

## 3 tips to avoid having your Dream Home turn into a Nightmare Project

### Tip 1

Set a simple, realistic project goal

An example of this might be:

"To accommodate our growing family by adding a second living area and separate bedrooms for our 3 children by end of 2023 for under \$300,000".

### Tip 2

Prepare a Design Brief and test the brief  
before even thinking about designs.

If you are like most people starting out on a new home or renovation project, you will have a list of Needs & Wants and some images from Houzz or Pinterest that reflect your desired style. While this information can form the basis of a Design Brief, it will greatly assist the design process if you separate your Needs & Wants and prioritise the Wants. This is a time for your inner Marie Kondo. Ask yourself, "if I can't achieve this, would I still go ahead with the project?" If the answer is "no" then it goes in the Needs list. If the answer is "yes" then it goes in the Wants list. The Design Brief should also include a timeframe and a budget for the project. The Project Budget needs to include construction costs, consultant & approval fees and GST (e.g., \$240k construction + \$30K fees + \$27K GST = \$297K)

Test the brief to confirm that it is both practically and financially achievable. This involves calculating the total amount of space required to accommodate the Needs & Wants set out in the Design Brief then applying a 3 basic tests.

Test 1 Practical - Can the additional space physically fit on the site within the available building envelope? Preparing a concept design plan will confirm if there is sufficient space available and what form it might take.

Test 2 Financial – Can we build the additional space within the defined Budget? Applying estimated building costs/m<sup>2</sup> to the areas identified on the concept design plan will provide an estimate of the building cost for the project.  
(e.g., 80m<sup>2</sup> x \$3000/m<sup>2</sup> = \$240K)

Test 3 Reality Check – Do we need to spend all of our budget? What if we focus only on the Needs and top priority Wants? Let's use the example above. You've calculated you can borrow \$300,000 @ 5% paying it off over 25 years at \$1750/month. What if you can achieve your project goals for 75% of the budget by giving up on a few of the Wants? For the same repayments you could pay off a loan of \$225,000 over 15 years and save \$130,000 in interest.

Would that be worth considering?

### Tip 3

#### Make the hard decisions early, when the cost of change is low

If your Project Brief has passed the 3 tests, then it will provide a solid foundation for the creative design process to follow and you can confidently engage your architect and other consultants to proceed with the design and documentation of your project.

If, however, the tests have highlighted conflicts, then it is important to review & revise the brief before proceeding. Focus on the project goal, and review the lists of needs & wants to see if they can be trimmed. Review the space allocation to see if there are any efficiencies to be gained there. Also, review the concept design to see if there are other options to achieve the required space at a lower cost (e.g., build out instead of up, or allow for a lower level of finishes). Finally, review your budget and consider if you are prepared to and/or able to access additional funds.

Whatever you do, do not pay anyone to design your home until you can provide them with a Design Brief that stacks up both practically and financially.

#### So, how can I help?

As a residential architect with over 30 years' experience working for both commercial & private clients, I have experienced the benefits of having a high-quality Design Brief provided by the client at the commencement of the project.

In the commercial world, clients generally have an in-house design manager who assesses potential sites, collates site information, obtains planning advice to determine potential yield for the project, and conducts a feasibility study to ensure there is sufficient return on investment. Once satisfied that the project is viable, the design manager acquires the site and prepares a Design Brief for the project. The design manager then engages architects and other consultants and provides them with the Design Brief to undertake the design & document the project.

It's a very different story in the world of private home design. Too often, potential clients arrive with a very basic brief. A few pictures, a sketch, a detailed list of Needs and Wants (plus a few "hopes") and a vague budget (provided verbally – not set in ink). Eager to please and hoping to sign up the client, the architect reviews the brief, nods and says something like "you've obviously put a lot of thought into this, is this your Dream Home? Your Forever Home? It looks like a very exciting project; I'd love to design it for you. Let me prepare a fee proposal for you so we can get started on the design." If they are lucky, the project will run smoothly and the client will get their dream home for a price they can afford. ... IF THEY ARE LUCKY.

I start all projects with a stand-alone service for the pre-design phase of the project. Referred to as the Project Definition Phase, it guides you through the process of preparing a high-quality Design Brief. This service includes research of the site and local regulations, preparation of a preliminary Design Brief and testing of the brief to ensure that the project is viable. At the end of the process, you will have a commercial standard design brief with all the necessary site data, project goals, spatial requirements, inspirational style cues and costed concept designs to guide the design process as well as a Project Plan setting out the steps required to complete your project and achieve your project goals. Only then can we start the process of designing your Dream Home and turning it into reality.