



any questions or issues that may arise. The main difference between draftspeople and architects is that they do not handle the contract administration process, and dealing with builders. "I take plans right to the stage where clients can just hand them to a builder," Pstahija says. "Some clients want me to come around and have a look on site during the construction process but I don't usually."

A perfect fit
After living in their house for close to 20 years, Jenny and Bryan McEwan knew exactly what they wanted for a much-needed renovation to their home. They were after a second-storey addition on the 1950s timber house, plus they wanted to open up the back of the house, convert an existing garage and add a new double garage out the front.

They decided against an architect for this job, having used one for a smaller renovation years before and been unhappy with the results. "We really didn't want to go to an architect this time, because you tend to end up with their ideas rather than your ideas," Jenny says. "We had a certain look and feel we wanted. We wanted to stay with the timber and keep the open-plan layout."

Jenny and Bryan asked a couple of builders to help draw up some plans but weren't happy with their design options either. "Our house is fairly open and their designs just didn't work with what we wanted."

So they did some research on the internet and found House Plans By Design, a building design and construction company. Owner Wendy Bates runs the company with her builder husband, and building designer Nicole Porter, whose qualifications include a degree of bachelor science in architecture and 16 years'

experience as a building designer. Wendy and Nicole visited the site and did some initial plans, and Jenny and Bryan were thrilled.

"They listened to our ideas and the first design wasn't exactly what we wanted in terms of look, but the design was fantastic and the layout was just what we were looking for," Jenny says.

One advantage of going with this building designer was the fact they were based in the area and had experience with the local council. "Their knowledge of council requirements was amazing," Jenny says. "On the spot they could tell us everything we could and couldn't do."

Building designer Nicole finalised the plans and handled the council approval process. Jenny and Bryan had their own builder they wanted to use, and he took over once all the council approvals were in place.

"They pretty much handed over everything to the builder," Jenny says. While Wendy and Nicole did not project manage the construction, they were available throughout the process to help with any queries that came up.

"The builder rang them once or twice but that was as far as it went," she says. The speedy construction was all done within 12 weeks, while Jenny and family lived on site.

"There were no nasty surprises," she says. "We sourced a lot of the materials ourselves and there were no budget blow-outs."

After a slow start to find the right experts, Jenny says they made the right decision to use a building designer and have ended up with exactly the result they were after.

"We had a lot of control through the process and our builder was quite flexible, so it was really a good experience."

Architect key to turning the dream into a reality

Sophia Symeou (pictured above) chose her architect even before she'd found the house she wanted to buy and renovate. She and co-owner Maria Kavallaris had long been fans of architect Yvonne Haber's work, and intended that she would design the update of the unrenovated home they were looking to buy in Sydney's eastern suburbs. When they found the house they wanted, they even asked Haber her opinion on its full potential before they bought.

"It was a single-storey, three-bedroom semi in a beautiful street and had a beautiful feel," Symeou says. "We wanted to renovate straight away but Yvonne's advice was to live in it for 12 months first, which turned out to be exquisite advice because we changed our original plans a lot."

The renovation involved adding an upstairs level with two bedrooms, each with their own ensuite and walk-in robe, and an open-plan kitchen and living area downstairs.

Haber's role included the full design, getting the plans through council and all the necessary contract documentation. Symeou and Kavallaris used a builder Haber had worked with previously, and Haber helped out in part through the construction process, though did not take on a full project-managing role.

Symeou says they are astounded at the amount of light and space Haber has conjured up from the existing home. "It's hard to imagine how you can have so much space in a semi," she says. "The lounge area has no ceiling beams and a sense of open space. No draftsman would come up with that incredible space."

One challenge Symeou did face in the early stages of the two-year process was working out when to fight for things she wanted in the house, and when to give in to her architect's expert advice.

"We're both strong willed and I did find it hard to trust somebody," Symeou says. "She was very faithful to her design and if it was something she believed in, she would fight for it. In the end, I realised: what's the use of having an expert if you're not going to trust them? And I really had no vision of what the house would look like."

Symeou was also immensely impressed by Haber's involvement in helping choose the interior finishes, right down to designing built-in storage for the home.

"Yvonne is the queen of storage, so we have this house with storage everywhere, but it's quite hidden," Symeou says. "For example, there's a very narrow cabinet facing the lounge area that's just right for all the wineglasses."

More importantly, Symeou found it essential having Haber on hand to deal with the various hurdles and hiccups that inevitably crop up through every building process.

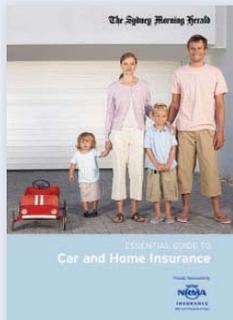
"She had worked with the builder and cabinetmaker before and when they got into strife, they just called her."

Symeou insists it was Haber's architectural training and experience that made her house quite so special.

"You see the difference between an architect-designed house and one that's not," she says. "I walk in every day and say, 'I love my house'. It's a remarkable space."

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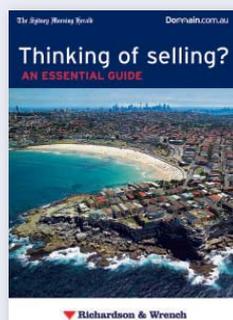
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