



HOW TO PREPARE FOR *YOUR* DESIGN PROJECT

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How to create a design brief before engaging a designer

Renovating a house can and should be exciting. However, too often we hear stories of clients not having their needs heard, and misunderstandings between the contractor, the client and the designer on the agreed scope of the project.

I have decided to do something about it.

It all comes down to the brief

What would you think of a doctor who gave a prognosis without a diagnosis? It would be a little peculiar to say the least, if not downright dangerous!

Just as a doctor makes an extensive diagnosis to pinpoint the correct remedy for an ailment, your *design brief* (the diagnosis in our example) will help your designer know what problems he or she is trying to solve. This will result in a better project for you, and a better investment for your money.

A good working relationship with your designer is based on open, honest communication. This starts with a good brief that helps your designer understand your expectations, preferences, wants, needs, aspirations and lifestyle. If the brief is not clear, you are planting the seeds of problems down the line.

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This document will help you prepare a thorough design brief to ensure your project's success.

At the end of this guide are two worksheets that you can use as a guide to create your personal design brief.

Right then, let's get started...

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Your Site

Study your chosen parcel of land and get a real feel for it. Where is the sun in the summer and winter? Are there beautiful views that should be taken into account in the design of your project? Are there views that should be excluded? Where are the surrounding houses, other buildings and trees you may or may not want to see? Which parts of the site (parcel) are most noisy or least noisy? Does the site slope? Collect the information you have concerning your parcel into a folder that you can share with your project designer (legal paperwork/covenants, existing plans or previous site information).

Spaces

Indoor

A *good* design will enhance your daily life. Catalogue your family's current and future needs. Map out your daily routine. How many people live in the house? How old are they? Who does what, where? Don't forget your children's rapidly changing needs! Do you want to separate family members, functions and/or pets into different zones? Consider the number of floors, rooms and other spaces and describe their use. Make a list of who needs rooms to sleep, work and relax in. Where do you cook and eat? Is the kitchen a central gathering place? Is your lifestyle formal, casual, relaxed or active?

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Do you need spaces to entertain at home – indoor and outdoor? What type of home entertainment do you want to include e.g. music, television, projector or areas for storage of equipment? List any special requirements you have, for example age-friendly design, extra storage areas, garage loft space, built in furniture or shelving, lifts, or a home office. What method of heating do you want? What do other family members think about and want from the project? Detail you indoor project needs in the brief.

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Outdoor

What do you want to do outdoors? Entertain? Relax? Play? Swim? Supervise children? Grow enough vegetables to be self-sufficient? Do you want a high or low maintenance scheme? What features are important to you? Think about the indoor/outdoor flow of spaces, where the morning sun falls, where your site is exposed to or sheltered from the wind. Do you want an exterior fireplace or entertaining space? Think of your external areas as outdoor rooms, and consider privacy and the connections between spaces. Listing your requirements (perhaps using our List of Rooms and Spaces template) will help both you and your designer quickly understand your priorities.

Design Mood and Feeling

This is important. This is your home, where your children and other loved ones are, where they're going to grow up and where you build your family memories. Think about the 'feel' of your project: do you want it to be bold, low-key, industrial, traditional, minimalist, contemporary or organic? Think about your feelings - yes really! For example, what is your favorite time of day? Do you worry about shutting the curtains to protect the furniture from the sun, or do you like to enjoy coffee on the terrace? Is curling up with a good book your favorite hobby, or is it taking the dog for a walk no matter what the weather? Describe spaces, design features and styles that appeal to you and those that don't. Create a 'mood board' or scrapbook

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of fabric swatches, photographs, magazine clippings and anything else that can help your designer understand who you are, how you live and what you want from your project. Use web-based photo sites to assemble and share your ideas.

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The Details

List major appliances you already own or are considering buying and any preferences you have about where you want to put them. Do you really want that American fridge next to your double steam oven? Do you have lots of gadgets that need sockets in your island unit? Is your washing machine on 24/7 and do you want the drying and ironing space right next to it? These details can make a big difference in the way your kitchen and utility space is planned. Note major pieces of furniture or artwork you want to showcase so your designer can provide spaces and sockets for them in the new plans. Better to include it in your planning from day one, than to move in and wonder where you are going to hang your Picasso.

Sketching

Sketch out your thoughts, but don't get too wedded to them. If the work involves altering an existing house you'll be constrained by existing structures and services and if it's a historically listed building, there will be limitations on what you can change. If it's a new house, let your imagination flow, but be prepared for your designer to suggest other approaches. That is, after all, why you are hiring one!

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Materials

List materials you like and dislike (inside and out), but be aware that your budget will be a determining factor in your final choice. Do you have any specific wall, ceiling and floor finishes in mind? Do you like stucco, wood cladding and concrete elevations? Stone, slate, rubber, glass, steel, aluminum... the list is endless. Wood windows or aluminum? Much will depend on the style of building, but there are choices to be made that will determine how much you spend upfront, and how much you spend on maintenance in the longer term.

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

Regulation and rising energy costs are making sustainable 'green' design an essential consideration rather than a 'nice to have'. There are now minimum requirements enforced by local and national government. Your designer will know all about these and will discuss with you how to make your project energy efficient and sustainable. There are lots of renewable energy solutions - solar panels, ground source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting to name but a few. Although these add costs upfront, they can save you money in the longer-term. Much will depend on your budget and how long you plan to live in the building after the work has been done.

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Timetable

Think about and share with your designer key target dates that are important to you. When do you want to start and finish the project? Bear in mind that, as a rule of thumb, it takes at least 4-6 months to agree on a design, obtain planning permission, and prepare construction drawings before building work can commence. You are less likely to be disappointed if you allow at least 6-12 months for work on existing buildings and about 18 months for new buildings.

Budget

Lastly, have a conversation with yourself – dig deep to determine why you want what you want. This will give you the opportunity to work your brief into more detail. Include the emotional aspects, as this is the overriding reasoning behind what you want to change about your house. Use the checklists provided below to help you get a deeper understanding of what you want and why you want it.

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I want to renovate my house, why?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

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The nuts and bolts

Having listed the 'whys', we have dealt with the big elephant in the room. Now it is time to dwell on the nuts and bolts. The following is a series of questions that will further elaborate on your emotional brief.

Who will live in your home now and in the future?

What different new activities will you need to accommodate?

How do you want your home to fit with the existing environment?

Are there any health and safety issues you need to take account of?

What would you really like to live in?

What do you want your home interior to look like?

What colors will it have?

What facilities for cooling and heating do you want?

Do you want to install or upgrade existing security and/or audio systems?

Do you want a total makeover or a staged process?

What is your budget?

Does your budget allow for unexpected contingencies and other design related fees?

What level of involvement do you want in the management of your project?

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Still have questions?

I'm sure you have many more unanswered questions about the specifics of your design project. As my gift to you, you can call me at **(816) 525-3506** to schedule a 20 minute session to discuss any additional questions you may have about your project. I look forward to speaking with you further.

Sincerely Yours,

Sherri Weaver

Sherri L. Weaver, AIBD, CPBD, CAPS, CGP

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