

IN TWO MINDS

Architect or building designer ... which one is right to turn your dream house concept into reality?

Knowing where to begin can be the toughest part in renovating. An architect might do a whizz-bang job, but are they going to blow your budget? A building designer seems a popular choice, but will you get the results you're after? And once you decide on that, how do you find a good one? These are just some of the questions homeowners face when they are looking to renovate.

Housing Industry of Australia NSW executive director Graham Wolfe says homeowners facing the ruinously high costs associated with upgrading to a new house are increasingly deciding to stay put and improve what they already have.

In the December quarter alone, Australians spent almost \$1 billion on renovations.

"People are working out what they want and what they can afford to improve their homes," Graham says.

When it comes to choosing an architect or building designer, there are a few things to consider.

Pinpointing the differences

Graham says architects are university-trained designers who have studied the process of design in more complex detail than building designers. In contrast, he says building designers would consider themselves more practically minded and geared to deal with on-the-ground designs for residential clients.

"But that is not to say that building designers aren't equipped to do the more complicated design work," he adds.

Graham says an architect and a building designer are both qualified to design a home and to do renovations, alterations and additions. They each incorporate such things as streetscapes, aesthetics, efficient use of land, environmentally responsible design and the use of various materials and colours.

"Some people might expect an architect to create innovative designs to match their personality and show a lot more flair and sophistication," Graham says. "A building designer might take the client's ideas and put them on a set of plans, but that's not to say the roles aren't reversed in some instances."

For some people, Graham says the decision can come down to the extra status perceived in hiring an architect.

Builder Mark Merhi says a building designer sits somewhere between an architect and a draughtsman.

"They are less qualified, but for standard homes they are quite adequate," Mark says. "The more complex you want it to be, the more you need an architect."

The downside of a building designer is that they won't always supervise the construction of your house, whereas an architect usually manages the project.

"An architect stays on the job from start to finish and that gives you the greatest chance it will run smoothly and nine times out of 10 you will get what you were after," Mark says.

Architects also do all the paperwork and liaise →



TAKING THE HARD ROAD

Managing a renovation project yourself may save dollars but the time and energy required will not suit everyone. A pragmatic assessment upfront is a good place to start.

Working in stages

When Heidi Lambert and her family bought their Concord home, they knew they had a big job on their hands to turn it into a house they wanted to live in. Most of the house was gutted and has since been modernised.

Heidi (above) hired the tradesmen herself but, in hindsight, says it would have been a lot

easier to have had a professional architect or building designer to oversee the project.

"At the end of the project, I thought I would rather have hired someone ... perhaps I had been a little naive," Heidi says.

But living in a rented house in Concord during most of the renovations meant Heidi could keep a close eye on the work being done.

"If I had lived on the other side of town it may have been worth hiring someone," she says.

Heidi, mum to Cecelia, 3, and Mack, 5, says she and her husband are truly over renovating and have done the project in stages, partly for financial reasons but also to give them a break.

"We still have a front veranda and another bathroom to do, and a garage I'm going to convert into a rumpus room," Heidi says.