The Design Brief

by Greg Adsett

How do you get the design you want? The perfect building you envision in your head? … The design brief is the answer.

Whether you are an architect or a client, an effective design brief is the single most critical factor in ensuring that a project is successful.

The purpose of this article is to help you understand what is required to include in a design brief. This document will be both beneficial to you the client and to the architect.

The design brief is your guiding document from the start to the finish of the project. The design brief will initially be a small outline of the key project criteria. It is the foundation of the project. As the project continues the design brief will expand to capture the additional detail that is required to allow the design team to make decisions.

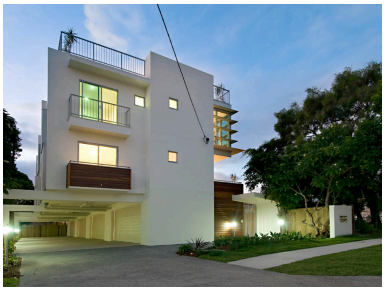
What Is A Design Brief?

First off, you may want to know what a design brief is. A good brief will empower all members of the design team to deliver a project quite literally beyond your comprehension.

The design brief also allows you (the client) to focus on exactly what you want to achieve before any work starts on the project.

A good design brief will ensure that you get a high quality design that meets your needs, providing you have chosen the right architect.

A through and articulate design brief is a vital part of the design process. It anchors a project and services as an essential point of reference for all parties throughout the design and implementation process. It is the tool that best delivers the project as outlined, on time and on budget.



A design brief should address the 3 categories of architectural style, level of finish and extent of landscaping. Your architect will benefit from understanding your vision. For example do you want to maximize outdoor living? Will the project have a swimming pool? What is the intended level of finish? – Low, medium or high?

What is required to be included in an Effective Design Brief?

If you answer these questions below in an ordered and detailed fashion, your design brief will be 90% done… the other 10% will come from further questions from the architect.

Where is the project site? What are the site parameters?

Provide a site summary

- Address
- Real Property Description
- Lot size
- Zoning
- Planning constraints

What are the contract parameters?

- Due Diligence Date
- Unconditional Date
- Settlement Date

What are the goals?

- What is the vision of your development company?
- Will you differ from your competition? If yes, how will you differ?
- What are your timeframes?
- What is your target sale price?
- What is your building budget?
- What is your expect project return?
- What is your intended Procurement (construction contract) method?

Who is the target market?

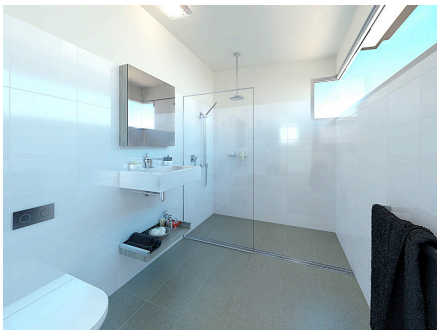
What are your target market's demographics? ie. the age, income, tastes, views, attitudes, lifestyle of those you want to sell to.

Form

Form addresses the style of the development. What size is the design going to be?

- Quality of the development – low, medium or high finish?
- External character - Is it going a contemporary style, beachside style etc?
- Is it going to be brightly coloured or have muted palates?
- What types of external and internal materials are going to be used?
- Do you wish to include any wow features?
- Internal finishes?

It is important to remember that you do not need and should avoid, making actual design decisions and selections. Leave that to your architect because they have the knowledge and access to products which are simply not available to you. By all means show your architect photo examples of what you like or examples of what you consider to be effective or relevant design even if it is from your main competitors. This will set a benchmark for your designer. Then let them design the spaces and suggest the selections in keeping with your style.



Function

Function addresses the actual functional requirements of the project.

- Type of development – townhouses, apartment etc?
- Density of development ie how many dwellings?
- Inclusions in each dwelling type?

    - Number and size of bedrooms
    - Number and of size bathrooms
    - Robe types to each bedroom
    - Laundry type ie room or cupboard
    - Inclusions in kitchen
    - Open plan living?
    - Size and number of balconies
    - Storage requirements

- Number of storeys?
- Basement or above ground car parking?
- Location of front entry?
- Extent of inclusion of solar passive design?

What Is the Project Budget?

You only have so much money you can spend so you need to get an idea of what is achievable for your budget.

Providing a budget prevents designers wasting valuable time and resources when trying to maximise your budget.

A realistic assessment of what is achievable from inception will contribute to a successful and stress free outcome.

What is the time scale / deadline?

Give the designer a detailed schedule of the project and set a realistic deadline for all stages of the development project. You should take into account the various stages of the design project such as consultation, settlement, concept development, DA approvals, BA documentation, tender period etc.

Intended Procurement Method?

Procurement describes the merging of activities undertaken by the client to obtain a building. There are many different methods of construction procurement.

1. Traditional (Tender)
2. Design and Construct
3. Construction Management

There is also a growing number of new forms of procurement that involve relationship contracting where the emphasis is on a co-operative relationship between the principal and contractor and other stakeholders within a construction project. The focus on co-operation is to ameliorate the many problems that arise from the often highly competitive and adversarial practices within the construction industry.

Traditional is still the most common method of construction procurement and is well established and recognized. In this arrangement, the architect or project manager acts as the project coordinator. His or her role is to design the works, prepare the specifications and produce construction drawings, administer the contract, tender the works, and manage the works from inception to completion. There are direct contractual links between the architect's client and the main contractor. Any subcontractor will have a direct contractual relationship with the main contractor.

Design and Construct is where the Builder will be involved in all phases after the DA approval has been received. The owner produces a list of requirements for a project, giving an overall view of the project's goals.

Construction Management is an arrangement where the builder plays an active transparent role in the procurement system by entering into separate contracts with the individual sub contractors. This system provides greater flexibility in design variation throughout construction.

Finalising the brief

Never be afraid to seek the help of your architect in finalising the brief. By working together you will ensure that you have a clear understanding about design direction including form and functional needs, roles and responsibilities.

Also don’t be afraid to change the design brief during the concept stages of the project. A development project is an evolving beast. The important thing is to get it right. Better to make the change early rather than risking delays later in the project.

Project Design Brief Template

Section	Sub Section	Notes
Property details	Address of proposed development	
	Real Property Description	
	Lot size (m^2)	
	Site Frontage (m)	
	Site Zoning	
	Planning Constraints	
Contract Parameters	Due Diligence Date	
	Unconditional Date	
	Settlement Date	
Project Goals	What is the vision of your development company?	
	Will you differ from your competition? If yes how will you differ?	
	What are your timeframes? - DA lodgement - DA approval period - Settlement - BA / CC approval - Tender - Construction	
	What are your target sales prices?	
	What is your building budget?	
	What is your expect project return?	
	What is your intended Procurement method?	

Project Design Brief Template

Section	Sub Section	Notes
Target Market	Age	
	Taste / Views	
	Income	
	Attitude	
	Lifestyle wants	
Form	Quality of Project – Low, medium of high?	
	External Character of the building - Is it going a contemporary style, beachside style etc?	
	Is it going to be brightly coloured or have muted palates?	
	What type of external materials are going to be used?	
	What type of internal materials are going to be used?	
	What "Wow" features are going to be included?	
Function	Type of Development?	
	Density of development – how many dwellings	
	Inclusions in each dwelling? Number & size of bedrooms Number & size of bathrooms Robe types in each bedroom Laundry type (room or cupbd) Inclusions in kitchen Open plan living Size and number of balconies Storage requirements	
	Number of storeys (height)?	
	Basement or above ground car park?	
	Location of front entry?	
	Extent of inclusion of solar passive design?	