



Photo: Jacky Ghossein



**Just the job** Left and above, Jenny and Bryan McEwan called on a building designer for renovations at their North Epping home and are more than happy with the results.

# Three of a kind

When it comes to choosing an expert to design your new home or renovation, what's the difference between using a draftsman, a building designer and an architect? **JODIE THOMSON** explains.

**E**xpensive, stressful and disruptive are just some of the words people might use to describe what it's like living through a home renovation or building a new home. And they're the ones who had a good experience.

Major construction work to your home is an enormous process, so it makes sense to have the very best experts on hand to get you the best results and guide you past the pitfalls. But how do you choose the right expert for your job when there are so many options on offer? What really are the differences between a draftsman, a building designer and an architect? What different services do they offer and what are the differences in cost?

There's a wide variation in costs across and within each of these professions. More importantly, there's a vast difference in the qualifications and experience that each brings to the job, and also the level of service you get. A draftsman, for example, may deal only with drawing plans and documentation, while an architect can liaise beyond the plans and construction to assist with interior fit-outs and colour schemes.

While building designers are a relatively new and growing profession in Australia, architects are currently used by only a minority of people undertaking building work and renovations.

"There's a crude figure that 5 per cent of new housing uses an architect," says Angus Kell, NSW and ACT state manager for Archicentre. "That says to me that 95 per cent of people don't really know what an architect does."

With interest rates and building costs soaring, and a growing focus on the environmental credentials of any new homes and renovations, there's now more pressure on home owners to choose the right experts for their project.

## All about architects

While architects are generally recognised as being at the top of the tree when it comes to home design, it seems few people have a full understanding of exactly what they do.

For a start, many people aren't aware of the extensive training an architect undergoes.

"They do a six-year university course, then two years' additional training before they can be registered with the board of architects," says Angus Kell.

Nor are many people aware of the broad scope of knowledge and skill that training covers, or the extensive service that architects offer throughout a building process.

"An architect is trained in a multi-discipline," Kell says. "There's design, documentation, construction, legal issues regarding contracts, and they're trained in understanding building codes and compliance."

You can engage an architect to do as little as draw up plans for your home, but they're also licensed and insured to project manage the entire construction process.

"The average architect is spending an enormous amount of their time on contract administration and other areas, not just design," Kell says.

Their training also allows architects to handle design in specialist areas, like heritage and disability access. And most important of all, to create environmentally sustainable homes, maximising light and natural ventilation.

"It's a three-dimensional understanding of making a building work," says Kell.

There's a common misconception that architects are an extravagance. In fact, their charges are generally based on a percentage of the overall construction, from about 10-15 per cent of the total cost, including contract administration, and vary widely depending on the cost of the overall project.

And Angus Kell argues that an architect's design can actually increase the value of your home. "We did some studies and estimated that using an architect added a 10 per cent premium to the value of a house," he says.

As a starting point, Archicentre offers one-off design reports by an architect, from \$910 for alterations only, up to \$2310 for a new house, including a brief, schematic plans and an opinion of cost.

## Build on this

Building designers are a relatively new profession in most parts of Australia. In NSW they emerged as a group about 16 years ago, and there's still a bit of confusion over exactly what they do. But Ted Riddle, the executive director of the Building Designers Association in NSW, insists the name says it all.

"They design buildings," he says.

In fact, building designers come from a wide

range of backgrounds, with a large variety of skills and experience. Some have qualifications in drafting and building. Others have degrees in architecture but haven't completed the full training to be registered as an architect.

"Most either have tertiary qualifications in other fields, or they have technical backgrounds and have learnt the art of good design," Riddle says.

He believes there's very little difference between a building designer and an architect.

"The only thing that technically differentiates building designers is that in most cases they don't do full project management. A lot do that, but they have to organise a different level of insurance."

To become a member of the Building Designers Association, building designers have to maintain a certain level of training.

"We insist that to be a full member of the association they have to do continuing professional development," Riddle says.

In terms of cost, building designers are often but not always cheaper than architects and their charges vary widely depending on the scope of service offered.



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