

What do I want from my designer?

The answer to this question is different for every client, and you need to tell us so we can tailor a package to suit your needs and requirements. We have devised this document to help you understand that the process can differ from one client to the next, or one designer to the next.

If you know exactly what you want, or the project is only minor in nature, we can often quote your job over the phone or email, usually within a few hundred dollars of the finished price. However, most people don't know exactly what they want, and more importantly, don't know how much it will cost, don't know if council will approve it, and / or whether it is physically possible.

These people may need a "Design Consultation" before we can accurately quote their project.

What is a "Design Consultation"?

A design consultation is NOT just a five minute quoting service, and is the single most important step in the design process. Start on the wrong foot, and you will have problems later in the process.

Some jobs can be quoted over the phone or with a five minute discussion, however, what often happens is that through an extensive discussion process, we figure out that what the client first thought they would do is very different to what we end up designing. This makes the initial quote redundant just about every time.

Some common reasons for a change in the scope of works:

- Budget allocation is incompatible.
- Council regulations interfere or prevent.
- Neighbours need to support (sometimes they won't).
- Client has not thought of all options – a better option may exist.
- Realistic resale analysis means over-capitalisation.

The process of having an impartial consulting process before you embark on the design process is crucial. More often than not, you need a professional to advise you on whether the project you want to embark upon is right for you, your property and the surrounding district. Under-budgeting or over-capitalisation may mean that your project is doomed from the start, and what should be the single biggest investment in your family's future can become a financial nightmare!

Engaging a designer or suitable professional to give you site-specific advice, independent of the design process is a great way to understand the limitations of your property, accurately assess budget compliance and most importantly, to have an impartial third party tell you when they think you are "getting it wrong"!

Pre-purchase:

We can even do this before you buy a property, to make sure that your grand plans are able to be carried out. Too many times, we visit home-owners and have to advise them that they have restrictions that prevent them from realising their dreams. Council Character Precincts, flooding, overland flow, small lot restrictions, and the list goes on. Call us before you buy that property, and you might avoid buying a lemon?? (Conditions apply).

How much does a “Design Consultation” cost?

The fees may vary from time to time, but for most clients, the total consultation fee is only \$500.

With a shift into modern technology, we now offer 20-30 min zoom meetings for free, which replaces the old face to face office meeting. This can be done from your property, which adds value for you.

Why should I pay for the “Design Consultation”?

As mentioned above, the process should for most customers be considered as a stand-alone device for determining if you should proceed to the design phase. Most customers do not figure out exactly what their project will entail until they have undertaken this process.

If you are paying for the consultation process, it becomes independent and disconnected from the design and drafting process. This allows the designer to provide independent advice, and sometimes the right advice does not result in getting the job. When you are paying somebody to tell you if your ideas are sound, or your budget is suitable, or the resale value will be preserved, you need this person not to have a vested interest in getting the drafting job to recoup his/her costs of providing a "Free Consultation".

Some designers will appear to offer you a service like this cheaply or for free, but you need to question if their motives are pure, and more importantly, be sure they are giving you enough time to properly conduct the service we offer.

Generally speaking, things that are free are not worth much, or are often designed to lure you in!

There are times when giving impartial advice means we do not get to do the job. Sometimes, the right solution does not involve us, and sometimes, there is a good moral reason why the client should not proceed with their intended project. We take the time in the consultation process to understand the client's needs and motives and then advise what we think is the right way forward for them.

Good honest advice will cost you money, but bad or insufficient advice can cost you a LOT more????

The consultation fee is charged so that we can do some research before we come to site, and we give you up to two hours or our time to properly discuss all of your needs and requirements, and then we give you a document that thoroughly covers all the aspects of the work to be undertaken, costs, risks and fee outcomes to deliver these works? This is truly obligation free, because you have paid for it?

It takes on average 5-6 hours of our time to deliver all of the components of this consultation process from the first phone or email contact until you receive the final contract and package of information. Anybody that is providing a cheap or free consultation will not spend the time to give you this kind of service, and if they do, honestly, they are doing themselves a grave dis-service.

A washing machine repairman charges you a call-out fee, which covers his travel time and half an hour to diagnose your problem, and you have to pay this irrespective of whether he can fix your machine or not? All professionals charge for the services they provide - why not the designer of your home or renovation? Do you value their advice less than your motor mechanic or washing machine repair guy??

Remember, for most people, the family home is the single biggest investment in their lifetime, and if you get it wrong, it can cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars in resale value? **Is it really worth the risk?**

What level of service does East Coast offer their clients?

We have developed a five-tier system for clients to self-diagnose their needs before we start the design process?

We know that each client has different needs, and to properly assess the fees, we need you to tell us what you want from us. There are many designers that limit the services they provide to Level 1 only, so as to reduce the fees they quote up front, which in the long run may not result in a saving, and if it does, often produces a less than satisfactory result or outcome?

In order to compete in the marketplace, we offer this level of service, but we also offer a lot more options to suit the individual client, and can adapt from one to the next if needed along the way?

FIVE LEVELS OF SERVICES:

Level 1:

Level 1 applies to projects that require basic drafting only.

Many designers and sole-operators only provide “Level 1” to their customers, and their quoted pricing probably reflects this outcome. Maybe this is all you need; in which case, we can accommodate your needs, even though we don’t recommend this option very often.

Maybe you have drawn your sketch plan already, or maybe you just know exactly what you want, and nothing is going to change your mind? Typically this level can be quoted over the phone or email as mentioned. All you need to do is send a scan or phone photo of your sketch and a brief description of what you need drawn.

Level 1 includes no design input, no advice, and nobody telling you what you might want – just pure drafting of the project you have in mind? We will not assess your budget and will not pass judgement on whether you can afford your project, or whether it represents an over-capitalisation of the property value?

When I say basic drafting, it is important to distinguish a good basic set of plans that covers all of the aspects of the project, from a set that contains the bare minimum. Building certifiers will often assume that builders know certain things, which means they will allow less detailed plans to be approved, even though they clearly do not conform to industry standards (AS1100.301-2008). We always make sure our drawings are fully detailed, as this helps to reduce disputes and corner-cutting during the building process.

If you have a cheaper quote, ask them if their drawings comply with the “Building Designer’s Assoc” – “Minimum Standards” or specific Australian Standards (AS1100.301-2008), and whether their professional Indemnity Insurers (if they are insured at all) provide extra cover to match? For more information go to www.bdaq.com.au and ask our industry association how many complaints are driven by cheap and under-documented plans, and why the QBCC can’t help you if you have a dispute?

Not sure if Level 1 is enough for your needs?

You can engage us for a “Design Consultation” and allow us to work through the issues, problems and options, and from there decide if you want level 1 or something more?

The choice is always yours?

Level 2:

Level 2 applies to projects that require design input.

Level 2 must include a “Design Consultation” which is explained above, as this process is critical to the provision of timely and accurate advice about your project’s needs and outcomes?

Most projects can benefit from a proper design assessment. With over 30 years of local experience, our designer can sit down with you and properly assess your needs, work out the best outcomes for your property, advise on local demographics, current and future trends, advise on budget outcomes and a whole range of other important impacts on your project?

In this process, the designer and client become partners in making sure that the best possible outcome is achieved for the project, and while the client always drives their own project, the designer plays a role in ensuring that the project runs smoothly and freely.

As mentioned in the “Design Consultation” process above, it is important to realise that this process can sometimes reveal that the project should not proceed. A good designer will give you this advice even if it means not getting the job. We believe that if you are paying us for advice, we should be honest enough to tell you if your decisions are silly or if your budget is insufficient for the project you intend to undertake.

Level 3:

Coordinate Consultants & Approvals. This is the most common level of service we are asked to provide. This level encompasses levels 1 & 2, plus we coordinate the approval processes and coordinate the consultants necessary to facilitate your project. Organising engineers, surveyors, council relaxations, development approvals, building permits, compliance assessments, etc can be a very time-consuming process, and most people do not know where to start, or simply don’t have the time. It is important to the smooth flow of your project that these things occur in a timely and efficient manner, and if one is missed, it can affect the whole project.

Just as important is the need to understand the information that these consultants provide, or the necessary steps in the approval processes. If you don’t know what you are doing, you can find yourself with an incompatible approval, or conditions that don’t match your approval, or engineering that contradicts the design intent in the first place?

With this process comes the responsibility of assessing impacts relating to council planning schemes and social impacts, such as waterways, flooding, overland flows, heritage and character protections, small lot regulations and many others? These impacts alone can render a project unviable, even before it starts?

Some builders will provide some of these services, such as engineering and building approvals within their construction quotes. The risk with this practice is that you become locked into that builder or that the chosen consultant will design the absolute cheapest outcome, which might result in a less than satisfactory aesthetic outcome or a structure that does not perform to current social expectations (structures might sway or bounce more than expected)?

If we are involved in this process, we can help to ensure that the outcome will meet your expectations, and of course advise you on the options, so you can make informed decisions. (You may choose a bouncy deck to get a cheaper outcome)?

Level 4:

Interior Design and Landscape design coordination. Every client can benefit from professional help with colours, finishes, fixtures and design of bathrooms, kitchens, etc? We choose to outsource this aspect to professionals that are dedicated to their clients, which ensures that you get the very best service. Some designer's incorporate this into their service, which is great, but often not the best way to achieve the outcome you want.

We have a team of talented designers, though we can work with your chosen supplier as well if required.

This process allows you to pull a bunch of what can sometimes be random ideas together in a way that allows each one to make a statement without clashing against each other? Some people can successfully do this themselves, and some builders have in-house people to help, but all too often the process ends in disaster? By using an Interior Designer or Landscape Architect in the team, we can further reduce the risk associated with a less than satisfactory finish, and further reduce the risks of disputes in the building contract process.

Interior designers have the skills to make substitutions to maintain budget adherence, they know where the specials are, and how to contact wholesalers to get bargains for your tradespersons, and often save more than their fees in the final construction process.

The most important reason is resale value, which is so often overlooked. Let's face it, we move on average every 7 years, so why build something that does not provide the best possible return on investment? Subtle things can make a huge difference to liveability and resale attitudes.

Level 5:

Level 5 must include all 4 levels above.

Contract administration. This process is fraught with peril, and so many people go down this path alone and either get hit with a pile of additional costs or end up with a finished product that is less than desirable. There are a lot of scrupulous builders that will take your money and give you a sub-standard product. More often than not, the QBCC can't help you because the contract that you signed was not complete, or simply did not cover these extras or specify quality. HIA and QMBA contracts are good, but in general they are geared to protect the builder not the customer? This means you need to find a builder that you trust???

We don't do open tenders, and nor do we get involved in the management of the project, because this is the responsibility of the builder under his QBCC license. What we do is make sure that the plans and documents cover a lot more than the bare minimum. Extra detailing reduces the possibility of arguments over extras and clears up what the finished product should look like, leading to fewer post-construction disputes?

We can help you by providing a direct referral to one of our pre-selected builders, with whom we have built up a repour and trust over time. By using one of our builders, we can limit the risks of having a poor outcome and unnecessary disputes through the building process.

We also get to be involved in the intro process so that the builder can ask questions about why we did certain things, or why the outcome is what they see? There are always reasons, and most builders don't even bother to ask, but just as importantly, the client often does not know all of the reasons themselves?

If you already have a builder, it is worthwhile having a meeting early in the design process, so that the construction techniques of your selected builder are reflected in the drawings. Some builders have different ways of doing things, but all builders can benefit from discussing the proposed outcome with the designer before he prepares a full and final contract for the works.

Following on, we can get involved in site-based meetings during the building process, however when the drawings are complete and the builder is trusted, this is rarely needed or justified? Interstate and overseas based clients will require a man on the ground, though again, this does not require a full project manager role, as the builder is already being paid to do this role, and if properly documented, there should be little chance of errors?

Do I need an Architect?

Building Designers, while being a much younger profession, are now considered as a “Parallel Profession” to Architects. Licensed under the QBCC Act instead of the Architects Act, means that you get the same level of protection through the Queensland Building Construction Commission (QBCC) as you would if a builder or any other tradesperson does not perform his/her duties correctly. In general, building designers can do all the same things as Architects, though most building designers choose to limit their services or area of specialty.

Traditionally Architects (most still do) want to manage your project through a “Full Service” approach, from the initial design through to the management of the construction process. Most people and most projects can’t afford the additional costs imposed by construction management on top of the builder’s costs (which also include site and trade management costs).

Statistics show that more than 80% of residential projects are now designed by Building Designers, and this is growing rapidly. “Architect Designed” may have had a higher community status in the past, but it is important to realise that Building Designers can be just as capable, and in many cases will save you money?

Pick up any magazine or look through the award winners on the www.bdaq.com.au award galleries, and you will quickly realise that Architects are not your only choice for quality design outcomes in the 21st century.

Conclusion:

Most designers provide level 1 very efficiently, and some do a little of level 2 & 3 well, but very few provide all five levels with the flexibility to allow the client to be involved and remain in control through the whole process?

If you are trying to compare our quality services against one of the cheap drafting companies, please keep the following in mind. These companies employ inexperienced or recently graduated workers. They will barely be licensed and in most cases, won’t carry any level of professional indemnity insurance. Before you go this way, as questions about experience and make sure they are licensed and insured.

East Coast Building Design has forged a highly regarded reputation around Brisbane over the past 30 years or so, and intends to remain in the industry for many, many years to come. We hold professional Indemnity to the limit of \$2 million dollars, and because we are “Chartered Members” of the BDAQ, we are required to undertake Compulsory Professional Development (CPD) to maintain a high level of education and knowledge.

If you are looking for quality drawings and documents, at a reasonable price, which will help to reduce the risk of disputes, clarify contract inclusions and help with future resale values of your property, then please contact us for a chat.

Quote: The bitterness of poor quality remains long after low pricing is forgotten!

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