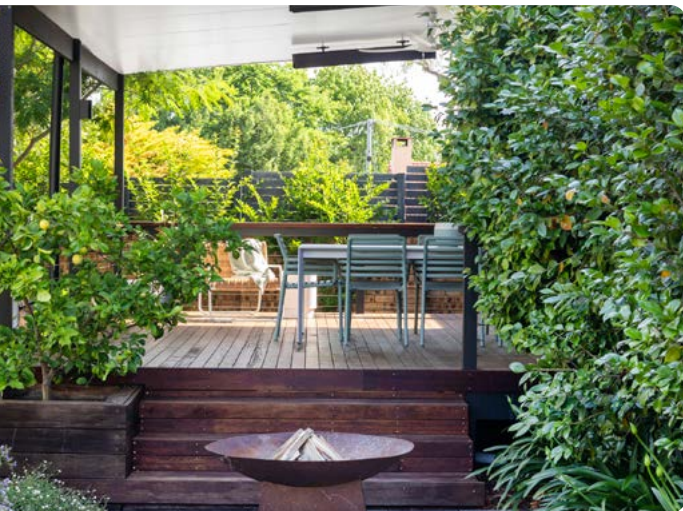


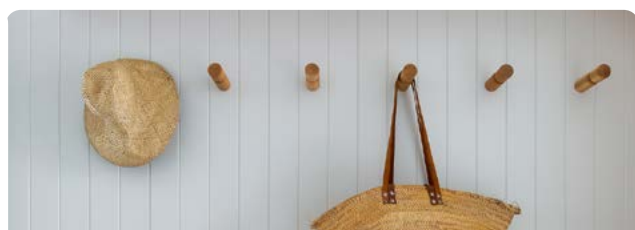


THE CANBERRA HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO: **pre-construction**





At New Spaces, our vision is to **redefine** residential construction by building exceptional, **sustainable** and **innovative** homes that inspire, and **enhance** the quality of life for our clients - creating spaces where families can **thrive**.





Embarking on a new construction or major home renovation project is an incredibly exciting journey. It's the chance to create a space that is uniquely yours, perfectly tailored to your lifestyle and needs. But before a single shovel breaks ground, there's a crucial period of planning and preparation known as the pre-construction phase.

THE **PRE-CONSTRUCTION PHASE** IS THE PERIOD BEFORE ANY PHYSICAL BUILDING WORK BEGINS. IT ENCOMPASSES ALL THE CRITICAL STEPS OF PLANNING, FROM INITIAL DESIGN AND BUDGETING TO SECURING PERMITS AND FINALISING CONTRACTS.

This foundational process is essential for ensuring your project is set up for success, and is arguably the most important stage. Getting it right ensures a smooth, stress-free build with a predictable budget and timeline. Getting it wrong can lead to delays, unexpected costs, and a lot of frustration.

This guide provides you with a step-by-step breakdown of what to expect during this vital phase and how our collaborative approach can make all the difference.

OUR PHILOSOPHY. **our focus.**

Exceptional homes begin with great design, careful planning, and open collaboration between architects, builders, clients and other consultants from the early concept stage. At New Spaces, we embody this through our **FEASIBLE. FUNCTIONAL. BUILDABLE. BEAUTIFUL.** philosophy.

By partnering closely from the outset, we ensure every project is financially viable, functional for modern living, practical to construct, and visually stunning. This collaborative approach fosters innovation, streamlines construction, and delivers sustainable, enduring homes that exceed expectations.

FEASIBLE.

Ensuring projects are financially and logistically viable through early cost estimates & market-driven data, and are regulatory viable through knowledge of ACT requirements.

FUNCTIONAL.

Collaborating on designs that enhance livability, ensuring practical insights optimise the home experience, and solutions are tailored to families unique lifestyles and needs.

BUILDABLE.

Leveraging early builder involvement creates practical, constructible designs, whilst early preparation streamlines the building process.

BEAUTIFUL.

Upholding architectural vision to deliver aesthetically stunning homes that inspire and endure. Ensuring that intricate details and ambitious designs are practically achievable and executed with precision.



STEP 1: **defining your vision & budget**

Before you can build your dream home, you need to imagine it. This is the fun part! Start by creating a wish list. What are your 'must-haves'? What would be 'nice-to-have'? What's a definite 'no'? For many people, this vision isn't clear-cut from the start, and that's perfectly fine. We can help you navigate this process by asking some key questions:

WHAT IS WORKING AND WHAT ISN'T?

Think about your current home and lifestyle. What are the daily frustrations? Is the kitchen too cramped? Do you need more natural light? This helps us identify the core problems we're trying to solve.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO FEEL IN THE SPACE?

Do you want a home that feels open and airy, or cozy and intimate? Are you a frequent entertainer, or do you prefer quiet nights in? This helps us understand the emotional and practical goals of the project.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5, 10, OR 20 YEARS?

A great home is built to last. Considering your future needs—like a growing family or aging in place—can help your design and build team create a space that will serve you for years to come.

ESTABLISH A REALISTIC BUDGET:

This is the foundation of your entire project. It's not just about what you can afford to spend, but what you are *willing* to spend. A clear budget will guide every decision you make, from the size of the project to the quality of materials. We know how important it is to avoid "price shock," which is why our process focuses on a clear, detailed budget from the very beginning, using industry-specific calculation tools rather than imprecise square meter rates.

DEDICATE A CONTINGENCY FUND

While our detailed costing process aims for cost certainty, every custom project requires a financial buffer for unforeseen site conditions (e.g., unexpected rock) or client-requested changes after construction begins. We strongly recommend budgeting an additional 10-15% of the total build cost as a dedicated contingency fund. This practice prevents stress and ensures your project maintains momentum if a variation is necessary.

TALK TO YOUR BANK:

A crucial, early step in defining your budget is to speak with a financial institution. Understanding your borrowing capacity is essential for setting a realistic financial scope. By getting pre-approval or a clear assessment of your loan capacity, you can confidently move forward with your design, knowing that your financial expectations are aligned with what is possible. This conversation helps you bridge the gap between your ideal budget and your feasible budget.

SET A TIMELINE:

When do you want to break ground? When do you hope to move in? Having a rough timeline will help you and the team plan accordingly. We can help you set realistic expectations for a timeline, understanding that today's market can have its own unique challenges.





STEP 2: **assembling your team**

The right team is everything. Think of it as a collaboration. You need a group of experienced professionals who understand your vision and can bring it to life. This is where the concept of Early Builder Involvement (EBI) comes in.

The pre-construction phase is the best time to get everyone working together. When the architect, builder, and you are all communicating from the very beginning, it ensures that the project's design is aligned with your budget and a realistic construction plan. This early collaboration fosters innovation and helps to find efficiencies that would otherwise be missed. It is also the ideal time to identify and resolve problems where design and building practicality conflict.

CHOOSE A BUILDER:

Your builder is your project manager and on-site partner. During the pre-construction phase, the builder acts as a crucial consultant, using their practical expertise to assess the feasibility, functionality, and buildability of the design. This also involves ensuring that the design aesthetics and approach are achievable within the project's constraints. As part of this buildability focus, the builder will also use this time to start planning the construction process itself, identifying key milestones and potential logistical challenges before a single shovel breaks ground. A good builder is an invaluable partner, especially when they are brought into the conversation early on.

FIND AN ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER:

This person is your creative partner. They will take your wish list and turn it into a functional, efficient and beautiful design. Your architect or designer is responsible for creating the detailed blueprints and drawings that will be the road map for the entire project. They'll help you navigate design aesthetics, space planning, and the flow of your home. It's important to find someone whose style you love and who is a good listener. If you don't already have one, we can help you find an architect who is a good fit for your project, or we are happy to work with a professional you have already chosen. When speaking to architects or designers, ask them the 10 questions listed on page 9.

BRINGING IN OTHER KEY CONSULTANTS:

The team extends beyond just the architect and builder. Depending on the scope of your project, it's highly beneficial to bring in other consultants early, such as:

- **Structural engineers:** To ensure the integrity and safety of the building.
- **Certifiers:** To confirm that the design complies with all relevant building codes and regulations.
- **Surveyors:** To provide accurate data about your property, which is crucial for a precise design.
- **Energy consultants:** To advise on energy-efficient solutions and materials.
- **Interior designers & landscapers:** To ensure the interior and exterior of your home are seamlessly integrated with the overall design.

Your builder can help with recommendations for these professionals, ensuring you have a team of trusted experts all working together toward a common goal. An experienced builder will also work with your design team to manage all these consultants, so you don't need to.

STEP 3: **design brief, initial concepts & budgeting**

With your vision and team in place, it's time to get into the details. This is the beginning of the design journey, where you, the builder, and the architect work together to set the design brief. The design brief is the foundation of the project, outlining your needs, desires, and the functional requirements of your home. It's from this brief that the architect creates initial concepts and floor plans based on your vision.

At this stage, the builder's early involvement is critical, and all consultants will start having input, as required, and as directed by the architect and builder. For example, the surveyor will be involved early on to provide accurate site data, which is crucial for the early concept design.

The builder will collaborate with your architect to review these preliminary concepts, providing input on the feasibility and buildability of the concepts. This proactive approach ensures that the design is achievable within your budget - that it is not impossible or prohibitively expensive to build. This collaborative dialogue at the concept stage is crucial in aligning the design with a realistic financial scope.



STEP 4: **detailed design & costing**

Once a concept is approved, your team moves into the detailed design and costing stage. The architect and other consultants will create comprehensive drawings and specifications. This is where the interior designer gets more heavily involved. They work closely with you not only to specify material, fixture, and finishes for your home but also to consult throughout the process on spatial planning to optimise flow and function. Crucially, they develop detailed interior plans, such as custom joinery drawings for kitchens, laundries, wardrobes, mud rooms, and bathrooms, ensuring these elements are functional, aesthetically stunning, and priced accurately by the builder.

Concurrently, the structural engineer will be developing structural plans, and the energy consultant will be providing critical advice on the building's thermal performance. The architect and builder will be consulting with certifiers along the way to ensure that the design complies with all regulations.

The critical component of this step is a back and forth, value engineering process to ensure design optimisation. Much of this work will happen behind the scenes and managed by the architect and builder. This ensures nothing critical is left to the end, where costings and timeframes can blow out and designs can fall over. During this stage, your builder will work to finalise the detailed cost estimate and construction schedule.



STEP 5: **finalisation & approvals**

With all the final plans and costings in place, it's time to navigate the final regulatory hurdles. In the ACT, your builder or architect will submit the documentation to the relevant local authorities (typically to Access Canberra through a private certifier) to obtain the necessary permits and approvals. This documentation must demonstrate compliance with the National Construction Code (NCC), the ACT's 7-star energy efficiency rating, and other specific local regulations. With everyone involved from the beginning, we can often foresee and address potential compliance issues, before the plans are even submitted, which helps to streamline the approval process and save valuable time and additional design and certification fees.

STEP 6: **contracting**

With all the details worked out and approvals at hand, you're ready for the final handshake before construction begins.

FINALISE THE BUDGET

Your builder will provide a final, detailed cost estimate based on all the plans and material selections. This document should be as accurate as possible and account for any potential contingencies. We recommend reviewing this document closely, asking for clarification on anything you don't understand, and ensuring all of your material selections are accurately reflected.

REVIEW AND SIGN THE CONTRACT

The contract is the legal agreement that outlines the scope of work, project timeline, payment schedule, and what happens in the event of unforeseen issues. We encourage you to read it carefully and ask questions to ensure you fully understand everything. This document protects both you and your builder, providing a clear roadmap for the entire project.



CONSTRUCTION **commences**

Following a thorough pre-construction process, you can expect the construction phase to run with minimal delays and budget variations. A well-defined scope and detailed budget act as your project's roadmap, allowing the builder to execute efficiently. While the primary focus shifts to the site, your architect and builder will continue to collaborate closely, meeting periodically to review progress, ensure the design intent is being faithfully executed, and quickly resolve any unforeseen site conditions. This continuity ensures that the design vision translates seamlessly from paper to reality.



10 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO **ask your architect**

The pre-construction phase is critical for defining your project's budget, direction, and ultimate success. While open communication with your architect sets the course for a beautiful, functional design, Early Builder Involvement (EBI) is the key to maximising results. The complexity of modern building—from fluctuating supply chain costs to challenging approval processes—demands that design undergo thorough cost and buildability analysis. Asking these ten questions will ensure your design team and chosen builder collaborate from day one, integrating cost control and value engineering to save you time, stress, and budget blowouts.

1. How do you approach a project's budget, and at what stages do we get cost feedback? Explain your process for how you design to a budget.

You must look for a commitment to early builder involvement. Remember, architects are experts in design, but their ability to accurately estimate the final cost of a custom project is limited. Their expertise is in design, not the up-to-the-minute market prices of materials and labour.

Industry best practice integrates a builder at or before the initial concept is drawn. If the cost exceeds your budget, the architect must lead a value engineering session. This commitment to early builder involvement ensures your architect is actually equipped to design to your budget.

2. When do you recommend bringing in other key partners, such as a builder, certifier, energy consultant, engineer, interior designer etc into the design process?

This is a crucial question that reveals their philosophy on collaboration. The ideal answer will be a discussion about the value of EBI, and how it helps align design with budget and buildability. Furthermore, involving other consultants, such as an energy consultant early on can provide advice and cost indications that may otherwise cause delays and that significantly expedite the design.

3. What is your communication style, and how often can we expect updates?

Look for a commitment to a structured communication plan, not just a vague promise to "keep you informed." The architect should clearly define the frequency and format of updates, specifying if they prefer email, scheduled video calls, or face-to-face meetings, particularly at key design milestones. A great response will detail their process for handling revisions and urgent questions efficiently. This conversation is also key to ensuring the architect is comfortable coordinating and sharing information with other essential players, like the builder, engineer, certifier, energy and other consultants, ensuring a smooth, transparent flow of information across the entire project team.

4. How do you ensure the design is truly buildable, and not just conceptual, before we get to construction?

A confident answer will show that their design process is grounded in close collaboration with a builder. Look for an explanation of how they factor in structural requirements, material limitations, and on-site logistics to ensure the project can be built as designed.



10 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ARCHITECT

5. What happens if we don't like the first design you present?

A collaborative architect will not see this as a failure, but as a normal part of the process. Their answer should show they are open to feedback and have a clear, step-by-step process for refining the design until you are completely happy.

6. What are the most common reasons for a project going over budget during construction, and how do you help clients avoid them?

An experienced architect will speak candidly about budget risks, such as unexpected site conditions, volatile market conditions, or material choices that shift late in the process. The best answer, however, focuses on reducing unknowns and eliminating variations. Variations commonly occur because the builder misinterpreted incomplete plans or was forced to rush their quoting.

Look for a proactive strategy: the more detailed the plans and the more involved the builder and other consultants are from an early stage, the more fixed and accurate the final price will be. Getting a builder involved early ensures they develop a thorough understanding of the design complexity. This collaboration dramatically improves their pricing accuracy, helping to eliminate costly surprises and avoid the budget blowouts caused by rushed tender submissions and misinterpretations.

7. How do you handle changes to the design once we've started construction, and how are the costs for those changes managed?

Even with the best planning, changes can happen. This question ensures you understand their process for managing design changes, and that you have a clear agreement on how costs will be handled, preventing surprises.

8. Could you walk us through the approvals process for our area, and what is your role in that?

Building approvals and permits can be a major source of delays. A confident answer will show they have a deep understanding of local regulations and a clear plan for managing this complex, yet essential, stage.

9. What is your approach to specifying materials, and how can we balance our design vision with material availability and cost?

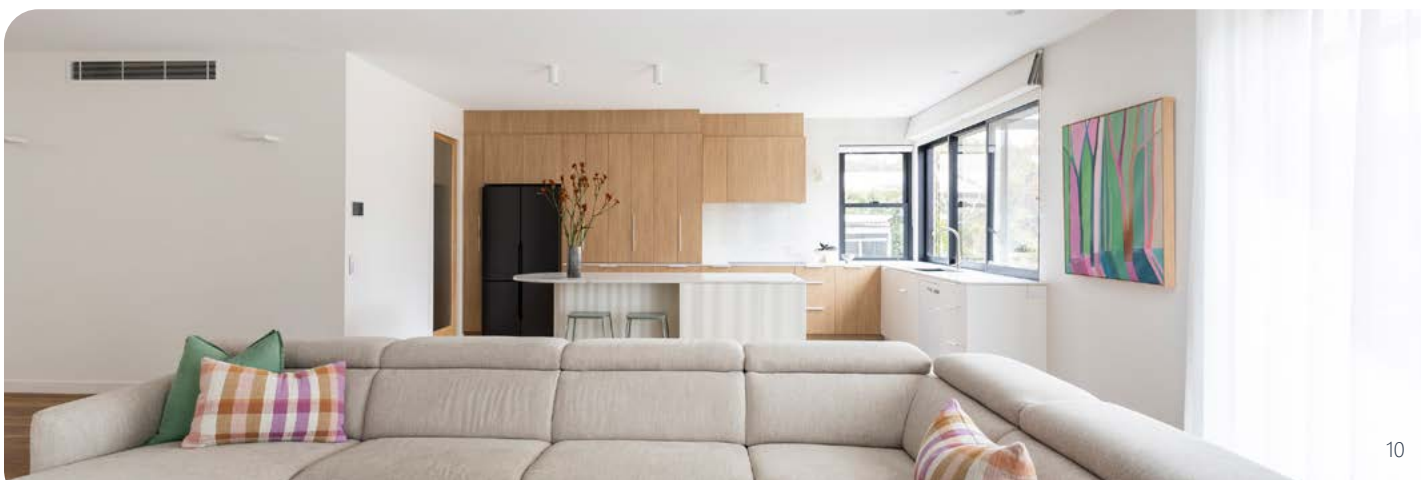
Materials are a huge part of the budget and a major source of potential delays and variations. Look for an approach that is flexible and transparent. The architect should have a clear process for specifying materials that integrates cost and availability feedback early on. Crucially, pricing material selections is the exact level of detail that your builder can start working through from an early stage. This commitment to early pricing allows you to make informed decisions about your budget—if a design choice pushes you over budget, you can pivot to an alternative finish before the final plans are drawn up, ensuring your design vision remains financially viable.

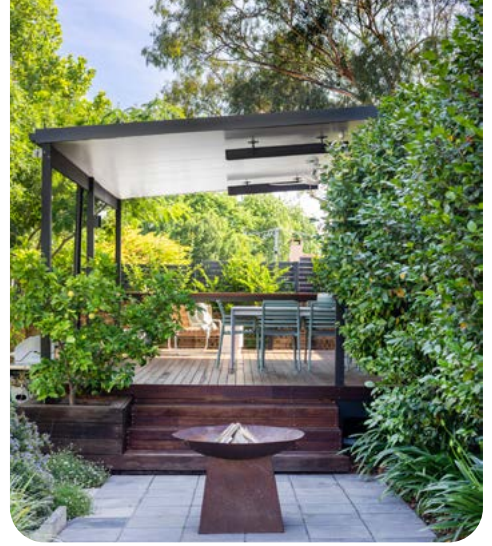
10. What does a successful builder-client-architect relationship look like to you?

This is an open-ended question that gets to the core of their values. Look for an answer that emphasises a team-based approach, where all three parties are working transparently and collaboratively towards the same goal: delivering your dream home.

Successfully navigating these ten questions establishes a transparent and collaborative foundation for your project. By securing clear answers on budget and buildability early on, you ensure your architect and builder are aligned from day one, directing their collective expertise to deliver on your vision.

Ultimately, the best designs are those that pass cost and buildability analysis. Getting your builder involved early who will initiate value engineering sessions during the design phase ensures your stunning vision remains affordable and efficient, moving you smoothly from planning to groundbreaking.





PRE-CONSTRUCTION frequently asked questions

DO I NEED AN INTERIOR DESIGNER?

However, many homeowners underestimate the sheer amount of research and time required to manage their own selections, and conceptualising their joinery designs. Even a simple renovation involves hundreds of decisions across tiles, tapware, lighting, paint, and hardware. An interior designer handles this workload for you, significantly reducing your personal stress and ensuring the final result is functional, aesthetically unified, and at the forefront of design. They are essential for solving complex spatial planning challenges and producing the detailed drawings needed for things like custom joinery (kitchens and wardrobes). Crucially, their attention to detail at the planning stage helps to minimise design conflicts and stops late selections from causing costly site delays once construction is underway.

Services are flexible; you can hire a designer for a one-off consultation or a full-scope package. Note that many top interior designers include sourcing and procurement services that leverage trade discounts. These savings on fixtures and materials can often be significant enough to well and truly pay for their professional fee.

I'D LIKE TO SUPPLY SOME MATERIALS OR MANAGE ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT MYSELF, WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

We strongly advise against supplying your own materials or managing any part of your building project yourself. While it might seem like a way to save money or gain more control, it actually introduces significant, unseen risks that can quickly wipe out any initial retail savings and lead to project delays, unforeseen costs, and potential disputes. When you choose to supply materials, you are solely responsible

for ensuring the product is delivered on time, is compliant with building regulations, and is free of defects; for example, if a custom tile you supply arrives cracked, you are liable for sourcing the replacement, the cost of the replacement, and any associated site delays caused by our team being idled. This decision effectively transfers the warranty and defect liability risk from us to you: if a problem arises post-completion, the manufacturer blames the installer and the installer blames the product, leaving you without a clear point of recourse to resolve the issue. We urge you to rely on our expertise and network of trusted suppliers, as this guarantees you a single, clear point of accountability for quality, timing, and a comprehensive project warranty.

WHAT DOES A SURVEYOR DO?

A surveyor provides essential, detailed measurements of your land required for both design and legal compliance. They typically perform two main services:

Contour and Detail Survey: This is a detailed assessment of a property's topography (slopes and levels) and existing features (trees, services, structures). This information is crucial for your design team, ensuring plans are functional, harmonise with the environment, and comply with regulations.

Identification Survey: This survey accurately defines your property's legal boundaries, identifying the exact location of boundary lines, structures, easements, and encroachments. This is essential before construction starts to verify your project stays within legal lines, and is also recommended before purchasing property.

Either your design team or we, as part of a preliminary service agreement, can organise these surveys for you.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A BUILDING CERTIFIER?

A certifier is crucial for compliance, ensuring construction adheres to building codes and standards. They work for you (the homeowner), not the builder.

Their role includes:

- Approving plans (with ACTPLA) before construction.
- Conducting inspections throughout the build.
- Issuing the final Certificate of Occupancy and Use (COU) at completion.

When choosing one, look for licensing, experience in similar residential projects, and clear communication. You nominate the certifier; we work closely with them.

DO I NEED TO ARRANGE ENGINEERING?

No, we can manage it. If you undertake a Full Pre-Construction Consultation with New Spaces, we will arrange and consult with Canberra's best engineers.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION AND A BUILDING APPLICATION?

In the ACT, a Development Application (DA) and a Building Application (BA) serve different purposes in the construction process.

Development Application (DA): This is a formal request to carry out a development, such as constructing a new building or altering an existing one. It assesses the impact of the proposed development on the environment and community, ensuring compliance with planning regulations.

Building Application (BA): Once a DA is approved, a BA is required. This application ensures that the construction complies with building codes and standards. It involves detailed plans and specifications about the building work itself.

If building works are DA exempt, it means that the project does not need to go through the DA process because it meets specific criteria outlined in the regulations, such as being minor work or not impacting the environment significantly. However, even if DA exempt, a Building Application may still be required to ensure compliance with building codes.

Together with your design team, we can help you understand this process, the costs involved, and what measures can be taken to help expedite the approval process.

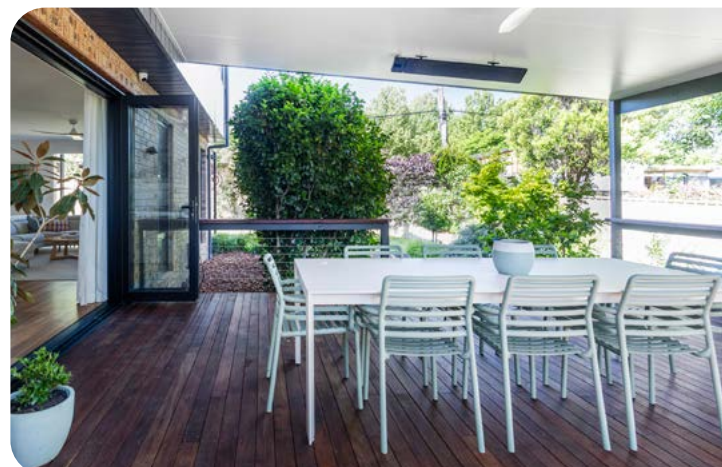
WHAT IS THE ESTIMATED TIMELINE FOR THE ENTIRE PRE-CONSTRUCTION PROCESS?

The pre-construction timeline—from initial concept to approved plans and final costs—is highly variable, depending on your clarity of vision and the complexity of the design and approvals required. We have seen streamlined projects completed in as little as three months when clients are decisive, responsive, and have a clear vision from the outset. However, complex or custom builds where clients require more time to gain confidence and finalise decisions can take up to 12 or even 24 months. We encourage clients to take the time they need to ensure the design is perfect before we break ground. We will consult with you on your time expectations and work hard to meet them, but ultimately, your responsiveness and clarity are the greatest contributors to a streamlined process.

SHOULD I MOVE OUT DURING CONSTRUCTION?

Deciding whether to stay in your home during construction depends entirely on the scope of work and your tolerance for disruption.

We generally recommend moving out for major renovations, as living on site can be noisy, dusty, and potentially unsafe due to exposure to hazardous materials or equipment. Remaining in the house also forces our tradespeople to navigate around occupants and furniture, which significantly slows down the schedule and increases costs. Consider the practicality—if your kitchen or bathrooms (essential areas) will be out of commission, staying may be impossible. Ultimately, while alternative accommodation has an associated cost, it buys back your comfort, safety, and routine, and contributes directly to a faster, more efficient build.





CASE STUDY: **narrabundah**

The homeowners initiated contact with New Spaces to explore an extension of their cottage home in Narrabundah.

Following an initial consultation to define the project scope, budget, timeframe, and design expectations, New Spaces immediately engaged building designer Baxter Design to collaborate on the architectural vision. We worked closely with Baxter Design and the clients through each stage, integrating continuous pricing analysis and construction consultation from the outset. This involved structured value engineering sessions with the clients, which provided strategic options to maximise design outcomes within their specified budget. Simultaneously, our teams held several technical meetings to proactively problem-solve buildability constraints and construction challenges.

This close collaboration extended beyond design. Early engagement with the client's certifier, surveyor, engineer, and energy consultants ensured the design remained feasible, compliant, and buildable well before the final design was signed-off. Crucially, the early involvement of our selected trades and suppliers allowed us to secure the budget and proactively plan the construction phase, ensuring the availability of materials and trade capacity within the client's desired timeframe.

Following the successful completion of the design and costing phase, New Spaces was contracted to execute the build. The streamlined construction phase was a direct result of our thorough understanding of the design and pre-construction scheduling, concluding smoothly and meeting the client's expectations and budget requirements.

Key successes:

- ✓ **Cost certainty:** The final project cost resulted in only a 0.5% increase variation to the contracted price (predominately due to client-selected upgrades), demonstrating exceptional budget control.
- ✓ **Efficiency:** The entire design and costing process, from initial enquiry through to construction commencement, was completed in less than 6 months.
- ✓ **Construction quality:** Achieved a highly streamlined construction phase due to early planning, detailed scheduling, and a comprehensive understanding of the design documentation.



we can't wait to work with *you*

GET IN TOUCH TO DISCUSS HOW WE CAN HELP
YOU REALISE YOUR HOME'S FULL POTENTIAL

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Let's get social!



New Spaces is a proud member
of the following industry
associations:



We are a HIA GreenSmart
Professional, certified in
sustainable building principles
through construction & design.

