia  
by McLean Quinlan Architects  
© Martín García/RBA