

# THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN BRIEF - CHECKLIST

From FIRST IN ARCHITECTURE



## What is an architectural design brief?

The architectural design brief forms the very beginning of the design process. The brief is relevant in both educational and professional settings. Student projects are often based around a real life project, with an imaginary client often included. A live project usually exists in order to fulfil the needs of a client, which then forms the grounding for a project brief.

A thorough and informative design brief is an imperative part of the design process. It is an essential point of reference not only for the architect, but for all people involved in the design and implementation of the project. The more information we can gain from the client in the early stages of design, the more effective our decision making and problem solving process will be.

## Types of design brief

There are two main types of architectural design brief that we will focus on here which in many ways are quite different from each other. There is the private or domestic client that may be looking to have a home designed. They could be someone that has never employed an architect before, and has little or no experience of the architectural design and construction process. The commercial client however, generally is more experienced, and has very different priorities to a domestic client.

## How the brief evolves

It is important to remember that the design brief can evolve over the life of the project, it is not a static document that is completed at the start of the process. The brief must be developed with the client and end users to reflect the changes and challenges that occur as the project progresses. It is important that the brief not only fulfils the aesthetic aspirations of the client but also the functional requirements and needs too.

With student projects that are developed without a client focus, it is possible to consider the site or place as the client, and consider the needs of the site itself, and how the project design is going to meet those needs.

## Helping your client develop a brief

Often clients, particularly domestic, may find it daunting to compile a design brief and as such it is important that we, the professionals, guide our clients to give us the information we need.

We have put together two checklists/questionnaires (which are certainly not exhaustive) to go through with your clients to help you get the information you need from your client in order to inform your design and fulfil your clients requirements. These lists will take you to technical design stage where you will have a new set of questions and a new brief to be developed.

# Residential Design Brief Checklist

Briefing requirements will vary from project to project depending on scale and need. You will also find some aspects will be dictated by local authority regulations, planning requirements and conservation restrictions – it is important to be mindful of this from the outset.

You may also find that the brief will change and develop as you work on your early proposals as you interact with your client and gain a better understanding of their needs.

See below our checklist of questions that you can start off asking your client:

## Initial Client Questions:

- Full contact details of client - address, phone number, email
- Full site address
- Details of any other important parties in the design process

## About your client:

- Describe your current home. What do you like and dislike about it? What is missing, and what would you change.
- What kind of ideas do you have about design and / or materials? Do you have any images from magazines/internet that show us a style that you like?
- Are there any particular design features that are important to you?
- What kind of style do you require for the project e.g. contemporary, traditional, industrial, bold, elegant, minimal etc.
- Do you have any specific materials or surfaces in mind that you would like to see included in the project?
- Do you have specific time requirements for the project to be complete?
- Do you have any specific accessibility requirements, for example is anyone in your family disabled or do you have any regular visitors that would have special needs?
- Do you have any specific considerations toward sustainability and energy efficiency – is there a particular system you would like to use: i.e., solar panels etc.
- How much time and energy would you be willing to invest to maintain your home?
- What are your budget requirements?

## About the site:

- Why did the client choose this site?
- Is there anything about the site that you particularly like or dislike?
- Are there any views within the site that are particularly important to you?

## About the occupants:

- How many people will be living in the new home?
- Do you foresee new additions to the home (ie children)
- Are there any pets that will need to be accommodated?

## About the lifestyle:

- Describe your lifestyle and the kind of spaces that you need? For example, work from home, entertain often, etc
- How much time do you spend in the different areas of your home (indoors and outdoors)?
- What type of entertainment systems do you require? Music, TV, projectors, speakers throughout the house?

- What type of storage do you require? Specific hobbies that require lots of storage space?  
Large wardrobe space?

#### Indoor spaces:

- Number of floors / rooms / spaces and use for each?
- Are there any particular areas that are to be more private than others? Or particular rooms that you would like to be connected?
- Do you have any preferred room layouts/relationships or orientations – a south facing kitchen for example.

#### Outdoor spaces:

- Do you have any specific ideas or plans for the outside spaces that you would like us to consider?

#### Specific questions for clients looking to extend or renovate current homes:

- What would you like to see in your newly extended/renovated home that it currently lacks?
- What additional areas / functions / activities will be housed in the new proposed space?
- Do you have any particular preferences to the relationship between the rooms? Would you be happy to reconsider the internal layout?

# Commercial Client Checklist

## Initial Client Questions:

- Full contact details of client - address, phone number, email
- Full site address
- Details of any other important contacts in the project team

## Client Information:

- Why is this project being developed?
- Why did the client choose this site?
- Who are the other participants of this project?
- Does the client have any specific wishes with regard to design?
- What attitude do they have towards architecture and design?
- Will the drawings need to be understandable by non experts?
- Has the client worked with an architect before? If so who?
- What are the time constraints of the project?
- Are there any particular phasing requirements?

## Fees:

- On what basis is the calculation of fees based?
- Should the project cost be estimated in order to base the fee calculation?
- What is the client budget?

## Basic Design Factors:

- Depending on the type of project questions will vary, however some of the domestic questions may apply.
- What is the client looking to achieve with this project?
- What do the surroundings look like? Landscaping, trees, orientation, climate etc?
- What are the existing buildings and surround buildings? What materials are they?
- Does any later construction need to be taken into account now?
- What sort of materials would the client like to use?
- Are there any specific design goals? sustainability targets for example.
- Does the client/company have any leaning toward a sustainable energy efficient ethos?
- Would they like to include new technologies in the project?
- What are the infrastructure requirements of this project?

## Occupants:

- Who will use the building?
- What are the requirements of the users of the building?
- Are there any specific accessibility requirements?
- There will be many more questions in this category following discovery of proposed building occupants.

## Spaces:

- What floors / rooms / spaces are required? Indoor and Outdoor
- How would the spaces need to connect?
- Are there specific spatial requirements?
- Are there any specific external landscaping requirements?
- Are there any specific mechanical or electrical requirements?

Above are just a few of the things that need to be considered when developing the initial architectural brief.

It is key to really take the time to understand the requirements of your client and the site in order to develop solid design solutions for your project.

You may also be interested in [Space Planning](#)

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<https://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/the-architectural-design-brief-the-checklist-part-1/>