

Advice, Tips and General Opinions

Free Home Extension Advice

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to avail yourself of this information.

I assume that if you have made the effort to get here then you are reasonably serious about the possibilities of extending or adding to your home.

Below are some tips, food for thought and otherwise general opinions that I believe will assist you in moving forward.

The following 'tips' are, for the most part, my personal opinions based upon my early years as a carpenter, through the formative years being employed by the then premier extension builder of the day, to co-founding and running the very successful and arguably best Extension Company around, Extensions Unlimited.

Let me say from the very start that I am constantly amazed at the perplexing state some companies leave their Clients in (or potential clients). Unclear paperwork, pushing inappropriate work onto the Clients, inflexibility of design, product fittings or suppliers, high pressure selling techniques, exorbitant 'deposits', unrealistic prime costed items, etc.

The combinations of these factors causes nothing but anxiety for the Client and a bad experience.

This should be the opposite.

It is our strong opinion this should be an exciting experience for the whole family.

Children will remember the experience forever and for the parents, well, this is a HUGE commitment to your family and future for, I imagine, quite a few years.

It is one of the most expensive decisions you will probably make outside buying the house itself.

And it should not be overly stressful.

A specialist Extension company and builder should be able to provide you with easy to understand steps, clear and easy to read documentation, set clear expectation parameters, give great advice and have the ability to 'listen'.



So... Where to start?

First and foremost I believe that you need to have fully explored and dismissed the alternative of selling up and moving.

Having this alternative lingering will not allow you to commit to the alternative of investing in your own home.

An old but effective way to do this is by simply doing a good points / bad points breakdown.

Include things like neighbours, friends, family, activities, schools, entertainment, transport etc... and not only in the 'now'!

Consider the needs in 10 years time when kids are older.

If considering moving then you need to do a rough cost analysis on stamp duty, agents fees, moving fees and any other expenses that seem to go everywhere except directly into your home as re-investment. This money simply 'disappears'.

Also consider whether the new premises will give you everything you will need without needing to spend more. And if so how much more?

Are you committed to doing something and stay in your existing home if it is able to be transformed into the home you need and want it to be?

Have you spoken to your bank about the maximum borrowing available and the maximum you are prepared to spend or commit too?

Have you had family discussions about this and are you ready to make these exciting decisions?

Many of these first steps are crucial because it sets some subtle things in place... Foremost it sets a tone of commitment within the family to move forward unitedly and with purpose.

It also has a positive energy because it has become a team / family decision which should be exciting.

So... once a decision has been made the next logical step is to find someone to listen to your wants', needs and desires, understand what you are trying to achieve and work through it to find a balanced solution.

This is not easy, and some good advice here is crucial.



For the average family, which is the very heart of the market for my particular Company, I suggest that you avoid Architects and drafts-people.

Why?

In my experience, time and again, we get families bringing in architecturally drawn plans only to discover that the cost is twice what they believe they told the drafts-person what their budget was... it happens all the time and they waste thousands of dollars on lovely plans that they cannot afford to ever build!

How does this happen? Architects often lack costing skills (in the extension area particularly), structural consequences, access issues, etc. I find that they appear predominantly interested in the aesthetic only.

The problem is also compounded by the Client themselves. For example, if someone asked for your 'wish list' then it is natural to do exactly that! and tell the architect / drafts-person all the wonderful things you want.

Remember that at the end of the day the architect / drafts-person will have your money well before you ever get it formally costed.

I suppose that if I were explaining to a car sales person the exact car I would like I am sure he would present me with something akin to a Ferrari... I would very quickly realize that the car I want is way too expensive.

My advice then is as follows:

I strongly believe you need to find someone who knows the industry, who specializes in the industry. Someone who's experience envelops design, structural and costing. Extensions are unlike new homes in many ways.

For example Extensions Unlimited as a Company and its employees are well adapted to working in people's homes whilst the Client remains in the home, which is the most common scenario.

All the trades need to be highly respectful of your family, your belongings, your property, your safety, your comfort and your neighbours during the building process.

These are the things that non specialized builders do not have engrained within their culture and it can all end very badly in those cases.

It's very important to get the right working relationship with the Builder as well.

The builder needs to have the ability to actually listen to you so that they can in turn decipher those things that are paramount to you and deliver a concept or design that can marry your fundamental requirements within a budget with possible options for some peripheral 'wish list' items.

Specifications should not only be concise, easy to read and understand, they need to contain what's NOT included as well as what IS.

This is very important as these 'omitted' items are all going to be part of the 'total' build and need to be considered fully i.e. carpets, etc.

So... How do you find such people?

Recommendation of course is always good. Look for signs, site signs, cars on the road, visibility.

Web sites can offer a good initial introduction but unfortunately a one man band can look like an empire on the internet so a little further probing should ensue.

Longevity may also play a part.

But nothing beats a bit of old fashioned leg work or 'due diligence'.

Invite a number of builders around for a quick initial chat and see if you are able to work with them.

Are they experienced extension designers or just 'faces' of a builder trying to lure you back to the office to be 'groomed' by hard sell's.

A good, well established builder should also have completed hundreds of extensions they are proud to show you, so perhaps even ask to see a couple of second storeys in your area before you even book a designer to come out. (I say second storey because if driving past it is very hard to see a ground floor rear extension even if you aren't after a second storey yourself)

Our own successful model, after being asked by a potential Client to visit them is as follows and is of course, in my opinion, the advisable way to approach this stage.

An initial meeting should establish, from the Clients point of view, the ability and confidence to work with the Designer. An opportunity to establish the Designers background and dig deeper into the background of the Company itself, who's behind it, and what they stand for.

If the proposal is reasonably straight forward or familiar to the designer they should be able to give a rough but educated ballpark cost range at the initial meeting.

Of course at this point you should be able to be upfront and honest with both the designer and yourselves to indicate whether or not this cost is within the 'realms' of possibility from a financial point of view or whether the process needs to abruptly end so as not to waste either parties valuable time.

Assuming that the ballpark figure and overall end to end total cost one within the clients budget then the next stage would be to enter into our formal design development stage to partner with your designer to create a design, specification & fixed price quote. Again, assuming that the final fixed price quote remains within the budgets expectations the next step is to enter the 'preliminary works' agreement with allows for all the mandatory pre-contract items to be addressed like soil reports, energy reports, engineering, council, planning feedback and contract and permit preparation. And this is the point that should be really exciting. Because if all parties have strived to be open, diligent and clear then getting to the stage of signing up for such a big change should be nothing less than exciting. For us too as the builder because we will get yet another opportunity to have a Client say great things about us and keep the cycle going.



So please do not hesitate to call or go to our website to arrange for more information or a visit.

Yours sincerely



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