



Design Your Dream Home: A Step-By-Step Guide



Every self builder has their individual expectations and ambitions in terms of the final result of their Self Build project. The process of designing a home is very demanding and challenging, as it is a crucial stage that is responsible for making your vision a reality. This guide will help keep you on track with your goals and thoughts to keep your project not only moving forward, but to also keep your mind at ease that you aren't forgetting anything.

Let's get started...

First start with a question. Why??? Why do you want to build your home instead of buying it directly from a mass home builder? Every self builder's reason can be different. Some of them want to build a safe and joyful environment for their children. Others may want to build a house to then sell on, to gain maximum profit. Retirement? Growing Family?

What do I need before contacting a design team?

First thing you need to include is the basic room information and room sizes. It is helpful to use the measurements of your current rooms, as long as they meet your expectations. The second aspect you need to consider is your building flow – the layout/structure of the internal rooms.

It is important to make sure that it will be consistent with yours and your family's lifestyle. For instance, if you need an open-plan kitchen connected to the dining room so that you can cook while spending time with your family and entertaining guests. Or a sheltered seating area outside with a gas fire pit and BBQ, so that you can enjoy BBQs with friends and family.

The next point that you should include is its architectural style. Do you want a traditional or contemporary house? Also is there any exceptional element of the landscape close to your house that you want to see from your bedroom window? Maybe you just want to position the house to receive the optimal amount of sunlight?



Two important elements of your Self Build brief would also be the heating strategy and how important the home's energy efficiency is. Do you want to build a low-energy house and focus on the form of renewable heating, or is this not a priority for your Self Build?

Your budget is one of the most crucial elements of the brief and something that is often kept secret from all but your partner. The amount of money you can afford to spend on your project determines the architect's design significantly, so it is important to set the budget as accurately as possible. You must also consider how you are going to manage the cash flow throughout the key stages of the project, but we will go into this further later in the article.

The final element to consider is the timescale for your Self Build. It is advised to focus on the starting date of your project rather than its deadlines. For more advice regarding setting timescales for your Self Build read here. We would never suggest setting the move in date, as an important birthday or worse Christmas Day!



Additional Information

Don't be afraid to provide your architect with as much additional information as you can. One way of doing this is by drawing sketches. You shouldn't worry about the quality, as long as it portrays your idea.

Another useful way of expressing your expectations is the use of a tool called SketchUp. This free software allows you to create your building and view it in 3D. It will even allow you to walk around and move within it, this is a fun way of getting your children involved in the design process. However, it's worth keeping in mind that you may design something in SketchUp, which is actually impossible to build. So don't be surprised if your architect will have to change your project in order to make it buildable.

The next tool that can improve the way you communicate your ideas to your architect is Pinterest. Pinterest is a content sharing website that allows you to "pin" images, videos, and other objects to your pinboard. It works like an online scrapbook. You can use it to search for inspiration, you can create separate boards, for example for interiors within the kitchen and bathroom. Then you can "pin" the pictures that express particular designs that you would like to implement in your project, and share it with everyone who is involved.



Here are examples of questions that your design team will need to know to get started:

- Residential or Commercial?
- Are you extending the footprint, adding a floor, remodeling, or new construction?
- What's the square footage?
- Is your house in a historic district?
- Do you have a survey or site plan? (If expanding footprint, adding a floor, adding a porch, and new construction)
- What is the goal? (make open floor plan, remodel with least amount of cost, make a larger master...etc)
- What style home?
- Is it on a Slab, Crawl Space, or Basement?
- Topography (on a hill, flat ground)?
- How many Beds? Baths?

Design Team

Land Surveyor

You may appoint a land surveyor to assess the plots you like, in order to choose the one that suits you best. It can help you to confirm the boundaries of your plot as well as the connection to basic services such as drainage, electricity and water.



Why Survey?

- see a visual representation of exactly what you are buying or selling
- know the exact property line dimensions, configuration, and the precise locations of all structures, driveways, fences, etc
- know of any encroachments (driveway, fence, structure, etc)
- be certain about easements such as utilities (drainage, sewer, power, water, etc) or egress / ingress
- know the exact location of all trees and topography so that the future building / structure can be designed to fit the landscape accurately
- know if any portion of the land is in a flood plain
- go to closing with confidence, whether you are the buyer or seller

Architect/Architectural Designer

This is the person that will bring your dream home to life on paper. All of your ideas and dreams need to be laid out for the designer to get the job done. This is someone you will be dealing with for most of the process, so make sure you do your due diligence and find the right fit.

Engineer

Once you have gotten your house dialed in, the engineer is required to make sure that your house is structurally sound.

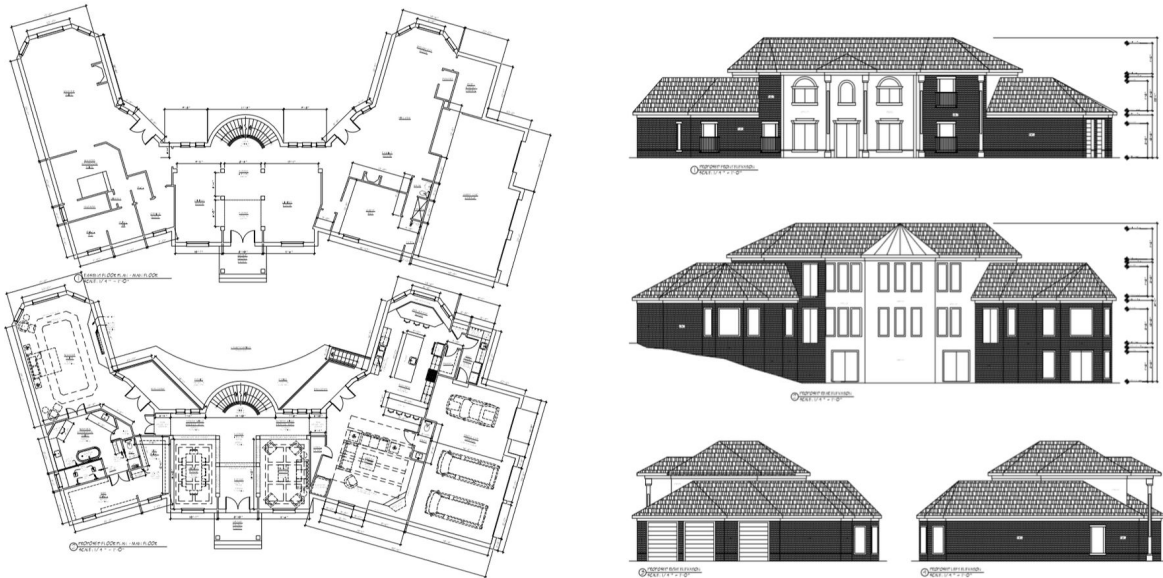


Top tips on appointing your design team:

- Interview a few of each profession required for your project. Make sure to ask for references and even check out previous work.
- Refer to the list of questions and answer them all thoroughly with any additional information. This would include sketches, pinterest ideas, etc.
- Get quotes. Make sure to get written quotes with fixed fees. Some businesses will want to charge % of cost quotes, but do not go for that. This is a sure fire way to blow the budget.
- Make sure not to let the price dictate your choices for your team. Fighting the cost of your project down too much will often lead your team to want to give you minimum service. No one is going to want to answer questions right away if they don't feel compensated. If you want a good service, the trades need to make a profit.
- Communication is the key to a smooth home build. Any issues or concerns should be sorted out right away before they become major. If communication is a problem make sure you have a means to part ways.
- Once your team is in place you can start on the part you have been waiting for. The actual design process. Next the steps will be described so you will have an idea on the ins and outs of the design stage that you will go through to complete your dream home project.

Summary:

- Make sure you have sufficient funds for your Self Build.
- Choose the plot that suits you most.
- Make sure that your architect understands your lifestyle.
- Appoint an engineer to conduct detailed expertise on your plot.
- Remember our top tips on appointing your design team.



Design Process

At this point, I will assume the Survey & Site plan have already been completed and given to the designer. Once they have these items they can determine where the house will be on the lot, square footage of the new house, and set back areas. The designer will take all of your hopes and dreams into review and utilize as much as possible into the space. Once completed, the proposed drawings will be given to the client for review. You should be looking to get 2D drawings including, plans, sections and elevations. If you do not like where the design is going you need to communicate it to your designers and they have to start again. This stage can make or break any timeline for a project due to the amount of revisions, but to reiterate you must love the design of your dream home.

After you are completely happy with the design, which meets all your requirements, you are ready to start pulling permits! Consult your local permitting department or the licenced contractor you plan to use for guidance on submitting in your local jurisdiction.

