

# **NAIL IT!**

Take control of your building project and save thousands

**Adam Hobill**



**Hobski**  **ARTEL**

Nail it!

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# INTRODUCTION

## THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE TO GET IT WRONG

Building or renovating is one of the biggest investments you will ever make. Needless to say, there's a lot at stake, with the big payoff for your money, time and the other demands of building being 'living the dream'. While that dream means different things to different people, a well-designed home has the potential to enrich and improve the lives of those it shelters.

Unless you are building purely for investment, you probably want to improve your family's living standards. Whether it's a small project, like adding an extra bedroom to your existing home, or knocking down and rebuilding a large family home; generally you have the same goals and constraints. The goal is to improve your lifestyle through either additional space or an improved space, and your constraints are a certain budget and timeframe.

In my case, I built a home to raise our young family. It was a home that we could grow into over the next 20 years, where our children would be raised and where we could get to know each other. And now? Now it's a place we love coming home to after a gruelling day – our ever reliable rock

of dependability when we need to retreat and recharge our batteries. It is a warm and safe place for us to spend quiet family time together, but it is also a wonderful place to entertain family and friends, with outdoor space for the kids to burn energy and creature comforts for the adults to be entertained and reconnect. It is our sanctuary.

I am a Building Designer. While my qualification is a Diploma in Architectural Drafting, I specialise in the design of individually crafted new homes and extensions. Over the past 20 years I have worked on over 500 projects; new homes, extensions, townhouses, renovations, big, small, I've done the lot. I have seen the good, the bad and the ugly that the building industry can offer and this has given me great insight into the many pitfalls in the journey of building or renovating a home.

As someone inside the industry, my needs, dreams and constraints were similar to those of most people. The toughest consideration in my building project was my budget, and my greatest concern was how far that budget would go towards achieving my family's personal set of needs and dreams. Like any building project, mine came with a unique mix of challenges, but the result was exactly what we wanted.

I'd like to tell you that our project was stress free; but it wasn't. We learnt a lot from our building project and I am now better qualified to share a select range of steps to help you avoid the stresses, budget blowouts and missed deadlines that many experience when building their own dream home.



## Avoiding the dreaded budget blowout

Being one of the biggest investments you'll ever make, I'm sure your budget is top of mind. Because of this, this book focuses on the idea of cost control.

You only need to watch a couple of episodes of *Grand Designs* to see how quickly budget expectations can be blown out of the water. I clearly remember watching one episode of *Australian Grand Designs* featuring a late-middle-aged couple who were building their dream home in Battery Point, Tasmania. To say these poor people were put through the wringer would be an understatement. Though the building project resulted in an absolutely stunning waterfront home, these people endured delays with council approvals, tension with neighbours, unforeseen cost overruns, weather delays and more, all of which culminated into a near-crippling budget blowout.

Comparing the physical condition and demeanour of the client before and after the project shows just how taxing the experience can be. He had changed from a bright, energetic and positive man into a tired and emotionally-drained person who had come closer to the edge than he had ever thought possible. It looked like he had aged 10 years in the course of a 50 minute television episode, and the magnitude of the budget blowout was what had the most impact. I truly felt sorry for him, even though he was now living in a stunning, contemporary, waterfront home. I remember thinking; *at least he has a beautiful home where he can recharge his*

*batteries*. While he was now living his dream, I expect that the experience will always be tainted from the stress of the building process.

So if cost control is the solution to budget blowouts, what do I mean by cost control? The idea of cost control isn't about cheap and nasty building, taking shortcuts, or how to source a \$50,000 kitchen for \$40,000. Cost control is achieved through having a thorough knowledge of the industry and its processes, and harnessing that knowledge to achieve cost-effective solutions while lowering the risk of blowouts.

Cost control and preparation to prevent a budget blowout starts from the very beginning. It is influenced by the team you choose to work with, the brief you formulate, the decisions you make, the documentation you prepare, the way you engage and deal with your builder and the level of discipline you maintain throughout the construction process. In reading this book you will be far better prepared to understand the critical steps in the building process and how to apply the insights and experience I have gathered over the past 20 years.

## **Go to whoa! Feeling the building industry flow**

So what are these critical steps? I know most people don't have a great understanding of building and renovating, which makes us very cautious and anxious about the idea of embarking on a building project. Fortunately it doesn't need to be so daunting, and a little knowledge

about the process and what to expect along the way will give you the confidence you need to comfortably get through it. This is what this book is designed to help you with.

This book is split into the four stages that every successful building project follows; Idea Stage, Design Stage, Quote Stage, and Build Stage.

“It’s important to follow a process. Once your design is done, and you are ready to get quotes, make sure your specifications are clear. At a minimum get three quotes and interview the builders who provided them. Make sure you know which questions you want to ask; check references and/or inspect the quality of their work. I spoke to three prior clients of the builder I selected, I am very happy with the outcome.”

*AJA – new home project*

## IDEA STAGE

You’ll realise soon enough that any building project requires a lot of decisions. Before you can make those decisions, you need to be clear about what you want to achieve.

What might surprise you is that the major decision you need to make isn’t the number of rooms you want, or how many square metres your house should be, or even your finishes. The major decision you need to make is about the type of lifestyle you want to create. Once you’re clear on that, this will guide all of your other decisions.

The Idea Stage is about getting clear on what you want, starting with your ideal lifestyle, then working back from there. You’ll figure out what’s important to you in a home, whether you want to extend, renovate or build, and the best way to figure out the right budget and timeframe for you. Essentially, the Idea Stage gives you the foundation you need to move on to creating a design.

## DESIGN STAGE

Your drawings are one of the most important elements in getting accurate quotes from builders and keeping your costs under control through the build. To get these drawings, you'll need to find a designer. Here you'll learn about the merits of architects, building designers, drafts people and design & construct companies, including which is right for you, and how to choose a good one.

You'll also learn how your design can influence costs, and how your designer should take these preferences into consideration to provide a concept design, which you can use to get preliminary quotes from builders.

## QUOTE STAGE

Once you have a set of final Sketch Plans it is a good idea to get them quoted as soon as possible. There is no point completing final working drawings and getting your project approved if it is going to be over budget and need redesigning. The sooner you understand the likely costs of your project, the better.

Along with your concept drawings, or Sketch Plans, the other essential piece of documentation you'll need for quoting is an Inclusions Schedule, which details your preferred finishes and fittings, including their prices. *This is not optional!* Without an Inclusions Schedule, the builders quoting your project will have no guide as to what you want to put in your new

home, which means they're likely to be quoting different items, leading to very different quotes.

Once you have your paperwork sorted, it's ideal to get an estimate from two to four builders. Here you'll learn about how to choose builders to quote your project, the quoting process, and what to look out for.

## **BUILD STAGE**

When all quotes have been received from your selected builders you will be able to assess and compare them. You will then probably want to interview a shortlist of builders to help you choose the final builder for your project.

With your builder selected, the drawings approved and a contract signed, you are ready to start building. The building contract will set out the building process and when you will need to make payments to the builder. However, I feel the key to a smooth build is having a good relationship with your builder, and this section teaches you how to do just that.

I'll also be focussing on how you can avoid dreaded cost variations, to ensure your dream home is completed on budget.

## **Ready to nail it?**

By better understanding the process of building and renovating, you can avoid the common mistakes that people make during the building process, and limit the risks and stresses involved.

By the end of this book you will be empowered to confidently start your building project, having learnt valuable industry insights that will prepare you for a smooth and enjoyable process. Whether you have only just had your building 'light bulb moment' or already have dust flying on site, I will take you through a process that will give you the knowledge necessary to ensure that you have a positive influence on the costs and outcome of your project.

The positives of a successful building project are amazing. When you get it right, it can transform your life and improve the lifestyle of your family, and that result far outweighs the potential for things to go wrong.

Now you just need to get on with it. Good luck!

# TO BUILD OR EXTEND, THAT IS THE QUESTION

## 2

So now that you've started thinking about the lifestyle you want to create, and the type of home that will contribute to it (rather than the type of home that everyone else is building), it's time to get more clarity about your project. Do you want to extend and renovate, or do you want to build a brand new home?

There are some important differences and it's important for you to understand these differences if you are still deciding whether to extend and renovate an existing home, or to knock down and re-build from scratch.

Here are the key factors to take into account before making your decision:

## 1) Cost differences – comparing apples with oranges

Building work for extensions and renovations is significantly dearer than building new homes. Using a cost per square metre rate, it is not uncommon for extensions to be 50% more expensive than new homes. This is the reason a lot of people find themselves in the tricky situation where the quotes for their extension project are much more expensive than they expected, and they are left to wonder if they would be better off spending a little bit more money and building an entirely new home.

A lot of the additional cost of extension projects is a result of the demolition or dismantling of parts of the existing building, and the repair and make-good costs of integrating the new building into the existing one. It is the labour involved in these processes that adds to the cost. Demolition may also attract a higher profit margin or contingency within the quote, so that the builder is covered for any surprises that may eventuate.

When budgeting for your project, it can be difficult to really know how much money you'll need. When building a new home you can easily research what a four bedroom home will cost from any number of project home builders; however, there is no such thing when you are extending or renovating. The reason is because every extension and renovation is unique; there are simply no two extensions that are the same.

A project home builder is likely to build dozens of homes with the same floor plan, so he will have a detailed and very accurate costing of what that



home will cost. That repetition and efficiency doesn't exist in the extension and renovation market, which is reflected in the higher cost.

Because of the accuracy of quoting and efficiency of building new homes, higher-volume builders can also charge a smaller profit margin with the confidence of knowing that each project will still return a profit.

Builders who are doing extension and renovation work, on the other hand, are generally not high-volume builders and they work in an environment that doesn't enjoy the certainty of costs that new home builders enjoy. The result is that their profit margins and contingency costs are often higher.

## **2) Limitations and compromises**

One of the realities of extending and renovating is that there are likely to be more compromises than when building a new home, especially when you are working to a tight budget.

The most significant factor and biggest constraint of any extension project is the existing building. Often we design and build around a home that is poorly-sited, too small, unattractive, and in poor condition. Designing an extension in and around the existing building to make the home larger, more appealing and with better solar passive qualities can be like squeezing square pegs into round holes, which usually results in one of two outcomes. There are either compromises that need to be accepted in the design and final result to make the project financially viable, or the project budget gets increased to make allowance for the things that cannot be

compromised. If you are in a position to make more funds available then you won't need to make too many compromises. However; if that is not a possibility, then you're going to need to think clearly about your priorities and make some adjustments.

If you are building a new home there are fewer compromises that need to be made, although your budget is still likely to be the main constraint. The benefit of starting with a clean slate is that there is more scope to design with fewer limitations; though, just like extensions, there are still likely to be some areas of your brief that need to be reviewed and priorities understood to ensure that you arrive at the right result and that your budget is controlled.

### **3) Surprise, surprise!**

One of the realities of an extension project is that there are likely to be a couple of surprises along the way, and these typically aren't good surprises. There are potentially dozens of unknown factors for any builder, which means they have no way to accurately allow for them when quoting a project. Ideally, most of them shouldn't pose any significant problem or add anything more than a small cost to the build, if anything at all.

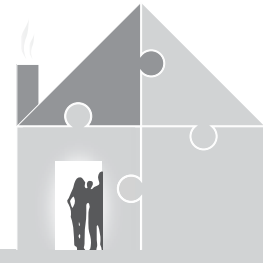
However, there are some potentially very costly situations that can occur in extensions or renovations that simply do not exist when building new homes. For example, if you are extending an older home you may be required to upgrade the electrical wiring of the entire house if it is found not to meet the current safety standards. In that situation, the electrician

cannot legally do any more work on the project; if the wiring is found to be sub-standard he must bring it up to standard first. Because that is an unknown cost, it becomes an extra cost to you; a variation on top of the contract price to complete the project.

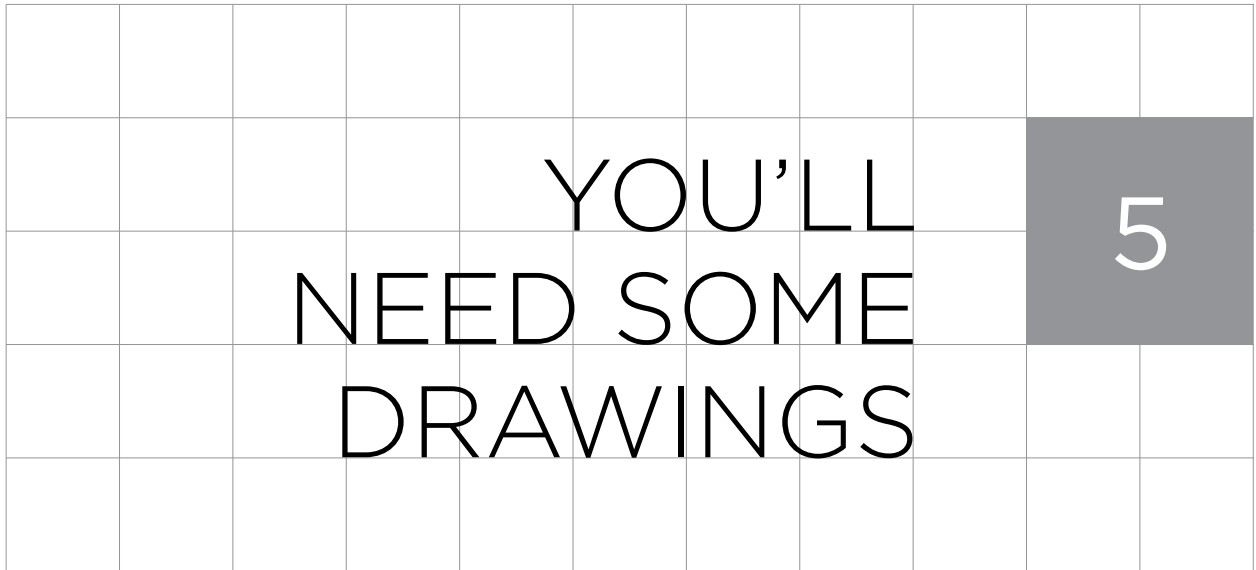
Conversely, a new home build should not present any surprises. The builder is in control of the build from the ground up and if he is provided with comprehensive documentation he should be able to quote everything very accurately without the need for inflated profit margins or contingency costs.

The increased likelihood of there being surprises in an extension or renovation project means that you will also need to be a bit more flexible. Ideally your builder will be very good at communicating with you and helping you understand the options to solve any problems that arise. Try to be flexible in the way you approach the situation and don't get too fixated on what went wrong. You are much better off thinking clearly about how to get the best possible result from the adjustment you had to make. From time to time, a surprise may even result in a better outcome than what was initially proposed.

## NAIL THIS!



- Extensions and new home builds are very different, so don't rely on new home building costs when estimating the costs of extension projects.
- You are more likely to have to make compromises in an extension than in a new build, due to the limitations of the existing building.
- Expect the unexpected when extending or renovating, so be flexible.
- Select the right builder. Experience in extension and renovation work should be high on your priority list where relevant.



Now you're clear on what you want. You've decided on the lifestyle you want to create; you know whether extending, renovating or building is the best choice for you; and you've set a rough budget and timeframe to ensure your lifestyle/mortgage equation stays in balance. Now you're ready to get started, which involves putting your vision on paper.

Many people embarking on their first extension or build question the value of professional drawings. Can't you just save money by going straight to a builder with your idea? In a word...No. Well, you could go straight to the builder, but it won't save you time or money in the long run; and it certainly isn't going to give you the best design outcome.

The role of your drawings (or documentation set) is like a map. They show the destination that everyone on your project team is working towards, and the more detailed they are, the more likely you are to reach your

“We experienced a lot of time delays which stemmed from drawing errors and the builders having to do re-work, which could have been prevented.”

*Mrs R – extension project*

desired destination on time and on budget. In short, high-quality drawings and documentation mean your project can get completed with as few hiccups as possible.

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### **Renovation/extension tip:**

For renovation and extension projects, always ensure that a measured drawing of your existing home is completed. This may save you thousands. It is not enough to rely on existing drawings, a point which becomes more noticeable the older the home is. I have come across dozens of homes that are not built according to the original plans. Mostly the changes are reasonably minor and insignificant, but occasionally the discrepancy is more important. If the ‘as built’ home isn’t properly taken into account, it may cost you a lot of money when the discrepancy is found during construction.

I learnt this lesson the hard way when not measuring up a modest three bedroom brick cottage that was to be extended. The existing plans, though old and in imperial measurements (feet and inches), were in good condition and easily readable. We went ahead and designed the extension to include an additional living space and a new master bedroom with walk in robe and ensuite, without measuring the home.

It wasn’t until construction that the builders realised one of the existing walls was not where it was supposed to be. In reality, the bathroom was about 30cms (300mm, or about a foot) bigger than what the drawings had stated which, in turn, made the neighbouring bedroom smaller by the same measure. It may not seem like a lot, but that 30cm difference had a significant knock-on effect. It meant that the clients had to either accept their new master bedroom being smaller, or they would need to pay for the wall to be

relocated so that the bathroom could be made smaller to suit the plans. The total cost of removing the wall and building a new one would have been about \$2000.

That could have all been avoided by measuring and redrawing the house in the first place. We would have known what we were dealing with from the beginning and could have designed accordingly. Changes to walls drawn on a paper are not expensive, but changes to walls that have already been built can get very expensive.

Needless to say, current, professional drawings matter.

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## **Understanding different drawing technologies (and how these impact your project)**

Before you decide who you are going to use to help with the design of your home, you should also understand the options that are available for your drawings. These include manual drafting, Computer Aided Design (CAD) software, and Building Information Modelling (BIM). While you might not think it's important to know the method your designer uses, it can have a significant impact on your project and budget.

Now for a history lesson. My first year of studies was spent in front of drafting tables, and drafting pens were our most important tools. We completed all of our drawings the old-fashioned way. By the time I had finished my studies a couple of years later, the pens were long gone, lost deep in a drawer somewhere, probably buried by a stack of floppy disks and software manuals.

The industry was moving with the times and we started using CAD (Computer Aided Design) software. What had taken us days to complete by hand could now be completed in hours and with millimetre accuracy. Duplication and repetition was a key strength of using CAD.

These days there are very few people who still document projects with manual drafting (personally, I have no idea how they manage). Most offices will have implemented CAD software long ago and many are moving over to the next advancement in the industry, which is BIM (Building Information Modelling).

BIM is a significant advancement on CAD. For the most part, CAD is still used as a 2D drafting tool, albeit a much quicker and more accurate tool than manual drafting. The leap that BIM has made is that it allows the user to build a computer-generated 3D model of the designed building, and from that model each of the traditional drawings are generated, like floor plans, elevations and sections.

The main benefit of BIM is the amount of information that can be sourced from the 3D model. In addition to the traditional 2D drawings like floor plans, elevations and sections, BIM is able to produce a vast amount of additional information. Any number of 3D perspective views can be generated once the model is complete, and these can then be rendered with increasingly high, photo-like qualities (though you may need to pay more for this). Features like sun and shadowing tools can also be invaluable to demonstrate how effectively a home will allow sun in during



winter and how effectively it can shade the sun in the summer months. Sun control is the most fundamental element of solar passive design, which takes advantage of the local climate (helping you save on energy costs once you've moved in), and BIM allows the user to design for that with amazing accuracy.

Essentially, by using BIM you can get as much information as possible about your design *before* the build, which saves the time and money involved with the last-minute changes that can happen when you see it in real life.

The other significant benefit of BIM is that, when used correctly, it ensures there are fewer errors in the drawings and that there is less likelihood of things being drawn that are not buildable. Just like manual drafting is simply lines on a page, CAD is nothing more than lines on a screen. The lines contain no meaningful intelligence about what they are; be they walls, roofs or any other item. However, in BIM, models are built with intelligent components and each component knows how it interacts with those around it. It is a similar concept to building a life-scale model, and the benefit of doing that is not only being able to see it from all angles, but also to better understand and visualise how the pieces actually fit together, and to iron out any areas of difficulty or uncertainty.

I hear from colleagues that a lot of offices are working on projects back and forth from CAD to BIM or from BIM to CAD. There seems to be a view that you cannot document projects in BIM (or that it is too difficult), so projects are being presented to clients using BIM, and then documented

in CAD. I can assure you that projects can be completed from start to finish in BIM; we have been doing it in my office for years and the benefits are significant.

So how does all of this industry talk affect or benefit you? Like I mentioned above, the wealth of information you get from BIM drawings means it's less likely for changes and cost variations to happen down the track. However, BIM is still a relatively new, yet fast-growing, development in the industry. It is completely different from CAD, in that it requires training and experience for designers to become competent. As I found out, it is like learning a new exotic language. The only similarity was that I needed to turn the computer on to get started; and from there on everything else was different. As a result, the upfront cost of getting drawings using BIM may be a little higher.

Like evaluating fees charged, the type and quality of documentation is something else you should consider when you are interviewing candidates to design your project.

## **When to choose CAD or BIM**

If your project is fairly straightforward, like a small, conventional extension or renovation, then you may not be too bothered by how drawings are produced. It is more likely that you can easily visualise your project, and it can be easily explained through basic drawings to the builder and trades.

However, as your project's complexity increases, so does the need for better and more thorough documentation. As we have already discussed, the role of your documentation set is to give a detailed explanation of the work to be executed so that all of the people involved in your project are clear on what you want and can work together to achieve that result. The more thorough and accurate your drawings, the more likely you are to finish with the house of your dreams.

Additionally, while builders and trades should be familiar with interpreting all types of drawings, it is important that *you* are able to understand the drawings, and I find BIM the most effective for clearly explaining what is proposed, and what the house will look like when it is completed.

Importantly, the more detailed and more thorough the documentation is the better chance you have of controlling the costs of the project. When a builder is quoting a project they will be influenced by the quality of the drawings. Because most projects are completed under fixed-price contracts, a builder may include a contingency in their quote so they aren't exposed to absorbing the costs of any unknowns and surprises they encounter along the way.

\This is more likely to be the case in extensions and renovations than when building new homes, due to the increased chances that there will be hidden costs and surprises when encountering the existing building.

Ideally, we try to eliminate as many contingencies as possible by giving the builder enough information for them to feel confident that there are

no, or at least very few, uncertainties for which they need to include a contingency cost. The more detailed and thorough the drawings are, the more confident the builder can be in applying a competitive margin to his costs to build the home. Ultimately, this should result in more competitive quotes.

The message behind this is that paying a little more for professional and thorough design and documentation is usually well worth it. A few hundred dollars, or even a few thousand dollars, extra for a larger or more complex project will be money well spent if it gives you more certainty around the final design outcome, as well as budget and timeframes. Even the smallest error or omission in a drawing can cost you a lot of money when the building work begins on site, so it's very important that you get it right from the beginning.

Just remember how many builders, trades and suppliers are going to be relying on your drawings. If the drawings are not up to scratch, then all of those people are effectively being misled, and they will have no other choice but to make assumptions and add in contingency costs.

## **The documentation every project needs**

Now that you understand the importance of thorough documentation, which drawings does every project need in its documentation set?

## SITE PLAN

The site plan identifies where the building and other structures, such as garages, sheds, pergolas and retaining walls, are located on the block of land. In the case of extension projects, the site plan should clearly show which portion of the building is existing and which portion is new, and it should indicate distances from the edge of all buildings to the block's boundaries. Ideally, it should also include contours that show the slope of the block and any trees or vegetation that need to be retained through the course of construction. It should give the builder sufficient information to plan how they will manage things like access around the site, storage of materials, and the need for temporary installations like fencing and waste collection bins. A site plan is most commonly shown at 1:200 scale and should always include a north point indicating the orientation of the block.

## EXISTING FLOOR PLAN

For extension/renovation projects, the existing floor plan shows the builder what the building looks like in its current form. It may take shape as a demolition plan, in which case it will indicate which walls, windows and other items are to be demolished or removed and which are to be retained. This gives the builder a better understanding of the scope of demolition work and also the extent to which the structural elements of the home are likely to be affected. Most floor plans are commonly shown at 1:100 scale.

## PROPOSED FLOOR PLANS

The proposed floor plans show the layout of each level of the home, i.e. lower level floor plan/upper level floor plan. For a new home, this is obviously the floor plan of the house you intend to build, while for extensions, the floor plan will show what your house will look like following the extension.

Of all of the drawings in a documentation set, the floor plans are referred to and relied on the most. The floor plans should be sufficiently detailed and dimensioned to ensure that each space in the home is clearly understood. In the case of extension and renovation projects, they should also reference the information shown in the existing floor plan. They will need to include an accurate layout of all wet areas like bathrooms, kitchens and laundries so that the plumbing and drainage can be installed in the correct locations and they should also show the floor finish of each room. They should indicate window sizes and, for extension/renovation projects, they need to show which windows are being retained and which ones are new. Floor plans are most commonly shown at 1:100 scale.

## ELEVATIONS

Elevations are drawings that show each external view of the building. Generally there are four elevations (one for each side of the building) in a drawing set; however, more complex designs may have more. They should differentiate the portion of the building that is existing and the portion that is new. The elevations should include information such as ceiling heights, roof materials, pitch and eaves; window size and opening style and wall

finishes. They should also demonstrate the slope of the block and how that relates to the building. Elevations are most commonly shown at 1:100 scale to match the scale of the floor plans.

## SECTIONS AND DETAILS

As you might imagine, sections are sectional views through a building. They are used to indicate the structure of the building and are very useful in showing things that are happening inside a building that are difficult to show in an elevation view, like changes in floor or ceiling levels, retaining walls and stair details. In most cases there is only one section provided, which is fine for simple projects. Larger or more complex projects with design features like split levels, raked or high ceilings, basement structures, etc., will benefit from additional sections. Sections are often shown at 1:100 scale, but it is preferable for them to be at 1:50 scale, which shows a little more detail.

Some projects will require additional details. Detail drawings are larger-scale drawings that show a higher level of detail in how particular items are required to look, or how they should be built. For example, if you are trying to show a customised skirting board then you will find that a 1:100 drawing is useless. You will need to show that in a detail drawing that is probably no less than 1:2 scale.

So as a general rule, the more complex and customised your project is, the more sections and details you should have.

## ROOF PLAN

A separate roof plan is not always required, however I think it is always a good idea. This is especially the case for more complex roofs and for extension/renovation projects where the integration of the new roof into the existing roof needs to be accounted for. A more detailed roof plan will show guttering, downpipe locations and the preferred placement of roof installations like solar panels and skylights (remembering that they should be considered as indicative locations only due to the fact that the final location will be determined by the location of trusses and rafters within the roof structure itself). Roof plans are generally shown at 1:100 scale, being the same scale as the floor plans.

This list is not exhaustive and each local council will have particular items that need to be included in the documentation set. One advantage of using a designer in your local area is that they will be more familiar with the requirements of your council, which means the approvals process can be dealt with more efficiently.

### **...but more may not be better!**

I know that high-quality documentation has a positive effect on a building project. However, in my experience, too much documentation can also be detrimental to achieving a cost-effective build. There are situations where a project can be over-specified, which can have the effect of scaring builders away.



One example is issuing a full project specification with the set of drawings for quoting. The specification is usually a significant document, often 100+ pages long, and it generally details the finer points of construction, giving very specific requirements on how work is to be carried out.

In my opinion, for most residential projects a full project specification is an unnecessarily complicated and detailed document that doesn't help with the process of achieving a cost-effective build.

I remember how daunting the first full specification I saw looked and, knowing that builders rely heavily on the quality of the drawings, I wondered how much of the specification was actually read by the builders quoting the project. I suspected that it was probably commenced with good intentions, but then skimmed over as its dryness became too much to absorb.

On many occasions I witnessed the tendered quotes being hundreds of thousands of dollars over budget. In several cases that was the end of the project, as the client felt the project was so far over budget that there was no way the building costs could be massaged back to a point at which the design elements they had fallen in love with could be maintained.

I suspected at the time that the full specification may have had something to do with the inflated quotes. I wondered if, instead of reading the specification, the builders had possibly weighed it, gauged how intimidating it was and then multiplied their usual profit margin to account for any hidden surprises buried in the specification that might bring them unstuck.

As it turns out, my suspicions weren't too far wrong. Since then I have spoken to many builders about what works for them when quoting a project and a lot of them confirmed that full specifications were often not read in their entirety, and the resulting lack of confidence was dealt with by adding a higher contingency to the quote to allow for any unknowns. That probably sounds very unprofessional; however, we need to be realistic about the fact that we are playing the builders' game. We need to work in their environment in a way that keeps them engaged and motivated, while still attaining the outcomes we seek as clients.

There are certainly projects that benefit from a full specification, but they are generally ultra-high-end projects with huge budgets and a high level of customised, and sometimes experimental, detailing and materials. In these cases, they are also likely to be built by commercial builders who are used to dealing with complex drawings and detailed specifications, rather than smaller residential builders who are less experienced with those types of projects.

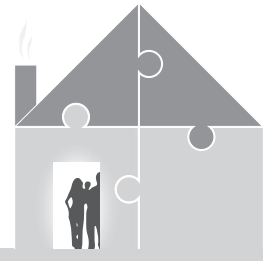
Eliminating a specification from the document set can create a vacuum of important information that the builder does need. I fill this vacuum by using an Inclusions Schedule (see the chapter *Sort your paperwork* for more information). It also

places a greater importance on the quality of the drawings, which is why it's so important to have thorough, detailed and high-quality drawings.

If your drawings aren't sufficiently detailed and you have no Inclusions Schedule, then you run the risk of receiving inaccurate quotes which, in turn, increases the risk of budget blowouts.

In short – your drawings matter, so make sure you give them the time and attention they deserve.

## NAIL THIS!



- Ask to see examples of drawings and documentation sets to ensure that you understand what you will be getting.
- Consider the benefits of BIM and 3D drawings.
- Think about the likely complexity of your project and who is going to deal with the builders during the quoting process and throughout construction.