



Working with an Architect

Introduction

You have decided to build, extend or renovate your house - you are making an important decision which will influence your daily life for many years. Such an important investment needs the help of a specialist to avoid mistakes at the design stage and to ensure that your needs are properly realised. This information is intended to help you as a client to work more effectively with your architect - together you can achieve the project you want.

The Architect's role

Architects have the most appropriate training and experience to design, co-ordinate and manage your building project. Your architect will advise on the design of your extension or the refurbishment of your house so that it is laid out economically and efficiently and will add to the value of your house and to your lifestyle.

The professionally qualified architects training is the second longest professional training in Ireland, comprising five years academic education and two years practical training, together with an examination in professional practice. This education is of a depth not equalled in the building industry.

The architect's work begins with an analysis of your requirements. The architect will relate your needs and quality, aspirations to your budget for the project. The ultimate success of your project depends on the quality of your brief - your description to your architect of what you need from your building. This information will enable your architect to develop a design solution related to your needs.

Your plans for the future

The architect will present proposals in the form of sketch designs. Drawings can be difficult to understand and it is important that you work with your architect to understand the proposal. If you have any doubts, discuss these with your architect so that both of you can understand exactly what is proposed. Once your project goes on site changes can be very expensive - some alterations may even require an additional planning application and can have implications in terms of compliance with Building Regulations.

As the client you are part of the team and you need to maintain effective communication with your architect throughout the project so that he or she can act in your best interest at all times.

Planning permission

Extensions under a particular size may be exempt from the requirement to obtain Planning Permission and your architect will advise. Above this defined size, planning permission is necessary. Your architect will apply on your behalf for the necessary permission. There can be difficulties with neighbours and you should not rule out the possibility of a planning appeal which will delay your project. Your architects will advise you on the correct procedures if an appeal is lodged against your project, if planning permission is refused or if you need to appeal against a condition in your permission.

Building regulations

In 1992 National Building Regulations were introduced covering aspects of construction.

You as a client, your architect and your contractor are legally obliged to comply with these building regulations. Your architect will know which materials and construction systems will meet the requirements for each part of the building and will advise you on a cost effective solution.

The Building Regulations include Technical Guidance Documents, and three hundred and thirty building standards and codes of practice - altogether over 20,000 pages of text. Even if you have some experience of building work, you will need the expert advice of an architect to comply with these regulations in your building.

Benefits of using an architect

For most people, their home is the most important investment they will make - your architect will work with you to enhance the value of your property and achieve a cost effective solution.

By investing in the services of an architect you will have a product specifically designed for your needs; you explore with the architect the various options for the design of your project and through good design the architect can maximise your investment.

The architect can also work with you on improving the long-term usability and efficiency of your house by examining the implications of two issues which are becoming increasingly important.

Barrier-free design

Barrier-free design aims to remove or minimise the factors that might make it difficult for you to enjoy your house if disabled or as you grow older. Design for the disabled is a special area but some of the proposals set out in the RIAI publication Housing for the less mobile should be discussed with your architect.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is defined as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs . It raises complex issues for society but your architect can advise you on basic techniques such as use of materials and increased insulation.

The building process

Having translated your brief into a final agreed design and having obtained the necessary planning permission your architect will then produce documentation for pricing by contractors. The architect will also select a list of contractors and will help you to evaluate the tenders received.

The builder should be selected not only on the basis of the tender price, but also on quality. A good builder represents real value in reliability and quality of work and may ultimately cost less than one with lesser ability who has tendered a lower price. Builders selected for tendering should have a good track record for your type of project. For this reason architects often prefer to work with builders known to them.

The architect will advise you on the appropriate form of building contract, which is published by the RIAI, and will act as your independent advisor during the contract, liasing on your behalf with the builder and ensuring compliance with the contract documentation.

Your architect will advice you on stage payments during the project.

Building even the smallest extension is a complex process and requires good management and co-ordination by the contractor. Even with the best contractors problems can occur and it is important that you maintain good communication with your architect so that such problems can be dealt with effectively. During building it is important that you do not give direct instructions to the contractors, because what may seem to you to be a simple matter, can be expensive.

You should also make sure that any variations to the contract which you request are agreed in advance. The cost of a number of small variations can add up to an alarming total. If you think you do need to make changes, discuss these carefully with the architect to establish whether they are really necessary and make sure that the costs are agreed. Good communication between you, the architect and the contractor can avoid unpleasant surprises and will make the contract run more smoothly.

Problems

Building is a complex process and problems can occur - your architect is there to help resolve these problems. If you are dissatisfied with aspects of the architects service, you should discuss the problem with the architect -

this will usually be sufficient to resolve the matter. If problems persist, the RIAI has a range of services available to clients on application - aimed at resolving difficulties.

Your architect's work does not end when the building work is finished - part of the contract sum is retained for to twelve months and only paid on the architect's instructions, after the contractor at the end of this period, when defects have been rectified.

Ethics

RIAI members are required to observe the RIAI Code of Professional Conduct and to provide objective advice to their clients.

Selecting and appointing your RIAI architect

Architects are generally willing to discuss an appointment with you without obligation. You should be satisfied that you can work together and you should also look at examples of work. The RIAI can help you by providing a copy of the current practice directory, which gives information on RIAI practices throughout Ireland and the RIAI can also nominate practices for your project with appropriate skills and experience.

How much will an Architect's services cost

Architects fees are charged on a percentage of the final project cost or on an hourly rate, and depend on the extent and complexity of the work and the services required. Your architect will discuss and agree the services and fee appropriate to your project. You should ensure that you have a copy of the RIAI Conditions of Appointment, which covers all aspects of the services provided by architects.

The appointment of your RIAI architect should be confirmed in writing to avoid any misunderstanding as to the nature and scope of the services required from your architect and as to the fee to be paid for the agreed service.

Financing your extension or selling your property

On completion of the work the architect can supply you with Opinions on Compliance with Building Regulations and Planning Permission. These are important legal documents and will be needed when you come to sell your property. If you are borrowing to finance your extension most lending agencies will insist that a properly qualified architect is involved with design inspection and provision of Opinions on Compliance for your project - employing an RIAI member will meet this requirement.

A member of the RIAI has to conform to the standards established by the professional body both in professional conduct and the manner in which commissions are executed for clients.

An RIAI registered architect is obliged to carry out work on behalf of the client honourably, independently and competently, and is obliged to declare any interest which might conflict with the duties of an independent architect.

RIAI members also follow standard procedures set out in the RIAI Conditions of Appointment. Such procedures provide a client with an established framework, which is not available to architects who choose not to subscribe to the professional body.

In addition to meeting the rigorous entry requirements, RIAI Members are fully up-to-date on architects all aspects of practice. When changes in practice such as the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations occur, RIAI Members are updated through the issue of regular information seminars etc. Even if your architect has recognised architectural qualifications, without RIAI membership he or she will not have access to this information service. RIAI members are required to complete a specified amount of Continuing Professional Development each year.

Architect Search lists over 400 practices. Each firm brings a different combination of skills and expertise to its projects, and they all offer a professional and personal service to suit their clients' needs. Choosing the right firm to carry out your project is crucial to success in realising your expectations and creating a building of lasting quality and worth.