

...At Last a Friendly Custom Home Enthusiasts Guide

# Architect me now!

**How to Find the Right Architect for Your Custom Home**

**“For the Discerning Home Builder that Doesn’t Know Where To Start”**



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Read this guide and you will discover:

- How To Avoid Being Overcharged
- How to avoid being taken advantage of
- Whether or not you need an architect
- 10 Costly Misconceptions About Architectural Services
- 8 Expensive Mistakes That You'll Make When You Hire the Wrong Expertise
- 5 Key Value Creating, Life Enhancing, Benefits That The Right Architect Can Offer
- 6 Essential Recommendations That Will Get You Started
- 7 Questions That You Should Ask In Order To Avoid Getting The Wrong Architect
- 8 Questions That Will Help You Get The Right Expertise
- The Difference Between Value And Price
- How Poor Design Could Impact Upon Your Health
- How to get 5 Cast iron guarantees that will set the foundations for your project
- How To Achieve The Goal Of Building Your Home
- And Much, Much More

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## Preface

The very fact that you're reading this guide means that you're aware that neither designing and building a home, nor choosing a designer is easy. This is particularly the case when you open the phone book, or boot up your search engine, and find that you're simply bombarded with choices. No wonder it's hard to determine the most appropriate person for the job.

The reason why I've written this guide is because I've seen my clients struggle. They struggle to get an appropriate site. They struggle to get the appropriate finances. They struggle to get the appropriate home designer. This is why I've dedicated myself to educating the building industries potential customers. I'll be happy to help you in every way. If you have any questions about how to choose the right architect that may help you, then you're invited to call at **0191-375-7702**.

I'm Mark Siddall and **here's why I can help you**.

I've been involved in the building industry for most of my life. When I was younger I spent summers working on my Dad's building sites making houses and later in his office as his cost estimator. Then, more than twenty years ago, I trained to become architectural technologist before going on to become an architect.

I've now been a practising architect for more than thirteen years and along the way have developed not only a **specialism in residential design** but also particular expertise in sustainable construction. Careful attention to **comfort, health, wellbeing and building performance** are integral and essential to my work.

So I've not only got a wide range of experience, but I've also got a rather **unique combination of skills** and a somewhat different perspective to most people within the building industry. You could say that I've seen it all; and from various perspectives.

During this time I've recognised that the building industry can be confusing, bewildering and at times overwhelming. This is particularly true for those people that are not familiar with the intricacies and complexity of today's building industry.

My clients recognise that they need **the right person** that has the **specific skills** for undertaking the design work associated with your project. They also know that they need **the right 'fit'** between themselves and their designer.

What I'd like to do is to help you **develop a plan for selecting an architect**. This will enable you to **avoid many of the obstacles and pitfalls** that my clients have struggled with before they've come to me.

Within the limited space of this guide there's no way that I can address all of the misconceptions and mistakes that currently exist but I'd like to do what I can to help you. So please, save yourself from being a victim of regret and do yourself a favour. **Find a quiet place, sit down and read this guide from cover to cover.**

In just a moment, I'll share with you **seven of the most costly misconceptions about designing and building homes and seven significant mistakes**. Plus I'll offer **five recommendations**. I'll also give you a total of **fourteen questions** that you should ask a designer before you invite them into your home.

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## 9 Costly Misconceptions

The investment in your home is one of the greatest financial commitments of your life. Making decisions that will offer the best bang for your buck is going to be vitally important. In this section I'll discuss costly misconceptions about architectural services and the main benefits that you can get from working with the appropriate architect.

### Misconception #1: I don't need to hire an architect....

Okay, here's a little background. **Architects** receive five years of **design training** and have a further two years of professional study before being eligible to qualify. That's **seven years** of education even before they are let loose on the world. Then in the years ahead they continue to refine these skills.

There are many people within the building industry that offer so called "architectural services," but did you know that **many** of these **people**, even those with professional status, have **not** been **trained in architectural design**? If you dig deeper then you'll find that their education and training offers them many skills but not architectural design.

#### How do I know this?

Before I qualified as an architect, I began working in an architect's office. While I worked there I trained to become an **architectural technologist**; this is somewhat like becoming an engineer of building technology. I found that this particular education gave me a very **strong appreciation of the technical requirements** of buildings as well as an understanding of the how and why these requirements had to be addressed. But it did **not** teach me about **aesthetics, style** or the finer points of **architectural design**. What I learned was the value of constraints and conventions with regard to building technology. This is very different.

More recently, owing to **my own technical expertise in** environmental design, building physics, construction technology and **low energy architecture**, I spent three years at Northumbria University **teaching** students the skills that would enable them become **architectural technologists**. I can guarantee you that their understanding and appreciation of design and technology is very different to that of even the most average architect.



Whilst I've had the pleasure of working with some very fine **architectural technologists** the vast majority are not versed in **architecture**. It's **not a part of their training**; and the more professional amongst them widely admit it. Other building professions fall into a similar camp.

Why are good **design skills** important? The ability to design well is important because these skills make it possible to **release potential** and **create value** at a **financial** and a **qualitative** level.

Architectural design skills are not simply about drawing and being creative, they include the ability to collaborate and negotiate with others in order to agree and achieve a common end goal.

How can you satisfy yourself that **people** that haven't been **trained** in architectural design are actually suitable for designing your home? I don't know the answer to that one; it's **pot luck** I guess.

Arguably the best building designers are those that are registered by the **Architects Registration Board (ARB)**. Other so called building designers cannot buy this certification as **the term "Architect" is protected by law**.

As I mentioned a moment or two ago, an architect must earn certification through study, experience and the successful completion of formal, written examinations. **People** that are **registered with the ARB** have **earned** the **legal right** to call themselves an **architect**.

Only once a person has registered with the ARB as an architect can they go on to become a member of the **Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)**. In order to maintain competency RIBA members are required to undertake **Continual Professional Development** on an ongoing basis.

One critical thing that you should be aware of: In order to register with the **ARB**, **all architects** are **required** to have **Professional Indemnity Insurance**. The purpose of this insurance is **to protect you**, the consumer. It is strongly advised that you ensure your designer, whoever you choose, has this kind of insurance. If they don't then you can be certain that they aren't a professional.

The need for Professional Indemnity Insurance and the Continual Professional Development obviously has a cost. This means that regardless of the scope of services that you required an architect's fees are higher than those of someone that does not seek to maintain their professional standing.

Can you imagine how disastrous it would be to have a patient tell a brain surgeon how to do the operation? Or, if an athlete were tell his coach how to do his job? So, why would anyone other than an architect design your new home?

## **Misconception #2: All that architects do is design**

One thing that I've noticed over the years is that home owners that have decided to build their own home can get a little squeamish when they see the fees for receiving input and support from an architect. This is entirely understandable - they are after all a considerable financial outlay. I've tended to find that because of the sums involved that people often see the fee as a cost rather than an investment. This is an easy mistake. The reason that people get hooked up on price tends to be that they do not appreciate the true value that an architect can bring to the design and management process of building a home.

Architects have problem solving and communication skills that can offer you significant benefits.

There are essentially five areas where the right architect can have the greatest potential to add the significant value:

### **Benefit #1: By helping you to recognise and realise hidden value and to maximise upon the known value.**

This is achieved:

- By understanding and clarifying your needs and developing a robust clearly defined brief. Getting your dreams out of your head and on to paper is not as easy as you may think. There are often conflicting demands that are made of a building and if they are not understood and anticipated at the right time then they can be very costly to address at a later stage.

- By recognising potential where others wouldn't. Sometimes people get trapped in old ways of thinking or we just can't see the wood for the trees. This can create a set of blinkers that means vast amount of potential, a huge amount of value, can be ignored. As an **architect** I've been specifically **trained in design** so I'm able to think more creatively. This allows me to see opportunity and potential where many others wouldn't.

For instance, as an architect, I can help you to **release** the **potential** and **opportunity** of highly constrained, poorly utilised, disused or low value sites. By seeing the potential that others can't I can unlock and enhance the real value of a site. This can **increase** the **worth** of the site many times and make a project a commercially valuable investment.

Another example would be where I'm able to **help you** determine whether you should retain or refurbish existing premises, whether you should **expand** them; or whether it would be wiser to **relocate** and find **better opportunity elsewhere**.

- By assisting you with the evaluation of design options that will enhance your quality of life. By examining how efficient internal space planning, suitably generous spaces, day lighting and interior design an architect, such as me, can find **imaginative** ways to **improve** your **quality of life**. We can also design in ways that consider your future needs in order to make your home remain usable and accessible in later life. I'll come back to this point later.

- By taking a broader view. A diligent architect will proactively consider the impact of your proposals upon planning constraints, the character of the surrounding area and the natural environment. They will also consider the interaction between the various components of your brief in order to create an environment that will enhance your quality of life.

- By creating character that instils a sense of place. An architect's design training means that we, more than anyone else, are able to create an experience unlike any other. Through our training and experience we know how to create an oasis of peace or a place that has a lively buzz. We spend time thinking about how to enhance the experience of living in a using a home. (If you simply are prepared to live in a home that is relatively bland and emotionally uninteresting then an architect may not what you need.)

People often ask me what style of architecture that I do. When I dig deeper I find that they are really asking "How do you instil character into your work?" A home with character makes use of form, materials and light in such a way that it creates and enhances the experience of home. It is because of this that I believe that creating a home with character is far more powerful than adopting a particular architectural style. So, even though I love to use traditional materials and enjoy learning from historic architectural styles I don't seek to mimic the past, instead I see to reinterpret how materials and form may be used to create character.

## **Benefit #2: By helping you to recognise hidden risks and to minimise the known risks.**

This is achieved:

- By using their specific experience and specific knowledge to identify specific project risks. In many ways this strikes at the heart of an architect's expertise. The greater the knowledge and experience that an architect has, then the greater the potential for them to identify the risks that other, less experienced and less knowledgeable architects wouldn't spot. Failure to spot risks in adequate time means that there is a tendency to manage by crisis. As everyone knows crisis management can be a very expensive exercise.

- By managing the projects economics. I have found that, to some degree of another, there is generally a tension between the ambition for a project and its budget. At the initial stages ambition often trumps budget. This is more than understandable after all it's the desire, the emotive and engaging component, that sets us on the path towards a goal or a specific result.

Once we've established a goal that appears to satisfy our needs we then need to figure out how to achieve these goals within any number of constraints. Generally the two greatest constraints that my clients face relate to time and cost. All other things tend to flow from here.

By drawing upon the skills and expertise of the right architect it's often possible to reconcile the budget and your ambitions; or avoid unnecessary cost before the project progresses too far. The reconciliation process does not mean compromise; rather it is a case of looking to achieve an optimal solution that addresses all of the constraints in the most beneficial manner. Getting the budget on track is a key step.

- By managing and coordinating the design process, and by creating and updating the appropriate design and construction documentation (minutes, drawings, specifications etc.), we can help you to control a project's budget. A good architect will be **systematic** in their approach to managing and coordinating the design process. In many respects this builds upon the **specific experience and specific knowledge** of an architect that I mentioned a moment ago. So, if you wanted a comfortable, healthy, low energy home then the right architect will have developed a **specific design process** that will **deliver** this outcome - **guaranteed**. If an architect is not willing to guarantee the outcome of their design process then you may choose to question the value that they have to offer.

### **Benefit #3: By mitigating unnecessary cost and expense during the construction process**

This is achieved:

- By assisting with the identification of, and negotiating with, building contractors. An architect can help you find appropriately skills building contractors and can then manage the process of obtaining suitable bids. The architect can answer questions raised by the contractor and, if necessary, make changes and amendments to the design and construction documentation.

- By developing robust construction documents; including drawings, construction details, schedules and specifications. Within the construction industry the key to cost and risk management is a set of well researched, well developed and well communicated construction documents. The more

thorough that these documents are the lower the risk that'll be introduced to the construction process. There can be a tremendous range in the level of detail that architects provide at this stage. In some cases the drawings and specifications are very precise, whilst in other cases it is somewhat fuzzy and superficial (the assumption being that the contractor will figure out the solution on site). A **well-informed** and **well-practised** architect with **relevant expertise** will know **exactly** what information they need to provide in order to **guarantee the outcome** that you have specified.

- By providing training and undertaking site inspections to ensure that the work that is being undertaken reflects the construction documents. Prevention is better than cure. I've found that site inspections alone are not the best way to avoid and prevent mistakes occurring on site. When working on design intensive or technically challenging projects I've found that it is better to provide training *before* the trades get their work underway. (The training should include, but should not be exclusive to the site manager or the builder contract manager.) These workshops serve to get everybody on board and allow the opportunity to work through any concerns or reservations that a particular tradesperson may have.

- By providing and undertaking site inspections. A good set of construction documents can go a long way, but the building trades are notorious for drifting off and doing their own thing. Without appropriate support there is a risk that this drift can take place on your project. With training in place site inspections become a pre-emptive. Whilst I'm still looking at the work that has been undertaken and remarking upon what needs to be done you are also looking forward to the work that is yet to be undertaken. I'd say that any diligent architect should undertake this kind of work as a part of their standard operating procedure; assuming of course that you have commissioned them to undertake this work.

- By managing design changes. Even the best laid plans may need to change. Recording and tracking instructions that result in changes to the design is critical – particularly when you don't want the budget to run away with itself. We've all see those episodes of Grand Designs! Keeping records of design changes and understanding their impact upon the cost is incredibly important, particularly once a project is on site. When it comes to avoiding costly misunderstandings on site, it is essential to make sure that the construction documentation is updated to reflect and record the design changes. If this is not done then costly rework may have to be undertaken at your expense.

- By managing and administering the construction contract in the event of misunderstandings, delays and expense. One of the most important ways to manage risk is to have an appropriate building contract in place. Standard construction contracts are written in order to be fair and spread risk in

the most appropriate way. While it is always nice to put these unwieldy documents (that are couched in legalese) in a draw, there are unfortunately times that they are needed. For a contract to be executed appropriately a Contract Administrator is required. An experienced architect can fulfil this function. It is important to recognise that the architect is not “supervising” the contractor and it not liable for faulty work as long as the site inspections and decisions are made in good faith.

Contract administration may also include:

1. preparing additional detailed drawings if needed
2. approving the contractor’s requests for progress payments
3. approving any changes to the plans and preparing any required change orders
4. negotiating who should pay for disputed change orders
5. resolving any issues stemming from conflicts or ambiguity in the plans or specs.

- By checking to ensure that the work that is invoiced by the contractor has actually been undertaken and that the proposed cost is appropriate. On modest projects it may not be practical or cost effective to employ a quantity surveyor to manage the finances of the project. In these circumstances an architect can review the contractors invoice and compare it to the work that has actually been undertaken. Provided the two correlate then you will be authorised to make the payment.

**Benefit #4: By thinking about the lifecycle of your home, the long life after the build can be so much more cost effective.**

*Dr. Joseph Romm “...When just 1 percent of a [building] project’s up-front costs are spent, up to 70 percent of its life-cycle costs may already be committed. When 7 percent of project costs are spent, up to 85 percent of life-cycle costs have been committed.”*

This is managed:

- By designing for longevity a building needs to be adaptable and to provide a loose fit. This means not only thinking about your needs right now but also thinking about how your home will be used in the future. By getting the design right from the start you can reduce the risk that you’ll need to extend your home in the future. Or if your budget is more constrained, then you can get the home

designed in such a way that the future extension can be anticipated and suitable provision can be made to allow it to take place.

- By designing to minimise the energy bills, the lifecycle costs can be radically reduced. The cost of energy bills can far exceed the cost of the bricks and mortar. A suitably clued-up **architect** knows how to minimise energy use. I'll come back to this later on.

- By helping you to choose the most appropriate materials and technologies. As an architect I can help you to **appraise materials** and **technologies** that will be **appropriate for** the site **location**, the **budget**, and the **environment**. All **architects** can draw upon their knowledge and experience in order to help you with this.

### **Benefit #5: Making your life easier and less stressful.**

This is achieved by employing the right architect. Your time is freed up so that you can concentrate upon the things that matter most to you. Life is easier when you can keep on top of the challenges. Whether it's your family, your work or some particular important decisions about the house you don't need to worry about the finer details. Employing an appropriately skilled well seasoned architect allows you to free up your time by releasing you from the daily grind that's involved in the design and construction processes.

Before I wrap up this particular topic consider for a moment that the cost of constructing a home is about ten to fifteen times greater than the design fees. I'm sure that you can appreciate that spending a little more time and money on the design, getting the design right, can be money well spent; particularly when it avoids unnecessary and abortive work taking place on site. The ongoing support offered by an architect can offer you reassurance by helping you to manage and reduce financial risk.

**In order to get the best value, and to minimise risk appropriately, you need to ensure that you select the architect with the most relevant skills, experience and knowledge for the project that you are undertaking.**

### **Misconception #3: A large architectural practice is better.**

Having worked in a number of **larger architectural firms** I know what can happen to projects. You can end up dealing with 3 to 4 different architects during the entire process of a project.

It may be because the large architectural office is structured so that different architects deal with different phases of the design and construction process; or because a member of staff simply gets reassigned to a different project. Whatever the case, the impact upon your project is the same.

Each time your project is **passed between people** all those subtle bits of **knowledge** and **understanding** about your project are **lost**. Not only that the personal rapport is lost and has to be rebuilt. This can be time consuming and hard work; you may not even get on with the latest person that has been assigned to you. It's these breakdowns in communication and continuity that have the greatest impact upon your project. Smaller architectural practices tend offer a more stable platform for a client.

Another consideration is that **larger practices** tend to **use graduates** more **frequently** than smaller practices. These graduates are young and enthusiastic but completely **inexperienced**. They don't have a deep appreciation of the design and construction processes and they **don't have deep technical knowledge**. In larger practices junior members of staff tend to be assigned to smaller projects; and in the context of a large practice a house is a small project.

So, how would you feel if your home were designed by the graduate? Wouldn't you rather work with a **highly skilled, reliable** and **well seasoned professional**? Wouldn't working with an experienced architect with years of experience reduce risk, **get a better quality home** and allow you to avoid abortive costs?

Remember, it's not all about the end product, the journey is also important. A more **experienced architect** can **help to** smooth the way so that you can **avoid** the **stress and frustration**; which in turn frees you up to do more of what you want.

**Smaller practices** tend to have **experienced architects** and are far more likely to assign one architect to handle your project. Think carefully about the scale of the practice that you consult and make sure that they'll give you the appropriate level of service and personal attention. The advantage of working with a **small practice** is that **communication problems** are much **less likely** to arise.

Finally, remember that you'll be working with your architect for quite a while. **It is really important that you get on with your architect** and that their personality works with your own. There will be challenges and tensions during your project. I cannot over state how important it is that **you need to**



**feel good** about who you'll be working with **and** that you feel as though you can **trust them**. Smaller practices tend to have less of a corporate feel and are generally more customer friendly.

### **Misconception #4: One architectural practice is as good as another...**

No. There are essentially **three different types of architectural practice**. There are **general practitioners**, there are **specialists**, and then there are **experts**. If you have a specific kind of home in mind then you will need to **make sure that your architect has the necessary skills and expertise**.

**General Practitioners** - First I'll explain general practitioners. **General practitioners** have a **very broad portfolio** and do a little bit of **anything and everything**. They are a Jack of all trades, master of none. So you'll find that they undertake any work that they can get their hands on; residential, offices, schools, hospitals and the like. Just have a look at their websites and you'll see what I mean.

I used to work in a firm or two that was like this. From my experience I know that these firms are larger architectural practices. Whilst they are obviously capable of delivering these projects they may not be the most effective. Why? The architect that is given the job of delivering the project, say a residential design, has just come off working on a completely different type of project; say an office building or a school. This means that they don't have the specialist understanding that would be beneficial for your project.

Why is this important? Well, when I was working in one of these larger practices I realised that the design processes for these different types of building are actually very different. I don't mean at a superficial level. At a superficial level they appear to be no different. The difference arises in the nature of the questions that are asked and the level of enquiry that's undertaken. Learning which questions to ask and when to ask them comes with experience and this really means having a specialism.

**Specialist** - This brings me on to the second type of practice; the **specialist**. This type of architectural practice specialises in a **specific type of building residential**, offices, schools, hospitals and the like. By having a specialism an architect becomes more adept, and more able to ask the right questions at the right time. If you want a home designed by an architect then you really need to **hire an architect that**, at the very, **least specialises in residential design**. Architects may have any number of specialist skills which complement each other. For instance an architect that specialises in residential design may also specialise in sustainable, low energy design. For you to be sure that the person is a specialist there should be some form of qualification to support their claim. For instance

someone claiming to be a Passivhaus Architect should be a Certified Passivhaus Designer (see <http://www.passivehouse-designer.org/> for more information).

By using these skills and asking the right questions at the right time expensive, time consuming design changes can be avoided. Or to put it a different way, it speeds up the design process and makes it more cost effective; as a result it offers you better value.

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**WARNING:** There are some unscrupulous people out there that are claiming to have built to the Passivhaus Standard without using the relevant quality assurance standards or necessary design tools (sadly some of these people are even qualified as Certified Passivhaus Designers).

They claim to have built a “Passivhaus” or that they have built to “Passivhaus Principles.” In some cases they play word games and say that they have built a “passive house” (apparently the use of lower case or the English spelling means they aren’t trying to confuse you....)

I’d like to draw your attention to a technical briefing document that I co-authored on behalf of the Passivhaus Trust. This guide called “Claiming the Passivhaus Standard: The UK Context” explains how your legal rights as a consumer are infringed by these false claims.

[As Wolfgang Feist, founder of the Passivhaus Institute and inventor of the Passivhaus Standard once said to me "As you know it's one thing to pass the exam. It is another to build a Passivhaus."](#)

My understanding is that the statisticians suggest that for data to be reliable you need to have studied at least 25 examples. Where buildings are designed to achieve a specific performance standard, and then receive third party certification, you can be sure that the individual has demonstrated that they really do know their stuff.

To be confident that you will not be wasting your hard earned money I suggest that you select an appropriately experienced and skilled expert by seeking appropriate evidence to confirm that the architect has been involved with the design of at least 25 Certified Passivhaus homes.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Expert** - The final type of architectural practice is the **expert**. To be more accurate it is the individual architect that may be considered to be an expert. These architects are not simply specialists they are much more than that. They are highly skilled professionals, the brain surgeons of the architectural world, involved with assisting the ongoing refinement, development and transformation of their profession and/or industry. In addition to knowledge and understanding they also offer a tremendous amount of experience and skill.

An expert, as an industry transformer, will also educate by writing or contributing to peer reviewed conference papers, books, reports and articles; they will have been interviewed, given speeches at high profile conferences, won awards and have references from the most esteemed peers in their field.

Also, when you look at their back catalogue of work, you'll find that they also have greater experience and a stronger portfolio of work. Finally, their work will have been subjected to testing, analysis and critical review by research institutes and universities.

The **value of an expert** lies in the fact that they can help you to **reduce** your exposure to **risk and enable you to allocate your budget in the most effective** and appropriate way. Their breadth of experience means that they can save you money simply by guiding your design process in such a way that the construction will cost less than it would in the hands of other, less experienced, less qualified people.

**If you want a particular kind of home, one that is a cut above the rest, then you really need to hire an architect that is an expert in their field; and this means going beyond the educated, but relatively untested, would be specialist.**

**Decide what kind of expertise is important to you.** Let's say that it could be one or more of the following; comfort, health and well being, low energy and sustainable construction. **An architect with expertise, someone that is steeped in experience and has tried and tested tools and techniques, can offer real value to the design of your home.**

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Now think about it. If you had brain tumour would you go to the G.P. or a brain surgeon? Choosing the appropriate kind of architect is very similar. At the very least you should ensure that they

specialise in the kind of work that you are want to undertake. But it is best to seek out an expert that can ask the right questions, diagnose problems and offer appropriate solutions.

**When looking for an architect, the more specific that you are, the clearer your vision, the greater the likelihood that you will achieve your goals and ambitions.**

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~~As Wolfgang Feist, founder of the Passivhaus Institute and inventor of the Passivhaus Standard once said to me "As you know it's one thing to pass the exam. It is another to build a Passivhaus."~~

~~So that you may have a more practical appreciation of expertise I thought that I'd use myself as an example.~~

~~For my sins I am regarded to be one of the pioneers that introduced the Passivhaus Standard to the UK in fact Dr. Wolfgang Feist has said that I'm "one of the UK's most skilled and knowledgeable Passivhaus Architects."~~

~~My interest in the Passivhaus Standard first stemmed from my commitment to developing tools and techniques that would enable the building fabric to perform as predicted. In this respect my work is exemplified by the Racecourse Estate which Dr David Johnston of Leeds Metropolitan University considers to be "one of the very few developments where it has been shown that it is possible to 'bridge the gap' between predicted and measured performance of the building fabric."~~

~~At the time of writing I have worked on 27 Passivhaus Certified homes. I have also completed one home that is a 'declared' Passivhaus. This means that although the client chose not to pay for certification the home itself is deemed to satisfy the criteria because all of the appropriate quality assurance measures were undertaken.~~

~~In addition to being an architect and energy consultant I am an educator and industry transformer. I have helped to co-author the Certified Passivhaus Designer course for the AECB's CarbonLite Programme, lead master classes for the Passivhaus Trust, delivered CEPH training at the University of Strathclyde and, between 2011 and 2014, was a part time lecturer at Northumbria University. I have also contributed to technical papers for the UK's Passivhaus Trust including the internationally recognised 'What it means to claim the Passivhaus standard in the UK.'~~

~~As author and a contributor to two books and over 30 articles and papers on building performance and the Passivhaus Standard, my practice provides educational tools, information and 'how to~~

guides' for people building and renovating in the North of England. For free downloads of the papers visit [www.leap4.it](http://www.leap4.it) or to contact Mark email [mark@leap4.it](mailto:mark@leap4.it)

I have been a member of the Association for Environment Conscious Building (AECB) since late 2006 and regional chair of the AECB North East Regional Group since 2008. I have also been a speaker at a number of AECB Conferences, a technical advisor to the AECB CarbonLite programme and a regular contributor to Green Building magazine.

## Misconception #5: Thinking that each architect uses the same Design Process

There's a basic design process, which is reflected by the Royal Institute of British Architects Plan of Work, that all architects generally follow. The Plan of Work works at a high strategic level. If you dig down into the detail though you'll find that each and every architect has a subtly different approach. Some approaches being more robust than others. It can be very difficult to determine which approach is better or appropriate to your needs.

I don't know if it's just me with a design process that can keep getting better but it's been thirteen years and I keep finding ways to improve it. In this time I've learned that **the majority of brief development processes should happen before a design's commenced; not DURING the design process. But not all architects will agree; particularly the old traditional ones.**

What researchers have recognised, ~~and I've recognised too,~~ is that it's this initial phase that determines the entire outcome of the future phases. It impacts upon not only the design process but also the enjoy-ability and the lifecycle costs from using and maintaining a home. In my view the importance of this critical differentiation between pre-design and design can't be overestimated.

For some it takes years after having qualified before an architect can settle upon a particular design method. ~~Personally I've Others~~ never ~~felt feel~~ as though ~~they~~'ve been able to settle upon a specific approach.

~~You see, my~~ Arguably a good architect's underlying mission ~~has been~~ is to create better buildings for people to live in and enjoy. Over the years ~~I've they~~ experimented ~~ed~~ with many different design strategies and techniques. As you can expect some ~~have proven~~ more successful than others, but incrementally ~~I've they~~ developed a more and more refined method. Because ~~they~~ keep learning

about new, better, more robust ways to create reliable value for ~~my~~their clients ~~I've~~they don't~~not~~ stopped refining ~~my~~their design process. ~~I've never settled.~~

~~To tell you the truth~~One of the key areas of development ~~that I've been working on hasn't so much been~~isn't so much "the design process." ~~For me the major development that's taken place in recent years has been to develop~~but the pre-design phase. It's this particular part of the process where it takes time for you to describe, and ~~for me~~for an architect to understand, your fundamental needs.  
**Not just your practical needs but your emotional needs also.**

~~Before I started my approach – which I'll explain more about shortly – I knew the same as, or perhaps say 10 percent more than, other architects, but afterwards my clients kept coming back to me and telling me about their experiences. And now all of a sudden I found I that I knew significantly more than others because I have this whole network of people coming back to me.~~

~~You see~~Good architects love to create feedback loops ~~and~~ with ~~my~~their clients ~~I'm~~and are always developing new ways for their clients ~~them~~ to check back with ~~me~~them and in turn they give little extra bonuses just so that ~~they can~~ stay in their clients ~~their~~ world. ~~and that~~This allows ~~me~~them to keep creating ~~and developing my product, their~~my design process, so that it gets better and better and better.

So you see, the “secret sauce” that enriches the pre-design brief development phase is actually a feedback loop from other projects that ~~architects~~I've worked on. ~~My~~A good design process is informed, not only by an architect learning about your needs, as important as they are, it's also informed by a formalised process called Building Performance Evaluation; or BPE to those in the know.

The primary purpose of BPE is to improve the quality of design by providing feedback upon the effectiveness of design decisions. It is a structured way of learning about a buildings performance; it's not simply a case of keeping in touch with the owner or occupant.

At its greatest extent it examines building fabric, building services and how people occupy a building. Site inspections, questionnaires, thermography and data loggers are used to collect data that feeds forwards into future projects. This approach is not widely adopted within the construction industry.

The extent of BPE that can be undertaken depends upon funding, but ~~I~~do good architect will try to ensure that ~~the~~ir practice undertakes some kind of evaluation on each and very project so that ~~practices~~methodologies and protocols may be advanced for each subsequent project.

## **Misconception #6: Having the right equipment is all an architect needs to undertake your work**

Not true. These days, as you'd expect, practically all architects have computers and a range of software. Currently the majority of architectural practices use Computer Aided Design, and more recently good practices have begun the transition towards using Building Information Modelling.

You probably know someone that bought a new gadget but didn't learn how to use it for a year or more. The same is true with drafting and energy design software. The company may own the equipment but the employees may not know how to use it properly.

But it's ~~is~~ **not just** about tools and knowing **how** to **use** them. It's **knowing WHEN** to use them. The actual design process, and the techniques that are employed during the course of working on a project is the defining feature of an architectural practice.

When designing a home ~~I~~ a good architect does two things before I put pen to paper and draw up the design. ~~They~~ develop a very robust brief understanding of your needs by having some in depth and very frank discussions with ~~my~~ their clients and ~~they~~ use energy calculation software ~~to inform my brief~~. ~~They~~ do this because these initial calculations actually go on to inform the design because they also help me to test for the most effective and affordable options. The beauty of this approach is that ~~I am~~ they are also able to avoid unnecessary re-work and re-design. This approach differs to that of many other traditional or conventional architects. A good architect has specifically developed this strategy after having researched design methods and learnt that this approach offers significant value simply because it develops the brief in a more robust and rounded way.

So, to summarise, I hope that you can see that it's the nature of **enquiry** and the sensitivity to developing an understanding of your real needs that **is will be fundamental to the successful realisation of your goals**. A good design process has been carefully defined and systemised.

This is why it's important that you choose your architect carefully.

## **Misconception #7: Any honest architect should be able to give you an exact quote over the telephone.**

I wish that this were true but it isn't. Consumers often think that if they want a four bedroom house the price should be easy to determine. This is rarely the case.

You may hire an architect to assist with initial design discussions and considerations or may elect to have the architect oversee the project until it has been completed. You may even consider requesting additional support during the first two to three years whilst you get familiar with the building (look out for information on Soft Landings elsewhere in this guide).

Whatever services you choose there are a number of ways that the fees for the services may be developed. A number of common options are listed below and then discussed in more detail:

1. Percentage of the Build Cost
2. Time Charges
3. Lump Sum

**Percentage of the Build Cost** - Traditional architects usually price their work using a percentage based fee that is determined by your budget. Convention suggests a full service fee of between 5% and 15% (8% being typical), for a single residence. For refurbishment or an extension the range is about 10% to 20%, with 12% being typical. The rate for refurbishments and extensions tends to be higher because these projects are more complex and more unpredictable.

If however an architect is employed up to planning permission, according to the RIBA, the costs tend to lie between 3 percent and 5 percent. If architectural services are required in order to assist with a refurbishment, a retrofit, alteration of an existing home then a fee of between 12% to 18% is not uncommon.

Generally, as construction costs are considered to agree with both the complexity and the time taken to support a project, should the project extend beyond the initial budget estimate, then the architectural fees will increase accordingly.

But why, for a new build home, should an architect charge a higher fee simply because a house is more expensive? The time that I spend specifying gold taps is much the same as the time that I spend specifying stainless steel taps. So I personally don't believe that the percentage based approach is either fair or equitable as it imposes greater cost upon you; the consumer simply because you have a given budget.

**Time Charges** - At the initial stages of a project, say initial discussions or a survey, it is common for an hourly rate to be used along with an estimate of the time that will be required. These rates may vary from one architect to another. The Architects Fees Bureau has found that on average rate for an architect is £52 per hour rising to £90 per hour for a firm's partner.



There are times when time charges can be appropriate – say at initial stages of a project when there is a great deal of uncertainty about whether a project will proceed. However, this is not really a suitable fee structure for a whole project. The reason for this is because it's like writing a blank cheque- and no one wants to do that.

Hourly rates leave you without the clarity and certainty that you deserve and, at worst, you could be exposed to exploitation. By the time that you have completed the Concept Design stage you should have left firmly the hourly fees behind (I'll discuss this a little more in Recommendation #7.)

**Lump Sum** - A lump sum fee may be prepared for an agreed quantity, or 'package', of work. Any changes or additions to the package can be agreed by negotiation between you, the client, and the architect. When it is difficult to determine the quantity of additional work that is required a further lump sum or a time change may be agreed. This approach offers you the greatest amount of certainty and the least amount of risk.

Under this scenario the fee is not dependent upon the build cost; rather you pay the agreed lump sum for the work followed any additional fee that is agreed for subsequent work. ~~It is noted that~~ should the project extend beyond the initial budget estimate, or increase in complexity, then the architectural fees will need to be reviewed but with a well developed brief you should be able to minimise this risk. You will then be able to make a decision regarding the scope of work to be undertaken by the architect.

So, even though I can't give you an exact quote over the telephone, here are **six major things that I think need to be considered when quoting a price for a phase of work:**

**[Factor #1] The complexity of the site.** A steeply sloping site with an intricate topography is more difficult to work with and is more time demanding to develop a design for (levels need to be carefully coordinated).

**[Factor #2] The extent of your brief.** A brief with many different parameters makes the project more involved and more complex.

**[Factor #3] The scope of design services that are required.** In a short while I will discuss the range of services that architect offer. Each service takes time to undertake. Before a fee can be agreed it's necessary to develop a clear understanding of your needs and the level of support that you require.

**[Factor #4] The risk associated with addressing planning concerns and building regulations.**

External factors imposed the local authority or another third party adds to the complexity and the time that needs to be allocated to the project; this in turn has an impact upon the fee.

**[Factor #5] The range of management services that are required.** In addition to design services an architect can manage aspects of the project. Whether it's managing the design team, appointing the building contractor or managing the construction contract these management processes take time and need to be accounted for. This way your needs, aspirations and budget may be satisfied.

**[Factor #6] The regional location of the site and the architectural practice.** At a national level the location of the architectural practice will influence the fee – a practice in the North East will cost less than one in London. The location of the site in relationship to the practice will also influence cost as transport will be a consideration. I'll come back to this when I discuss disbursements and expenses.

To recap, a good quote will consider the brief, the complexity, the risk and the extent of design, project management services, regional location of the site and the practice. Hopefully you now appreciate why every quote is different.

## **Misconception #8: The architect that offers the lowest price is the architect that you should hire.**

Maybe -- but this is **rarely the case**. Here are four points to consider.

### **Point #1: The price that is given may not be for the service that you want performed.**

Before you select an architect, decide what you want to accomplish, for instance during the course of a project an architect can often fulfil many roles. You need to be clear about which roles that you want them to fulfil. They may include:

- **Architectural Design:** Develops the brief, the room planning, the design and the construction documentation
- **Project Management:** Leads and coordinates other consultants within the overall project
- **Design Management:** Leads and coordinates other consultants within the design process
- **Energy Consultancy:** Undertakes relevant energy calculations in order to assist with the coordination of the cost effective delivery of the design

- **Contract Administration:** Management and execution of the construction contract

During course of fulfilling these roles they will undertake various activities in order to satisfy the tasks arising from these roles. These activities may include:

<b>Initial Feasibility</b>	<b>Tender</b>	<b>Other Services</b>
Brief development	Preparation of Setting out drawings	Project Management
Site analysis	Preparation of Setting out Sections	Design Team Leadership
Feasibility Analysis	Preparation of Setting out Elevations	Preparation of Measured Surveys
Concept Analysis	Preparation of Window and Door Schedules	Management of Compliance with Planning requirements
Sketch Design	Preparation of Internal Door Schedules	Management of Compliance with Building Regulations
	Preparation of Passivhaus Construction Details	
<b>Planning</b>	Preparation of Specifications	<b>Energy Performance</b>
Pre Planning Consultations	Building Specification	Energy modelling
Pre Planning Quality Control	Preparation of the Invitation to Tender	Passive House Planning Package
Planning Applications	Tender Assessment	Thermal bridging calculations
Planning Appeals		Energy Assessment
	<b>Construction</b>	Retrofit Upgrade / EnerPHit Analysis
	Site Inspections	Passivhaus Suitability Analysis
<b>Design</b>	Project Updates	
Preparation of Plans	Claim Analysis	<b>Surveys</b>
Preparation of Sections	Certificates of Payment	Condition Survey
Preparation of Elevations	Practical Completion Inspection	Dimensional surveys
Housing Quality Assessment	Snagging Lists	Preparation of Land Registry Maps

You could do some, or all, of these jobs yourself...but you should ask yourself whether or not you have the time, resources and inclination to spend years learning about these subjects and then developing the skills to apply this knowledge to your own project.

On the other hand, if you want your home to be designed with skill and care - - if you want it to be your dream home - - then you need to hire an architect that has the appropriate skills and experience. This is the only way for you to ensure that your house will be free from design and construction errors.

So remember that the price you see offered may, or may not, be for the specific scope of services that you want performed.

**Point #2: The price that is offered may not reflect the extent of the services that you require.**

Just as a barrister cannot guarantee that you will win your case in court, and a doctor's can't guarantee to cure you, architects and engineers cannot offer an absolute guarantee for all aspects of

their design. There are many possible solutions to a design problem; each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Whilst some are more successful than others there's no particular right answer.

The law requires professional consultants to satisfy the standard of competence that is prevalent in their profession. In this respect architects are duty bound to provide reasonable skill and care. In many respects this means that from a legal perspective all that you can expect is an average standard of service.

So what is 'reasonable'? Without knowing all of the facts determining what is reasonable on a project specific basis can be very difficult. With that said I would suggest that you not only need to ensure that the scope of services is appropriate but that you also seek clarification about the extent of the services (and products) that are being offered.

We are all familiar with companies that offer us 'unlimited' service offers; just think of 'unlimited' broadband or 'unlimited' texts and phone calls. When you read the small print you actually find that 'unlimited' is defined as being something that is limited – though it may be more than you'd generally expect to need.

Are the services that you require comprehensive or are they limited in some form? How many drawings? How many perspectives? How many construction details? How many site visits? The greater the number the greater amount of time that is expended on the project, consequently the greater the cost.

Considering that the expenditure of building your house is typically about ten to fifteen times greater than the architectural fees it can often be wise to invest money in design work that reduces construction related risks; particularly when you are trying something that goes beyond standard industry practices.

In these circumstances reducing risk may mean investing in a less complex design from the very beginning or being prepared to invest in more extensive design development; or more often than not a combination of the two.

Initially it's often hard to determine the return on investment for undertaking thorough design development simply because, in the first instance, it exposes risk rather than 'saves money.' The actual advantage of a more developed design arises from the fact that it allows for an iterative process whereby the design can be developed, reviewed and simplified in order to manage design (and construction) risk, reduce cost, or both.

The more thoroughly developed the brief, drawings, schedules, and specification then the higher the quality of the design and the documentation that's provided to the contractor. This serves to lower the project risk by an order of magnitude, but may result in higher architectural fees if the design is more complex or the performance requirements are more stringent.

Basically you need to know that your architect is investing their time, and your money, in minimising construction risks rather than frittering it away on the cosmetic aspects of their design.

**Point #3: Errors, omissions and change management can influence the ultimate price.**

The less developed a design the greater the risk of errors and omissions. Ultimately not all changes to a design add value. Value may be added to a project by adding or omitting things from the brief and ultimately the construction contract.

Changes are often made when the aspirations of the brief and the budget are being reconciled. The earlier that these changes are made in a project then the easier it is to manage the cost of actually implementing the changes. The reason for this is that as the project develops more and more documentation is developed to reflect the more detailed design. At a late stage seemingly small changes can incur considerable costs – particularly when the building is being constructed on site.

As some additional work is required when making changes omissions (and additions) are rarely a 'no cost' option as some expenditure of effort is required when making changes themselves.

Design errors are mistakes that, when corrected, do not add value to a project. Often design errors are recoverable and do not incur a cost. Where these errors occur, and they fall below the standard of reasonable skill and care, the architect will normally resolve the issue amicably due to professional pride and the desire to maintain their reputation.

It should be noted however that there is no such thing as error free design. It is unreasonable to expect a design to operate faultlessly. Even modest building projects include hundreds of decisions and tens of people. Most architectural design is a unique creative endeavour that does not benefit from prototyping and product testing.

The notion that good buildings "Stand the test of time" is at odds with concepts of innovation and experimentation. The labour of innovation is experimentation. Custom designed homes can be a product of experimentation. Some experiments work better than others.

As homes become more complex, and they are demanded over shorter and shorter timescales, the risk of error increases. This risk is magnified when people seek overly ambitious and adventurous

designs without seeking to develop the design in sufficient detail. The more radical the design the greater the risk.

Preventing or obstructing design changes increases the risk that the value of the end product – your home - will be reduced and that the performance of the building or its component parts may be compromised.

You can either establish the costs associated with additions and omissions by determining how many changes have been allowed for in the fee quote, or by getting a quote for implementing each individual change. The former places more risk upon the architect – and will lead to increased fees to cover the risk – whereas the latter is fairer and more transparent. Personally I recommend adopting the latter as the most fair and appropriate change management procedure.

**Point #4: The price that you see advertised may not be the price that you pay.**

Like many others, including myself, you may have learned that the low price that you've seen advertised was not necessarily the amount that you were eventually charged.

If you have used a “home designer” before then you may have been the victim of false or misleading advertising or telephone quotations. If this is the case then you may have learned the hard way. You may have been quoted a low priced fee at first but then when you meet you were pressured into paying much more. Some may even break the law and use ‘bait and switch’ tactics.

Architects are bound by a code of conduct that establishes an ethical framework that they should work within. Because of this I'm not going to suggest that a fellow architect would bring the profession into disrepute by using ‘bait and switch.’ If, after an architect has been appointed, you perceive pressure to accept increased fees as the project progresses - - as things “come out of the woodwork” or you find that things weren't included in the scope of services - -then it certainly does suggest failings in the processes that were used to develop the brief and the scope of services that they proposed; this goes back to the things that I mentioned in Point #2.

As in all businesses and professions, the construction industry has its fair share of bad apples. I take no pleasure in telling you this, but some are unethical - - and, sadly, a few are dishonest. By their misleading advertising and false promises, they can cast a dark shadow on our entire industry.

Then you'll find professionals ~~like me who~~that work very hard to earn your trust and respect.

~~As a way of improving our profession, I've dedicated my business to educating the public.~~The only way that you can make an intelligent decision is to have all the facts that you need. ~~This is why I've~~

~~prepared this guide. And to help my personal efforts at consumer education, I became the regional chair of the Association for Environment Conscious Building.~~

**Point #5: Building costs are some ten times greater than the fee that an architect may command.**

By using their skills, knowledge and experience to hold the reins on the budget an architect can save you far more than any additional fee that they command. How? **A suitably experienced architect** will help you to reduce or avoid project risks. Each risk tends to incur a cost. The greater the knowledge, understanding, skill and expertise then the more an architect can do to help manage the project risks. It's the value, rather than the cost, that they bring to each hour that needs to be considered. If you use price alone as the determining factor when selecting an architect then be warned.

**Point #6: Some of the more customer focussed architects that specialise in housing also offer standardised house types.**

This not only helps you to keep the design fees down it also allows you to reinvest the money that you have saved into other important aspects of your new home; build quality for instance. If the standardised homes don't quite suit your needs then, for a small fee, they can often be modified to suit your needs. One of the benefits of this approach is that it can offer greater cost certainty than experimental, bespoke designs.

[You will probably find that the vast majority of standardised homes a little better than those offered by speculative house builders. There are a few architects that provide high quality standardised house types – when style and budget are a concern then it is well worth keeping an eye out for these kinds of home.](#)

Whilst this approach is cheaper it also means that you may have to compromise some of your ambitions. So, for you to get the ultimate home that you desire, I would recommend that you work with an architect to develop a bespoke home that is tailored precisely to suit your needs.

**Point #7: Disbursements and expenses.**

Don't forget that expenses that are incurred for things such as travel costs, copying and printing drawings, models and application fees (for Planning permission, Building Regulations etc.) may also have to be paid. The fees should be outlined in a formal agreement between the architect and the client.

Your budget should allow for application fees such as planning applications and Building Regulations etc. The budget should also make sufficient allowance for the cost of the construction (materials and labour), and contain a contingency to cover any unforeseen work.

### **Flexibility**

**It is important to remember that you, as the client, are in control and that you can have as much or as little support from the architect as you desire.** Whilst an architect may recommend a range of services, ultimately, it's for you choose the range services that you require. This helps you to manage and control the costs associated with your project. For instance, should you have a builder that you trust to manage the construction process, then you may not require architectural support for that work package. On the other hand, if the builder is doing something that they've not done before and the architect has, or they are not someone that you implicitly trust then it may pay to keep the architect on board so that they can keep an eye on the work.

### **Misconception #9: You don't need an architect once the contractor is appointed.**

A survey undertaken a year or two ago revealed that many respondents don't realise that architects offer services during the construction phase of a project. In fact I've also learned that some people from outside the construction industry believe that it's typical for an architect to hand over their construction documentation to their clients and then have no further input during construction.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Losing the input of the architect at this stage in a project is a critical mistake. There are a number of myths that lead people to believe that full architectural services may not be required. These include:

**Myth #1: The contractor will figure it out, it's their job.** The long and short of it is that contractors just want to build. They don't want to spend time chasing up decision makers and documenting design decisions. From their perspective this is a costly and unwelcome distraction from the process of managing a construction site. All decisions about the building construction have to be made at some point. Failing to plan and record the decision making process is ultimately where risk and unknown cost lies.



**Myth #2: Contractors don't want architects on site.** All the diligent contractors that I've ever worked with value the input of an architect and value their input. A good collaborative working environment keeps the project on the right foot.

**Myth #3: Contractors are used to dealing with the local planning authority.** When you receive planning permission you will also be given a schedule of Planning Conditions that need to be discharged. Some have to be discharged prior to commencing work on site and others need to be discharged before you occupy the property. Liaising with the planning authority is not something that contractors prefer to do they would rather that these matters be managed by someone else; invariably this is the architect.

**Myth #4: Contractors know what will satisfy the building regulations.** The majority of builders don't have time keep up to speed with changes in Building Regulations, British Standards and other regulatory frameworks; they are too busy on site building. And remember, these are minimum, not ideal, standards. With this being the case don't even think about voluntary advanced construction standards (such as Passivhaus or AECB Silver).

**Myth #5: The client pays twice when then employ both an architect and a contractor.** There is the architect (the designer, specifier and contract administrator) and the contractor the builder. There is no overlap.

**Myth #6: The client/owner can oversee the construction.** Unless the owner/client is particularly skilled and familiar with construction then the idea of managing the construction should be a no-go. Architect Mies van Der Rohe said that "God is in the details" others say that the devil is in the details. Whatever your belief system, if you are paying for a design to be developed for you, then you really need to ensure that it is executed correctly. Also, when design changes are made, and they invariably are, it's important that the consistency of the design is maintained. If it isn't then the value and pleasure derived from the end product can be vastly undermined. Is this something that you really want?

**Myth #7: Contractors always read drawings.** Good contractors do read the drawings. And even then they can be left scratching their heads sometimes. Drawings can be overlooked or misinterpreted having the architect on hand can really help to smooth the way ahead by offering clarification.

**Myth #8: Sub-contractors always read drawings.** The general contractor is the person that gives the orders on site. The sub-contractors, the trades, then have to do as they are told. Often the

subcontractors never have the opportunity to see the drawings. They operate in the dark with a flashlight. The person that knows the most about how the whole project comes together is the architect. By having the architect available for site inspections and to resolve queries construction errors and re-work can be minimised, if not avoided.

**Myth #9: The contractor's understanding of 'equivalent' is the same as an architect's.** In my experience building contractors do not have the same appreciation of a specification as an architect. Often the products and materials that I specify satisfy more than one purpose or function; after all this is how I seek to deliver the most value through my design. When a contractor seeks to substitute one thing for another they rarely consider the range of parameters that were addressed when the specification was first developed. They rarely check compliance with range of performance parameters – including the British Standards. Things get missed – it's just like a game of Chinese whispers. The incentive for making changes to the specification must be questioned because if it isn't then something could be lost. In my experience, when seeking to make design changes the contractor is normally focussing upon two factors; the cost and the headline in the specification that describes the product or material (not the body of the more detailed specification). The underlying question must be asked – who does the proposed change serve, the client or the contractor? The person that is in the best position to answer this question is the architect.

**Myth #10: The contractor should be able to figure it out from the construction documentation.** Contractors are skilled at reading and interpreting the contract documents and diligent contractors like to ask questions when they need clarification.

An architect can make the contractor's life easier by addressing questions and helping them to avoid making expensive mistakes. Not only that an architect can pro-actively help the contractor to think about the work ahead and familiarise them with particular risks before they arise.

### **Misconception #10: When I hire an architect I own the design**

When you hire an architect you hire their services, you do not purchase the design. An architect owns and retains the copyright for their design, drawings and documents that are produced for your project. They consent that you may copy and use those drawings and documents for purposes related to your project only.

The architectural practice owns the copyright of the drawings and documents that are produced for your project and they generally assert their moral rights to be identified as author of that work

under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Subject to payment you normally purchase the right to copy and use those drawings and documents for purposes related to your project (but not any other project). Your right to copy and use these documents does not extend to any future purchaser, leaseholder or tenant of your property without prior agreement with the architect.

## 8 Expensive Mistakes

**This section describes seven common mistakes that people make when selecting an architect. It highlights key subject areas where knowledge, skills and experience that have been developed over years culminate in expertise.**

So now that you know how to identify an appropriate designer with a relevant specialism you're in the right ball park, however, you may want to drill a bit deeper in order determine whether they have the expertise that you consider to be relevant.

Why? Because although you've done a fair amount to mitigate risk by this stage there are a number of other important considerations.

### **Mistake #1: Expecting all architects to be experts in everything.**

Of all the misconceptions this is perhaps the most pernicious. The dirty secret is that the design and construction of high performance homes is very poorly regulated. This means that obtaining truly healthy, comfortable, functional, low energy and sustainable buildings is surprisingly difficult. There are also a great number of myths surrounding so called green design and zero carbon technologies. These days EVERY architect and house designer talks about sustainability; the trouble is that very few really walk the walk.

To make matters worse there are a number of well known benchmarking tools that actually create perverse incentives insofar as they actually encourage unsustainable practices – which to my mind is crazy.

The fact is that a number of years ago I learned that buildings aren't performing as you and I would expect. It troubles me now just as it did then. In fact it's now become a growing concern within the

construction industry - - as highlighted in April 2013 by the Architects Journal in their article Architects 'liable for energy performance'.

I'm sure that you'll also recognise that knowledge alone is not sufficient. The real secret to delivering building performance is application. Architects that lack the drive and the passion, architects that have not absolutely committed to delivering their clients' needs, are unlikely to implement their knowledge. The result is that the risk of building performance failure remains unaddressed.

Architects have an ethical imperative to address performance gaps. If you agree then, when looking for an architect, you should ensure that you find evidence that clearly demonstrates your architect's engagement with addressing gaps in building performance.

### **The most costly advice is bad advice.**

Whether you simply want a better home that is more comfortable and respects your needs, you want to create a home that costs less to run and maintain, or you feel ethically motivated to create a home that is more sustainable, getting well founded and carefully researched evidence based advice is critical to the success of your project. The following mistakes describe in greater detail critical factors that you should pay attention to.

## **Mistake #2: Believing that all architects understand how to design for comfort**

Truth be told the only reason that we heat our homes is to try and achieve a reasonable degree of comfort. If we could be comfortable without needing to heat our homes then this is exactly what we would do. You don't need energy what you really need is comfort. An architect that truly understands how to deliver excellent standards of comfort, whilst minimising energy use, will be far better able to address your needs.

It may surprise you to learn that architects, and other designers, are not specially trained to understand thermal comfort. It's because of this that they normally seek to address thermal comfort by using the technical fix of using bigger more powerful radiators. This is a particularly poor design strategy as it does not tackle the root causes of your discomfort. So what happens? You end up using more energy than you need to heat your home. Which in turn leads to higher energy bills.

~~A diligent architect will also be able to demonstrate an appreciation of acoustics and how it can impact upon your health and well being.~~

~~For instance I have co-authored two peer reviewed conference papers that examined window design and its impact upon comfort during the summer and the winter. I have also investigated the impact of noise upon ventilation and indoor air quality.~~

~~Leeds Metropolitan University have studied a project that I designed. Their survey examined 34 criteria and was issued to 25 homes on the Racecourse estate. A total of 21 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 84%. The resulting scores were then compiled into a range of indices that covered various aspects of performance including Comfort, Satisfaction and Overall Summary Index. The overall level of comfort and satisfaction was reported to be excellent.~~

**Point #1: Evidence of knowledge** - Architects that have received appropriate training will address these concerns from the very beginning of the design process. An understanding of comfort criteria will inform their approach to low energy design. The best architects have dug even deeper and have refined their knowledge and understanding of these subjects even further and they have published papers on related subjects.

**Point #2: Evidence of experience** - The most authoritative way of determining that an architect is capable of providing a comfortable home is for them to be able to provide third party evidence that statistically demonstrates that their homes provide a high level of comfort. Ideally this work will have been undertaken by research institute or a university.

If they cannot provide this information then testimonials from the people that live in the homes that they have designed are the next best thing. You could also ask whether you can visit one of the designer's projects so that you can experience the homes for yourself; this also gives you the chance to speak to the residents.

The value of this evidence is not so much that they have this information; it is what the designer is doing with this information. Ask them questions about how this data is informing their work.

### **Mistake #3: Thinking that all architects understand how to design in order to enhance your health and well being**

The number of children in the UK that are suffering from ASTHMA and other allergies has grown. The UK has one of the highest levels of Asthma in the world. In the UK 1 in every 12 adults and 1 in every 11 children suffer from Asthma.

Living creatures, such as Dust Mites, Fleas and Creepy Crawlies live, hide and breed in your carpets. The droppings from Dust Mites have been associated with increased incidence of Asthma attacks. They are most often found in pillow and duvets.

Controlling the ventilation and the humidity level within your home limits the dust mite population. A well designed, constructed, commissioned and controlled ventilation strategy is critical if the appropriate level of fresh air is to be provided and indoor humidity and the dust mite population is to be controlled.

Most architects no doubt believe that, with regard to ventilation, their designs provide adequate ventilation and satisfy the Building Regulations. Recent research has proven that this is not the case. Studies have

- Found that the ventilation strategies are poorly designed, poorly installed and poorly commissioned
- Questioned whether the assumptions that underpin the building regulations are appropriate for providing adequate indoor air quality
- Determined that drafts and discomfort have been associated with poorly designed ventilation strategies.

These conditions often lead to a restricted supply of fresh air. This can have an undesirable impact upon indoor humidity and the dust mite population within the home.

Stress, sleep disruption and poor indoor air quality can all occur if the acoustics of your home is not addressed appropriately. Unfortunately my research, covering over 1000 homes, suggests that the Building Regulations aren't actually appropriate for addressing all aspects of acoustic comfort. For instance, the link between noise, various ventilation strategies and acoustic comfort is very, very poorly addressed.

**Noise:** You may be shocked to learn that a home designed to meet the Building Regulations can be expected to result in 50% of people being dissatisfied with the noise levels from a mechanical ventilation system. A diligent architect will therefore be able to demonstrate an appreciation of acoustics, how it can impact upon your health and well being and what needs to be done to mitigate these concerns.

~~During my investigations I have found research that allows appropriate noise levels to be specified.~~

**Cleanliness:** A growing number of new homes, for very good reason, use mechanical ventilation and they rely upon ducts to distribute the fresh air. The cleanliness of ductwork is often overlooked in UK construction. Poor ductwork cleanliness can result in dry eyes, eye irritation, risk of asthma and the like. The greatest risk of contamination occurs during the construction process.

Many building standards, including UK building regulations, suggest that ducts should be clean, but how clean is clean enough? It's easy to require laboratory levels of cleanliness, but the time and cost it would take to achieve this would be prohibitive. An architect with deeper concerns about economy, health and well being will have researched international best practice in order to plug this performance/specification gap.

**Fresh air supply:** An extensive study undertaken by BSRIA (the Building Services Research and Information Association) examined the airflow performance of ventilation systems. They found that 95% of the systems failed to meet the requirements contained within Part F of the UK Building Regulations. This is a worrying statistic. Further studies have brought into question the success of so-called natural ventilation strategies. Luckily we also know that ventilation strategies can be made to work – it just takes a little more time, effort and preparation than you'd expect within the industry in general. A good architect will be able to demonstrate that they understand how to get a ventilation system commissioned appropriately.

~~investigations have identified a simple standard from Finland that allows an appropriate level of cleanliness to be specified by comparing photographs with the actual ductwork in a home.~~

~~In addition~~ The best architects can demonstrate their competence by having taken part in building performance research (often undertaken by a university or another third party, though they may even have undertaken the work themselves). Whilst this is by far the most robust approach is it unfortunately not common within the construction industry.

There are essentially two types study. Those that assess the perceptions of the occupants and those that use measurements. Because perception is rarely the same as reality in-situ measurements can be informative. The best studies will combine both and create a more holistic impression of how the buildings perform.

~~to my own investigations a survey Leeds Metropolitan University has undertaken an examination of 25 homes that I have designed. Their study determined that the perceived indoor air quality was very good, that the overall noise levels are reported to be excellent and that there is an excellent level of perceived healthiness within the homes.~~

~~Some occupants have even given anecdotal evidence suggesting that a number of health conditions, including asthma, have been alleviated. Positive feedback was also received with regard to the design, layout and appearance of the properties.~~

~~We all recognise that perception not always the same as reality. This is why measurements are also important. In-situ measurements undertaken at one randomly selected property determined that noise levels were in the appropriate range for comfort.~~

~~Measurements undertaken by the researchers established that the MVHR systems had been commissioned in accordance with the design – unlike many other homes tested by Leeds Metropolitan University.~~

~~The reassuring findings on my project contrast with an extensive study undertaken by BSRIA where they examined the airflow performance of ventilation systems. The BSRIA study found that 95% of the systems failed to meet the requirements contained within Part F of the UK Building Regulations.~~

So, in summary, a good architect will have received specific training with regard to ventilation and will have a detailed awareness of ventilation strategies that can improve indoor air quality and reduce the risk of asthma and allergies occurring within the home. They will be able to explain, in detail, the pros and cons over various ventilation strategies. They will also have taken part in studies that have assessed the as-built performance of the homes that they have been involved with.

**Point #1: Evidence of knowledge** - An expert will be able to demonstrate that they have undertaken specific research into one or more subjects that relate to health and well being.

**Point #2: Evidence of experience** – Better still they may also be able to provide evidence showing the performance of the buildings that they have worked.

#### **Mistake #4: Holding the view that all architects truly understand low energy design.**

We have all seen fuel prices rising over the last few years. In 2002 the average annual fuel bill for heating was £522. According to energy supplier First Utility by 2012 this had risen to about £1,334.

This rapid increase makes energy the fastest rising household cost. Do you expect this to continue? Do you think that it would be wise to minimise your energy bills so that you may be buffered from rising fuel and energy prices? If so then a home that minimises energy use will be important to you.



If we take a home similar to Steel Farm – a project that my practice has completed – then it could be expected to have a fuel bill of just £260 per year; a financial saving of £1074 and an 80% reduction in carbon emissions to boot.

Now consider this, a study of 30 new homes by Leeds Metropolitan University has shown that they are using 40% to 70% more energy than predicted at design stage. **Only 5% of the homes that they tested performed as the designers predicted.** The cause of this performance gap is independent of how the homes are used by the home owner. The researchers concluded that the problem lies in the failings of both the designers and the constructors. This particular study focussed solely upon the building fabric, not the building services. Similar studies have also identified failings in the design, construction and commissioning of the building services.

How do designers commonly seek to address – or should I say 'hide' - these failings? They install bigger, more powerful heating systems than they otherwise would. Through their failings, and their ignorance, they impose a life of higher bills upon you. It's not simply a case of being able to use energy analysis software but also having deeper knowledge about how to design and construct ultra low energy buildings that's important.

There are a few of points to be aware of:

**Point #1: You need to adopt tried and tested design standards and include them into your brief -**

If you are to reduce the risk of wasting money on energy efficient buildings then you need to be certain that the buildings will perform in practice. Because the design of low energy building is so poorly regulated, and poor design is so prevalent, I recommend the adoption of voluntary energy efficiency standards.

There are very few quality assurance standards for low energy buildings. Arguably, over the last 20 years, the world's leading energy efficiency standards have been developed and refined by the Passivhaus Institute (PHI) in Germany. They have gradually expanded their quality assurance initiative to include not only new buildings but existing buildings also. Why is the Passivhaus Standard so highly respected? It is because there is a tremendous evidence base that serves to demonstrate that buildings built to this standard can really work. The biggest challenge that the Passivhaus Standard faces is a cultural one.

The UK construction industry is qualitatively different to the German one. Sadly in the UK the knowledge and understanding about how to design and build energy efficient homes correctly is very poorly established. To make matters more complex, because of the cultural divide, the

Passivhaus Standard cannot simply be implemented. A few additional strands of knowledge need to be brought into play, simply because the design strategies, the detailing strategies, the building technologies and the construction processes all differ. So you see, there is a translation process that is required.

More recently the Association for Environmentally Conscious Building (AECB) has developed their own energy efficiency standards for the UK context. It's important to recognise that these standards are underpinned by the same quality assurance standards that have been developed by PHI. So if you consider the Passivhaus Standard to be one step too far then I recommend that you adopt the AECB Silver energy standard.

**Point #2: You need to ensure that your architect understands building physics and uses energy analysis tools** - These days **good architects** have the ability to calculate the whole house energy performance. This allows them to assess the impact of their design decisions so that they can make more cost effective decisions about the design of your home. If you are seeking a low energy or low carbon home then it's critical that your architect has a detailed understanding of building physics.

There are a range of tools that need to be used. From your perspective the main thing is that they know how to use them and that they use them **consistently**. Here's a practical example of why an architect needs to be able to **use** these **energy design tools**.

For example, U-using conventional industry standard design methods heat loss is often compensated for by specifying additional insulation; this is far from the most cost effective approach. Simply by **designing and calculating** the construction details appropriately ~~I was able to help one client~~ it is possible to avoid an extra 11cm (4.5") of insulation around the whole house. This meant that ~~they~~ you can also save ~~d~~ money by avoiding unnecessary ~~on~~ labour costs, and the reducing the time spent on ~~the construction site~~ whilst also reducing operational energy use. This kind of design regularly ~~saves my clients~~ more than £3300 per (detached) home.

There are architects that don't appreciate the impact of thermal bridging and do not undertake these calculations. This means that they needlessly spend your money on things that could be avoided. What else could you have done with this money? Could you have had better finishes, a better kitchen, a better bathroom or a smaller mortgage? Would these things be more beneficial? To help you avoid these kinds of additional cost your architect should be able to calculate thermal bridges in-house.

**Point #3: You need to ensure that your architect can design draft proof (airtight) homes –** We have all lived in homes that are cold, draughty and uncomfortable. Homes in the UK are amongst the draughtiest in Europe.

Draughts are not only the cause of discomfort they do have a considerable part to play. Not only do we experience draughts from cracks and gaps in our homes but we also suffer down draughts from cold surfaces. When the air is cold and moves too quickly we often do something to compensate for the draught - - we turn up the thermostat, which in turn increases heating bills. The little appreciated problem is that this kind of behaviour can increase discomfort even further. This is caused by all the warm air rising to the ceiling and the lake of cold air pooling around your feet. I'm sure that you've experienced that warm head, cold feet feeling so you'll know what I mean.

Another factor that should be considered is that a home that has poor airtightness is more likely to suffer from moisture and mould damage because warm, moist indoor air cools as it leaves a heated room and travels outside. Research suggests that to avoid moisture and mould problems an airtightness standard that is 16 times better than the Building Regulations, and about 8 times better than the industry average, is required.

Draft proofing therefore has three benefits, it not only helps to reduce discomfort and helps to reduce your energy bills, it also helps to reduce the risk of moisture damage to a building. Within the construction industry draft proofing is referred to as 'air tightness.' This air leakage from your home can be measured. The lower the number the better the result.

For you to be sure that an architect really understands what they are doing; to ensure that they can repeat their success and that it wasn't a flash in the pan, they should be able to **demonstrate** that they have worked on **at least 25 homes** that have **achieved this level of performance**.

Find out the best results that your architect or designer regularly achieves and use this as a marker for determining the quality of their work.

In order to avoid downdrafts good glazing is required. Find out the kind of glazing that your architect or designer regularly specifies; or better still ask them how they develop the specification.

~~Personally I have completed over 30 homes that are at least 16 times more airtight than the UK building regulations. Measurements have shown that some of the homes are almost 30 times better draft proofed.~~

**Point #4: You need to ensure that your architect is aware of 'hidden' forms of heat loss** – There are a number of “hidden” **unregulated** forms of **heat loss** which, if unaddressed, have a **significant impact upon your comfort and your energy bills**. Measurements have shown that, in extreme cases, unregulated heat losses can lead to 600% increase in heat loss.

These forms of convective heat loss cannot be calculated using conventional tools. The study by Leeds Metropolitan University has shown that various types of air movement are the root cause of this problem. Only careful design, and well considered specification, by an architect can give the building contractor a fighting chance. A expert architect will therefore be able to demonstrate that their buildings perform as predicted.

~~Remember that only 5% of the homes studied by Leeds Metropolitan University actually performed as intended? These are the homes that I've designed.~~

**Point #5: Evidence of knowledge** - An expert will be able to demonstrate that they have not only received training but they will have relevant skills and abilities and also undertaken specific research into one or more subjects that relate to Building Performance.

In order to address all of the previously mentioned points, to achieve these exemplary standards of performance, not only did will an architect need to be able to design buildable details but they will also need ~~ed~~ to be able to work closely with the building contractor throughout the construction process.

**Point #6: Evidence of experience** - The best architects, the experts, will have proven evidence to demonstrate that their buildings are indeed low energy buildings. Ideally, to help you identify a designer with appropriate skill, they'll have evidence such as:

- 1) The results from something called a coheating test that has been conducted by a research institute or university. (A coheating test is a way of measuring the heat loss from a building).
- 2) Third party measurements from airtightness consultants showing their best achievements.
- 3) Records of energy usage in homes may be appropriate.
- 4) Evidence of further research into best practice.
- 5) Examples of thermal bridging calculations that they have undertaken.

Should you require copies of the evidence about my work then I will be happy to provide it.

## **Mistake #5: Believing that all architects understand Sustainable Design and Construction**

Due to public interest, and as a consequence of Government sweeteners, roof mounted bolt-on technologies, such as solar thermal or photovoltaic panels, seem to be all the rage these days. However, field tests are showing that many technologies are performing much worse than expected. They therefore cost more to operate and maintain.

As many architects and designers rely upon the marketing brochures, and the hearsay that is abundant at any tradeshow, there is little reliance upon a strong evidence base to support their understanding. This is good reason to be sceptical about many claims by designers and architects that they understand sustainable construction.

What you need is an architect that can demonstrate that they have robust understanding of building technologies. They should be able to cite field tests and other relevant academic research to support their advice. Architects that have this grounding will be able to offer advice that is more sound and appropriate to your needs.

Research shows that using quality assured ways of minimising energy demand is the most reliable way to reduce carbon emissions and environmental impact.

## **Mistake #6: Trusting all architects to consider usability**

As seductive as the idea of bolt-on technologies may be (regardless of performance), at the level of the individual householder, there is another reason to be cautious. In the race to satisfy the demand for bolt-on technologies there is something that is missed out of the equation. The most important question that is not being asked is:

Do these products really make my life easier?"

One of the reasons why the field tests are so dismal is because the technologies are not used, operated and maintained appropriately. Designing homes that are liveable, easy to use and low maintenance can conflict with the desire to include bolt-on solutions. Simple solutions are often better than overly complex ones.

You may be surprised to learn that many designers and architects unquestioningly recommend technical fixes without having considered usability or maintenance. If you are not minded towards engineering and maintaining technologies, then make sure that your architect has a deep interest and concern about usability.

Look for an architect that can demonstrate their competence by having taken part in research activities that demonstrate that the occupants perceive ~~The study by Leeds Metropolitan University has confirmed that the occupants, of buildings that I have designed, perceive there to be that they~~ have excellent control over their environment including ~~Control was also perceived to exist for~~ heating, noise, ~~and~~ lighting. ~~A good level of control was found to exist with regard to~~ and ventilation ~~with satisfactory levels of control existing for heating and cooling.~~

## **Mistake #7: Believing that all architects appreciate buildability**

Okay, before I can explain this statement I need to explain what I mean by buildability.

In order for a house to be built an architect will prepare a series of drawings that show exactly how the building should be built. A particular set of these drawings, called construction details, explain the interfaces between various elements of a building – windows and walls, walls and floors, walls and roofs and the like.

The theoretical purpose of a detail is give clarity to the builder so that they understand what it is that they need to do in order to satisfy the intent of the design. So the details are meant to address things like keeping the wind and rain out, keeping the warmth in, controlling the transfer of moisture through building fabric, minimising maintenance and looking good.

In order for these performance criteria to be delivered in practice the builder needs to be able to build them. They need to be considered from a practical stand point and for this to happen the SEQUENCE of the construction process needs to have been considered. Now, this may not be the actual sequence, the builder may have another, or even a better, idea. But it's really important that for a detail to be buildable that the sequence of construction is considered.

In my experience unnecessarily undeveloped, poorly considered, and excessively complex construction details make it increasingly difficult to satisfy these objectives. During construction poorly considered details are much more labour intensive and take more time to build. This means that they cost more to build. Not only that these details are more prone to degrading and

developing weaknesses at some point in the future; normally long after the architect and the builder have moved on to another project.

As a consequence of these failings details like these not only begin to look unsightly, often surprisingly quickly, but also have a higher maintenance cycle and greater lifecycle costs.

In a nutshell bad detailing is a maintenance problem that is waiting to happen. There is only one thing worse than bad detailing, and that is no detailing. If the contractor doesn't have the construction details then how in the world are they going to resolve and build a detail? They have to do the design work. Ask a builder whether they are a good designer and they will tell you that they aren't designers. What a builder likes is sufficient information that will enable them to complete the project.

A diligent architect will produce sufficient details that can be built easily by the various trades. Now this may sound easy but you'd be surprised; not every architect thinks like a bricklayer, a plumber or a plasterer. Why? Because they don't think through the sequence of the construction in enough detail. It may be that they simply don't think things through enough, or it may be that they have a tendency to create complexity. In both cases they suffer from a disease that I call 'infectious-repitiuous.' They are doomed to repeat the same mistakes time and time again.

It is not only architects that suffer from this. Building trades also suffer from the same disease and in many ways it can be even more chronic.

It's important to recognise that 'infectious-repitiuous' occurs not because these people don't care, or are unprofessional, it's simply due to a certain level of ignorance (or arrogance). Believe me in the past I've designed tonnes of details that needed a complete redesign in order for them to be buildable. I don't always get it right but I have developed tools and techniques that help to reduce the risk of getting it wrong.

An architect's fees are a fraction of the investment cost for a building project as a whole. Good buildable details save time, money and effort not only during construction but also over the lifetime of the building. Investing in a robust package of construction details is well worth the effort.

So now you have an appreciation about why buildability is important. Here are a number of points that can really help you find the right architect.

**Point #1** - The conceptual stage of a design is where all the excitement and exuberance is. It is one of the most creative and enjoyable parts of a project. This is where thrill-seeking, eye catching

designs first begin to get tabled by an architect. The images that are created can be highly emotive, engaging and compelling.

The design may feature extravagant over hanging roofs, undercroft garages, dormer windows, bay windows and other complex building forms and shapes. Be warned, this is the first opportunity of over look buildability.

**Point #2** - At a later stage, normally when architects are getting paid to develop the construction details, they begin to try to figure out how to address the problems that are now inherent to the design. They can't change things very easily once planning permission has been granted so they simply do the best that they can. As I'm sure that you can appreciate this is not a very good approach when seeking to create a buildable design. This is not to say that it can't be built, it is simply that it is more complex, will cost more to construct and is likely to have higher maintenance costs.

**Point #3** - The more complex the building design, the more construction details are needed to show how the building needs to be constructed. The greater the number of construction details that are needed to explain the design to the contractor then the greater the time and expense that will need to be invested developing and designing these details. In essence, the more complex the design the greater the architects fee.

If an architect underestimates the number of details that will be required then they will either seek to avoid producing all of the relevant details by pushing more risk and liability onto the contractor, or they will incur a financial loss in order to complete the project. As the latter is undesirable they may start to request additional fees or be forced to skimp on other aspects of their service. What the architect often fails to observe is that it is their complex conceptual design that has resulted in the need for the "additional" work.

**Point #4** – Another aspect to consider is how comprehensive the set of design documentation will need to be. The more comprehensive it is, the more it addresses all of the details, the less guesswork will have to take place on site. This goes a long way towards reducing risk, not just for you but for the contractor as well. Please believe me when I say the less risk that the contractor is exposed to the better the value you will get in the end product.

**Point #5** – Don't be caught off guard. Seek an architect that is acutely aware of how their design impacts upon their fees, the construction cost and the lifecycle cost. If you have the budget and want, or are prepared to invest in, a complex building then make this clear from the beginning,



conversely if you have a limited budget then make sure that you explain that you want a simple design.

**Point #6** – Look for an architect that has demonstrated their technical ability. They may have built houses with very high standards of airtightness for instance. This is important because in order to achieve such standards of airtightness they should have a good appreciation about how to create very simple practical construction details.

**Point #7** – Speak to a builder that has worked on one of the architects projects and find out what they think about the architect. Were all the drawings, schedules and specification prepared in adequate detail? How easy did they find the build? Was it easy? Did the documentation that was provided help the job get done right?

### **Mistake #8: Trusting that all architects spend your money wisely**

Imagine that you've not addressed all of the misconceptions and mistakes that I've highlighted before you've selected your architect. How would you feel if, after you've spent all your money and moved into your home, you discovered that there were underlying problems that were not addressed appropriately?

....Perhaps the building is proving to be uncomfortable and expensive to heat or that the expensive heat pump or the solar thermal panels aren't working appropriately; or maybe the inverter on the photovoltaic panels has broken again.

Would you consider that by having spent your money on the cheapest architect that you spent your money wisely? Let's face it, probably not. Would you feel as though your architect has squandered your money by offering poor advice about the building contractor and their workmanship? Most probably.

If you were faced with these problems what would you do? Would you do anything, or would you feel trapped? Would the aggravation of fixing these problems be 'just one of those things,' or would you rather avoid the worry when you have the chance?

You only have one budget. Spend it wisely.

Find an architect that not only has the relevant expertise but also has plenty of experience delivering the kind of home that you desire. This way you benefit from the lessons that they have ALREADY

learned and you don't end up paying another architect for embarking upon an expensive learning curve on your behalf.

For an architect to offer you reliable advice about the cost implications of design decisions then they will need to have adequate skill, experience, knowledge and understanding. Making sure that you select an expert is perhaps the most reliable way of ensuring that you will get the support that you need.

Architects Instructions are used to create a change to the contract documents when a design change or clarification occurs. ~~Personally I aspire to achieving a project with Zero Architects Instructions.~~

~~This approach means plenty of time planning the design.~~ Remember the saying "Failing to plan is planning to fail?" With appropriate planning the number of Architect Instructions can be minimised.

~~In order to build Steel Farm I produced~~ By producing a significant number of drawings and schedules and a very detailed specification. ~~I produced 19 plans, sections and elevations, 8 window and door details, 4 schedules and no less than 64 construction details. Why? In order to reduce~~ risk can be risk, reduced for the client and the contractor. This means that, and to get an a fair and accurate ~~and fair~~ price can be obtained for both parties. These ~~drawings documents will~~ explained everything that the contractor ~~needed~~ needs to know in order to achieve the performance standards that the client had specified. Crucially they will be provided before the contractor is appointed.

~~A~~ In my experience, using this approach, a competent building contractor that ~~had~~ has never build a home to these exemplary standards before ~~the project was can completed~~ complete a project at the agreed price and ~~satisfied~~ satisfy the ~~relevant exemplary~~ performance standards.

~~Only one Architects Instruction was required.~~

## Achieving Your Goals

By now you should have a good impression about those issues you need to pay attention to. But let's take a step back for a moment.

Do you know the really significant thing about your desire to build your own home?

- Not the fact that it will be a good investment
- Nor that it will make better use of space

- Not even whether it will be more comfortable, use less energy, save on the bills and minimise environmental impact

None of these things. They are, after all, of little direct consequence to you right now. The really significant thing at this point in time is your ambition, and the contentment of knowing that, once this project is complete, you'll have satisfied lifetime goal.

Have no doubt about it; making your dream become a reality will be a hugely significant and rewarding achievement. You'll be surprised how much confidence and self-esteem that can result from the process of building your own home.

Wouldn't it offer you a sense of accomplishment?

Just for a moment imagine how that would make you feel. Empowered? Liberated? Secure? Satisfied? I can imagine that I'd feel all of these things; and more no doubt.

Can you picture in your mind's eye watching your home being assembled, piece by piece in front of you. How this understanding of your home will enrich your appreciation and understanding of the house that you live in? Not only that, consider how your quality of life will be enhanced, after successfully working with your architect, because the character of your home and its space planning reflects your needs. Imagine for a moment, the satisfaction, and dare I say the pride, that you will feel by having accomplished the ambition of building your own home. Wouldn't this be one of the most satisfying, enriching and empowering experiences of your life?

Picture your friends coming around and, not for the first time, remarking upon the staircase that gracefully lands itself in the hallway. Imagine how you would feel hearing them enthuse about how characterful your home how is. Think about the family dinners. The joyful commotion at Christmas when presents are opened in front of the Christmas tree. What of the romantic candle lit dinner for two? Can you see it all very clearly?

Please take a moment - - right now - - to pause and write down, or if it suits you better draw, your vision. This very act will help you to clarify what is important to you. This is a really important step.

**What do you see? What's your picture?**

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**Why do you want to build your home?**

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**Are these reasons compelling enough?**

If not what would make it 100% compelling. Write this down also. Being clear on these things will make a huge difference to whether or not you accomplish your goal.

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So, now it's time to question how you're going to take this goal and move it from ambition to reality. How it's going to be achieved and become everything that you just imagined.

To do this you have to be truthful. Perhaps more truthful than you've ever been.

Building your home will be one of the most exciting and rewarding events of your life. It will also be one of the most frustrating, challenging, stressful, and time consuming activities that you will undertake.

Consider how, in those moments of uncertainty and insecurity, you think that you'll accomplish this goal of a lifetime? The way that you'll achieve your goal is by taking action and having the right support. All the ideas, dreams and ambitions come to nothing without knowing what to do and actually doing something about it.

What kind of awareness, skills and understanding do you think that you'll need to achieve your goal? To figure this out you need to be brutally honest with yourself.

Before you can take action to change your life you have to understand your position; you have to do a diagnostic.

Building a home is no different, in this case it's important that you create a schedule of the relevant knowledge and skills that you currently have, and those that you will need to develop, in order for you to achieve the goal of building your own home.

You also need to be dead set upon achieving your goal. You need to be 100% focussed upon your goal with laser like precision. If you are only about 70% clear about your goal then you are far less likely to achieve it; this is simply because any obstacles and distractions that get in your way are much more likely to wear you down.

Because of this you also need to identify the obstacles and distractions that you'll face when you are seeking to achieve your goal, and then you need to create a strategy for reducing them down to zero.

In many cases, despite their pragmatic veneer, if you dig deeper, then you're likely to find that obstacles and distractions ultimately stem from, or are attached to, some kind of emotional context; fear and anxiety being typical examples. Ultimately it's only by understanding these emotions, and developing ways to address them, will you be able to achieve the goal of building your home.

I suggest that you spend 15 minutes chewing these matters over. Spend 5 minutes scheduling your skills and 5 minutes determining your biggest obstacles and distractions and the underlying emotions that they connect with. Then spend another 5 minutes thinking about what you can do to address your worries and concerns.

I suggest that you do it now, whilst you're focussed.

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I find that sometimes, when tasks are large, a little daunting, or they extend over a great length of time I need support from the people around me. Typically this has been with exercise and fitness - - say going to the gym, rowing or football.

You could try teaching yourself by reading extensively and putting the things that you learn into place; though it can mean that you spend years learning through trial and error; each failure and set back wearing down your enthusiasm to achieve your goal. Is this the most useful and effective use of your limited time?

Having a training buddy can help, but this only really works if they are more knowledgeable, more skilled and a good teacher. It's often better to have a professional fitness coach to help keep focussed, improve skills and enable the ultimate goal to be achieved.

The coach, the professional support, can be valuable right from the beginning because it prevents bad habits setting in. Not only can they help you with goal setting and simplifying your life - - by offering focus and helping you to allocate your time - - but they also help you to enhance your lifestyle - - not just for tomorrow - - but for the rest of your life.

Who do you need to become in order for you to accomplish building your home? How do you need to change your life to accomplish your goal? If you are clear about this then you will have both drive and sense excitement. If you don't have those things then you may want to revisit the exercises again.

## **When do I need to hire an architect?**

It often surprises me how late some people leave it before they hire an architect. The best time to start talking to an architect is before you spend any significant money on the project. In particular this means before you buy a plot of land. The earlier that you begin your discussions the greater the opportunity for you to derive the most out of your ambitions without spending your hard earned money in inappropriate ways.

## **What is the RIBA Plan of Work?**

The RIBA Plan of Work is a framework that loosely speaking charts the design process. It was updated in 2013 so that it aligns with industry wide conventions agreed through the Construction Industry Council (CIC).

The RIBA Plan of Work 2013 is broken down into eight work stages that have distinct boundaries, tasks and outputs. For good reason this template, even the customisable version available from the RIBA (<http://www.ribaplanofwork.com>), is highly generic simply because it has to be able to work for all and any type of building project.

The old Plan of Work was often used as a point of reference when developing a fee structure. Unfortunately the recent changes mean that, for domestic projects, the Plan of Work is not divided as neatly (this is because of the generic nature of the Plan of Work and the need for it to accommodate large projects that more commonly use.)

A diligent architect will have adopted this latest framework into their design process, though they may modify it and refine it in order to deliver the appropriate standard of service. For instance I have refined the tasks and outputs of the work stages to reflect the needs of people that are seeking custom homes.

## **When Do I Need To Pay an Architect?**

In order to help you plan your finances, at the initial stages of a project, your architect will provide a proposed schedule of payments. The architect is retained to help address the requirements of the

project and may choose to invoice in a number of ways. The method that is selected should be proposed in the schedule of payments. Also, establish the preferred method of payment, i.e. check, credit card, etc. The timing of a fee payment will often depend upon the way in which the fees and services are structured. Typical examples may include:

1) At key stages – typically paid in one third increments of the total fee during the design stage, one third of the fee at the construction information stage, and the balance during and following construction. Typically fees are paid toward the end of a work package. A more detailed breakdown is provided below.

Key Stages		Typical proportion of total fee
RIBA Plan of Work Stage 0+1:	Strategic Definition + Preparation and Brief	2%
RIBA Plan of Work Stage 2:	Concept Design	13%
RIBA Plan of Work Stage 3:	Developed Design	20%
RIBA Plan of Work Stage 4:	Technical Design	20%
RIBA Plan of Work Stages 5.1:	Construction (Tender phase)	20%
RIBA Plan of Work Stages 5.2 + 6:	Construction + Handover and Close Out	25%
RIBA Plan of Work Stages 7:	In Use	?% +2%

2) Regular payments over a time period. The total fee is divided monthly over the projected duration of the project. (This is the most common method.)

3) Occasionally some architects accept a lump sum fee using an advanced payment method. These may be offered with a discounted fee as a reward for having used the advance payment.

When you first start the design process for your project, it is difficult, if not impossible to accurately determine the final project cost. During this initial time period (before a good estimate of the final project cost is possible) the architect may charge an hourly fee. The hourly fee will be credited towards the total architectural fee once it has been determined.

# Essential Recommendations

I'll now give you five recommendations that will help you to gain focus on your project. You'll also learn seven questions to make sure that the professional you are dealing satisfies some basic criteria. There are also another seven will help you to find the right expertise.

So, how will you achieve your goals? What action will you take to help you ensure that your objectives are achieved? If you're thinking of hiring an architect then I offer these recommendations:

**Recommendation #1:** Make a commitment to yourself to build your own home. The longer you delay the longer that you will be putting up with a lifestyle that does not meet your expectations. Plus the longer that you leave it the longer that you will live in cold, uncomfortable, and possibly damp conditions which means that you will continue to breathe in all the pollens, fungus, chemicals and dust mites.

**Recommendation #2:** List your objectives (refer to "Achieving your goals"). Do you really only want a home make over, which you could do for yourself? Or do you want to live in a well designed, well lit home with excellent standards of comfort, significantly reduced energy bills, and the avoidance of damp, bacteria, fungus, chemicals and dust mites?

**Recommendation #3:** Decide which architectural services that you think you will need in order to complete your project and consider the extent of these services (see misconception #8 points #1 and #2).

Also consider which kind of company you want to work with. Do you want to work with an honest, reputable practice that is committed to doing things properly - - or are you willing to risk working with the company that offers you the lowest price - - knowing that company might not be in business tomorrow and that the standard of service it offers is that much less?

**Recommendation #4:** Ask questions. The way you learn about an architectural practice is to ask specific questions and listen carefully to the answers. Here are the questions that I suggest that you ask:

1. Are you a registered member of the Architects Registration Board (ARB)? And are you a member of any professional institutes such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)?

2. How interested is the architect in your project? Does the architectural practice specialise in your type of project?
3. What does the architect see as important issues or considerations in your project?
4. Who from the architecture firm will you be dealing with? Will it be the same person throughout the process to ensure a consistent follow through of your needs and wishes?
5. How does the architect outline the steps for establishing the brief and scope of the project to suit your budget? What specific measures will they use to help mitigate project risks?
6. How does the architect explain the different stages of the project?
7. What services does the architect provide during construction? How disruptive will it be? How long does the architect expect it to take to complete your project?

**Recommendation #5:** Ask **more** questions so that you can identify and then judge the expertise of the person that you are speaking to. Here are the questions that I suggest that you ask:

1. What evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the homes that you design deliver an excellent standard of comfort?
2. What evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the homes you design will support or enhance my health and well being?
3. What evidence can you provide to demonstrate that your low energy buildings actually perform in practice?
4. What kind of quality assurance process underpins your design process?
5. What qualifications and references can you provide to confirm that you have suitable expertise for this project?
6. How do you approach environmental performance and the specification of building technologies?
7. What will you do during the design and construction process to manage the budget responsibly?
8. Please could you give me the contact details for builders that you have worked with on low energy projects? (This question will enable you to address concerns about buildability.)

**Recommendation #6:** Create a matrix. Once you have found a number of architects, or other home designers, that you consider to be relevant create a matrix that will allow you to compare them equally. As an example I've created a table below that could be suggestive of the kind of matrix that you may develop.

Item	Drafter	Architectural Technologist	Building Surveyor	Certified Passivhaus Designer (CEPH)	Architect (ARB)	Architect (ARB, RIBA)	Mark Siddall, Passivhaus Architect (ARB, RIBA, CEPH)
College Education	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓
University Education	No	Maybe	✓	Maybe	✓	✓	✓
Registered with a Professional/ Accreditation Body	No	Maybe	Maybe	✓	✓	✓	✓
Required to carry Professional Indemnity Insurance	No	No	No	No	✓	✓	✓
Required to undertake Continuing Professional Development	No	Maybe	Maybe	No	Maybe	✓	✓
Trained in architectural design	No	No	No	No	✓	✓	✓
Specialist in residential design	Unlikely	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓
Provides design services	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓	✓	✓
Administration of tender	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓	✓	✓
Administration of contract	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓	✓	✓
Site inspections	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓	✓	✓
Environmentally conscious building specialist	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	✓
Certified Passivhaus Designer	No	No	No	✓	No	No	✓
Expert in building physics	No	No	No	✓	No	No	✓
Expert in thermal comfort	No	No	No	✓	No	No	✓
Expert in advanced construction technology	No	No	No	✓	No	No	✓
Expert in quality assured low energy design	No	No	No	✓	No	No	✓
Undertakes building performance evaluation	No	No	No	No	No	No	✓
Proven expert: Provides training & publishes	No	No	No	No	No	No	✓

**Recommendation #7:** Get it in writing. Once you're satisfied that you've identified an honest, competent professional, invite him or her to your home and ask for a specific quotation in writing. A written quotation gives you the assurance that you know exactly what your job will cost - - no surprises.

According to the RIBA it is critical that a 'letter of agreement' is established at the beginning of a project. This is needed to create terms of reference that protect each party in the event of a dispute. This should be drawn up between you, the client, and the architect and needs to include:

- A description of the project and the services that we are to provide
- A statement regarding the how the fees and expenses will be calculated and paid
- Details relating to any additional consultants that may be required to work on the project
- Information regarding Architects Professional Liability insurance and the period of liability
- An agreement about how disputes, should they arise, will be addressed.

Before you progress too far (before you start RIBA Plan of Work Stage 2: [Concept Design](#)) you should formalise your agreement. The RIBA publishes a standard form of agreement which is suitable for use on your project.

**Recommendation #6:** Create a matrix. Once you have found a number of architects, or other home designers, that you consider to be relevant create a matrix that will allow you to compare them equally. As an example I've created a table below that could be suggestive of the kind of matrix that you may develop.

Here's an example that I've prepared for you:

<b><u>Item</u></b>							
<u>College Education</u>							
<u>University Education</u>							
<u>Registered with a Professional/</u>							

<a href="#">Accreditation Body</a>							
<a href="#">Required to carry Professional Indemnity Insurance</a>							
<a href="#">Required to undertake Continuing Professional Development</a>							
<a href="#">Trained in architectural design</a>							
<a href="#">Specialist in residential design</a>							
<a href="#">Provides design services</a>							
<a href="#">Administration of tender</a>							
<a href="#">Administration of contract</a>							
<a href="#">Site inspections</a>							
<a href="#">Environmentally conscious building specialist</a>							
<a href="#">Certified Passivhaus Designer</a>							
<a href="#">Expert in building physics</a>							
<a href="#">Expert in thermal comfort</a>							
<a href="#">Expert in advanced construction technology</a>							
<a href="#">Expert in quality assured low energy design</a>							
<a href="#">Undertakes building performance evaluation</a>							
<a href="#">Proven expert: Provides training &amp; publishes</a>							

By following these recommendations, you'll gain a lot of the information that you need to make an informed, intelligent decision. If you want a quick, cheap design then many companies in the phone book can help you. Or you can do it yourself.

But if you want to simplify your life, after all it's hectic enough, then don't waste time reinventing the wheel. Work with a **boutique** architectural practice that has specific **expertise** in delivering a healthy, comfortable, usable, low energy home that suits your budget. And if you believe that a **purpose built, evidence based design** process will address **your needs** then I invite you to give me a call or send me an email.



## Here's one last point:

### I guarantee my practices work...

I know that when you're undertaking a large financial commitment, such as getting your own home designed and constructed, you're right to be careful, cautious and far-sighted. For good reason you're uncertain, and sometimes outright sceptical, about the value that any particular architect can deliver to their project. What you want to be able to do is to make an informed, thoughtful and intelligent decision. So in addition to dedicating my practice to consumer education, I do one more thing as well. I guarantee my practices work. As a matter of fact, **add this question to your list** Question #8 **"Do you guarantee your work?"** Not all architects do - - and it's important that you have this information before you make your decision about who to employ.

Here's a list of the guarantees that my practice offers:

**[Guarantee #1] ~~One Page Action Plan~~ Right-Fit Guarantee:** ~~What type of research and planning do you need to do before you get into design? When you're starting out with the ambition of getting a custom home, that is designed and built just for you, developing a plan of action isn't always easy. As exciting as it can be it can also be pretty daunting.~~

~~Getting the finances. Finding land. Acquiring the land. Developing the brief, for the house AND the site. Knowing who to speak to, when to speak to them, and when NOT to speak to them. All these things - and more - are challenges that people face when they decide to set out their stall and get their own home built.~~

~~The One Page Action Plan has been developed to offer low cost support and mentoring that will help you to identify the key 'pressure points' that your project is facing. We then work together to develop an action plan that will enable your project to 'flow' more smoothly.~~

~~The One Page Action Plan tells you what to research before you hire an architect or a builder on a more permanent basis.~~

This 100% money back guarantee means that if, at the end of ~~the~~our first face-to-face meeting, you are not completely satisfied and don't feel it is right for you, then you will be provided a full refund of any Investment, including the deposit and applicable taxes.\*

**[Guarantee #2] Needs and Options Review:** The Needs and Options Review is your first low cost step towards employing an architect. It is such an important step that I will not work with a client that has not been through this process.

By clearly establishing your needs and reviewing your options we are able to minimise risk and increase clarity. We then develop a strategy that will enable you to progress your project, regardless of whether or not I am to assist you in the future.

If at the end of your Needs and Options Review you're not completely satisfied that you have developed a firmer understanding of your project then you'll be provided a full refund including the deposit and applicable taxes.

To find out more about the Needs and Options Review visit [www.leap4it.co.uk/needsandoptions](http://www.leap4it.co.uk/needsandoptions)

~~**[Guarantee #2] Site Visit Right Fit Guarantee:** During the site visit we discuss your site and your needs in detail by using a series of focussed questions. We then develop a strategy that will enable you to progress your project, regardless of whether or not I am to assist you in the future. If at the end of your Site Visit you're not completely satisfied then you'll be provided a full refund including the deposit and applicable taxes.~~

~~**[Guarantee #3] Discovery Package Right Fit Guarantee:** If a doctor gives a prescription without having made a diagnosis beforehand then this would be considered malpractice. As an architect I consider that the Discovery Package works in much the same way. Drilling down into the detail this diagnostic establishes the brief, the constraints and the opportunities. Prior to commencing the work on the Discovery Package we work together to prepare a schedule that will detail the intended outputs of the work. If, at the end of your *first* Discovery Package workshop you're not entirely satisfied, and don't feel that the process is right for you, then you'll be provided a full refund including the deposit and applicable taxes.~~

~~\*To receive a refund, you must meet the following conditions: (1) you must attend your first session and request a refund at the end of the workshop; and (2) you must complete and submit a Refund Request Form to a LEAP team member; and (3) you must be a first time LEAP client. You understand that The Right Fit Guarantee does not extend to clients who have previously attended or are currently attending the LEAP Initiative or to clients who are registered for the LEAP Initiative but have not yet attended their first scheduled workshop.~~

~~**[Guarantee #4] Discovery Package Product Guarantee:** Before starting work on the Discovery Package you will be given an agenda detailing the intended outputs and their benefits. I will complete the things that I've listed and, if you aren't happy with the work, then the document will be amended twice for free.~~

~~**[Guarantee #5] LEAP Product Guarantee:** If, after completing the Discovery Package, you then commission full architectural services from my practice, and you follow my guidance exactly, then I'll guarantee that you will have the most comfortable home that you have ever lived in. This 100% money back guarantee means if you're not positively delighted with the comfort of your new home then my practice will refund every penny that you spend on your first year's space heating bills.~~

What could be more fair?

Why am I so confident that I'm able to offer the guarantees?

**Down below I've listed some feedback from people that live in my projects:**

\*\*\*\*\*

"The passive bungalows are fantastic, I absolutely love my home and have settled in well here."

- Mrs Clish\*

"It's great in the cold weather my new home is cosy and warm and I don't have to worry about heating costs any more as I rarely use it. I really like living here the bungalows are brilliant!"

- Mrs Mugridge\*

"These bungalows are beautiful, we haven't had our heating on yet! My husband was always cold before we came here. It's amazing we were just saying this morning how fortunate we were to be given the chance to live in one of these properties."

- Mrs Rhoda Hughes\*

\* Quotes used courtesy of Gentoo Group

\*\*\*\*\*

**If you like the look of the guarantees that my practice offers, and would like to know more, then please get in touch.**

Thank you very much for taking you time to read this guide. I hope that you found it helpful. If you have questions or comments - - or to find out more about the One Page Action Plan, please call now on **0191-375-7702** or email me at [mark@leap4.it](mailto:mark@leap4.it)

On behalf of the low energy architectural practice known as LEAP - - I thank you for your kind attention.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Siddall', written in a cursive style.

Mark Siddall.

P.S. Don't forget I'm happy to answer your questions - - and provide you with a cost estimate for undertaking a diagnostic exercise - - without any obligation of any kind.

## Further information and guidance

A client's guide to engaging an architect (2009 edition)

[http://www.arbarchitecture.com/pdfs/engaging\\_an\\_architect.pdf](http://www.arbarchitecture.com/pdfs/engaging_an_architect.pdf) (Please note that the 2012 edition may be purchased from the RIBA Book Store)

Finding an Architect, RIBA

<http://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBAProfessionalServices/ClientServices/Findinganarchitect.pdf>

The Fees Bureau <http://www.feesbureau.co.uk/AF.asp>

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