

Home life: How to hire an architect

It's possible to hire an architect for different stages of the building process – you don't need to fork out on someone to oversee the whole project if you are happy to do bits yourself. They can help you with planning permission and building regulations, finding a good builder, overseeing the progress: watching standards and safety on site; organising specialist input and seeing the whole project through to completion. Visit architect-yourhome.com – a brilliant site to inspire, and will provide architects at different stages to suit all budget and projects.

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It is very important to hire an architect you will get on with so ask around friends and locals for any personal recommendations, or visit architecture.com/useanarchitect. The RIBA can provide a list of local architects who are suitable for your project – taking into account the period of the property and whether you are wanting a modern or traditional look. When you've found someone you like, ask them for examples of their recent work, finished projects and references. Remember that a good practice will be busy.

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Before you ask an architect for a meeting or to visit your property, check whether they charge for an initial consultation. Although some architects choose not to make such a charge, they are entitled to. Similarly, before you request a feasibility study or some preliminary design work from an architect, you must first agree on a proper brief and fee for the work.

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Consider what you want from your architectural work and how it will make your life better. Sit down with your architect and work out a plan of what you want to achieve, using pictures and cuttings of the sort of thing you are after. Keep the brief simple, unambiguous and to the point.

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Architect fees are usually based on a percentage of the build, hourly or in lump sums fixed at the different stages. Lump-sum payments avoid the risk of alarming fee increases if the project's cost spiral. Using an architect until completion usually costs between 8 and 12% of the final build, whereas employing someone up until planning permission is more likely two to five per cent.