

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR BUILDING PROJECT A SUCCESS:

### THE 7 BUILDING BLOCKS YOU NEED TO GET IT RIGHT



A building project is a daunting prospect for many (future) homeowners and it's hard to know where to start. We have listened to and advised many homeowners over the past years and we've come up with this list of 'Building Blocks' which will help get you started thinking about your project, get excited and take action.

#### **BUILDING BLOCK 1 - Starting out - How do I (want to) live?**

To get you started drawing up a brief think about what it is that you want from your project and how that would improve your lifestyle. We are all individuals with different needs, however we have found that there is a basic 'wish list' that is almost universal to all our clients and the way we all live right now:

- A generous gathering space for family, entertaining etc.;
- Separate utility facility (washing, drying) out of sight and earshot of entertaining space;
- Lots and lots of storage everywhere;
- A dedicated place to use your pc / laptop / tablet on an 'ad hoc' basis and for longer, with all the associated services needed for this, eg docking station, phone charging etc;
- And more storage...

And beyond that, what is your personal wish list? How about that observatory on top of your house or the roof that opens up to the sky? Share it with an architect and they will show you how it can be done...



before



after

### **BUILDING BLOCK 2: Budget and Timing – getting real**

Many people don't know where to start when estimating the budget that they may need for their project. Asking friends and neighbours can be a good starting point but beware: Whatever people may tell you should be taken with a pinch of salt. Most people are unlikely to give you a true picture of how much they have spent on their project.

Asking a good builder is a better way of getting a realistic figure but do make sure that you understand what the builder has actually priced. It is in their interest to give you as low a figure as possible. Do ask questions such as: Does this include the large glass doors that I have imagined and please show me a photo of exactly what I will be getting? Will you make my house be more comfortable and more energy efficient? Does your price include any fittings and finishes? And what about VAT?

At TURN we can give you an indication of your likely budget from the outset and we usually obtain prices from a number of good contractors shortly after the early feasibility stage of our clients' projects. This ensures a good degree of cost certainty for our clients BEFORE money is spent on fees for detailing the project.

### **BUILDING BLOCK 3: Adding Value - Good design pays off**

Everyone should live in a home that enhances their wellbeing. Good design is a simple, clean-lined, well-lit, well-ventilated and well-serviced space, which can be inhabited with ease and joy and which encourages communication and harmony. Good design is the result of a process of the 'end user' communicating their needs and aspirations and the architect responding with solutions and feeding in their expertise.

For most people their house is their single largest asset – something that should be looked after, maintained and treated with care. An architect can add value for you in many ways, not only in a financial sense but also in making your home comfortable and a joy to use.



#### **BUILDING BLOCK 4: Taking the Statutory Hurdles**

##### **- Planning**

Dealing with your Local Authority can be tricky and what you want from them in the end is the written stamp of approval for your project. With planning guidance and regulation constantly changing it can be difficult to know what you can and cannot do. It is a good idea to make an appointment to speak to the Duty Planner at your Local Council as a starting point. But beware: The Local Authority will not be held accountable for their verbal advice – in the end the only thing that is binding is the written approval of your Planning Application or Application for Certificate of Lawfulness.

Often there can be room for negotiation with your Planning Department but this requires a great amount of dedication on your part, replacing drawings in the nick of time as well as chasing Planning Officers, sometimes on an almost daily basis (and more often than not they will not return your calls). At TURN we closely monitor and manage the planning process. We deal with many of the inner London Boroughs on a regular basis and our track record is excellent- we have never been refused Planning!

##### **- Party Walls**

Most of us live in close proximity to our neighbours and many houses have shared walls and foundations to one or both sides. When you are building a new house or extending or remodelling an existing one it is more than likely that your neighbours are affected by the works in some way or other. The Party Wall etc. Act, which was passed in 1996, regulates and prescribes the procedures that apply to reach agreement with your neighbours. Your neighbours cannot stop you but you must ensure that both parties are protected and covered for any potential damage – and that you agree as to where a new wall sits in relation to the boundary.

A party wall surveyor should be engaged to advise you and handle all party wall matters on your behalf. With this type of consultant - as with every other one- there are good ones and ...not so

good ones. At TURN we work with a small list of excellent consultants, many of whom we have been working with for years. We can recommend them with a good conscience as we know they can be trusted to look after our clients' interests.

#### - **Building Control**

Your works must comply with current Building Regulations, even on small projects. There are different ways of obtaining approval. We would always recommend a 'full plans' application for Building Control approval. This minimises the risk of changes you may have to undertake at the last minute and provides your builder with much clearer guidance. However if you rely only on your builder to deal with Building Control on your behalf do make sure that you obtain all certificates from him before he moves off site, particularly the Certificate of Completion, which shows that your works are 'in order' and which you may need for future reference.

Building Control applications is part of our service at TURN. We submit Full Plans applications on our clients' behalf and see them through to approval.

#### **BUILDING BLOCK 5: Finding the right builder at the right price**

'You get what you pay for' is true also for building projects. For all of us, and time and time again, it is very tempting to believe that the cheapest builder will do a great job for you on time and on budget. However in reality more often than not this is not the case. When making your decision which builder to use, make sure that you have checked their references and, ideally, seen one or two of their recent jobs 'in the flesh'. Insist that they provide you with answers to all your questions and that you fully understand them so you can be sure that you know what you are getting. Don't be afraid to question them or ask them to clarify what you haven't understood.

An architect will vet builders for you, obtain tenders and ask the right questions. They will ensure that your end result 'does what it says on the tin' and will not let your builders get away with short cuts (which they all love!).

#### **BUILDING BLOCK 6: Futureproofing your home**

It is worth considering energy efficiency improvements to your home from the outset of your project – apart from those that you may need to make to comply with Building Regulations in any case. Energy prices only have one way to go, which is UP, and making an investment at the right time might pay off much quicker than you might think – and imagine the comfort of living in a warm, draught-free home that is cheap to heat!

Before considering technology you may want to look at the 'envelope' of your house, ie walls, floors, roof, windows. Improving this in the first instance is most effective way of saving money and resources. An architect can advise you on what options are available for your improvements and how to include them in your project in a cost-effective way.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 7: Having a Contract in place**

For your protection and any comeback that you may have in the future we strongly recommend that you have a written contract in place with your builder. This means you are protected financially and legally and you have 'come back' when there are problems further down the line, ie if your roof starts leaking in the first winter.

NEVER pay a builder up front for any works. If your builder asks for an advance payment for materials you must be sure that you can absolutely trust this company. If in doubt do check their company history, you can do this on line. If you engage an architect to administer the contract for you they will release payment on an agreed basis (usually monthly) based on works carried out and materials on site. They will also hold back funds in form of a 'retention', which is only released after expiry of an agreed period of time following completion, when it is proven that everything is in working order, and that all defects have been repaired.

## **WHY HIRE AN ARCHITECT?**

We hope that this document is helpful to get you started thinking and to get you excited about your project that you are about to embark on. Please call or e-mail if you'd like to arrange for free half-hour consultation to talk about your project.

..Or to say it in Kevin McCloud's words: *"Expert help needn't be impossibly expensive. Everyone deserves and needs to work with talented individuals. If you go to a good architect your fees will pay for themselves."*

**TURN Architects llp** was established in 2006 by architects Gozi Wamuo and Andrea Jung, who met working together at KPF back in 1996. Both partners bring a wealth of experience from a diverse range of projects to the practice, including large and small scale commercial (office and retail), private residential and social housing, a zero carbon house, childcare, educational and community projects.

### **Gozi Wamuo**

Has been a chartered architect since 1991. She has worked in a diverse and interesting range of practices including Rivington Street Studio, Matrix and KPF before setting up TURN.

### **Andrea Jung**

Moved to London in 1996 after completing her diploma in Germany and working as an architect in Berlin for a few years. She has been a chartered architect since 2001 and was an associate director at KPF until 2006.

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