

HOW TO choose a builder for your home addition

For many people, a first-floor home addition is for many people one of the largest investments they will make, second only to the purchase of the house itself. Whether you have engaged an architect or a home designer, you will definitely want to choose a Builder who will keep the whole experience as pain free as possible. This article will help you to make a more informed decision on which Builder to choose.



1. Stay in Control of your Budget

Most builders will give you a “ballpark” estimate to use as the basis for your budget. While this is generally a good starting point, each home renovation project is unique and you do not want any “surprises” when it comes to additional costs for items you assumed were included in the price. Remember, you are in control of the budget and you need to be sure of what the estimate includes or excludes. As they say, “the devil is in the detail.”



Obtain a Fixed-Price Quotation

The only way to stay in control of your budget is to insist on a detailed, fixed price Quotation from each Builder that you approach to do the work; a Quotation that specifies everything the Builder will take responsibility for. Read the Quotation document carefully. If it isn't listed, then it's not likely to be included. For example, who will pay for internal painting, pest inspection, Construction Certificate, Council damage deposit or final inspection fees? Insist that the Builder be specific – even small items such as window frame colours can impact on the cost. Some Builders charge a small fee to produce a detailed Quotation; this is likely to be money well spent as it can avoid a much larger cost blow out.

Prime Cost allowances

Prime Cost allowances are typically included in a Quotation for items you will select yourself during construction, such as bathroom hardware. If you select an item more expensive than the allowance, you will be required to pay the balance. If, on the other hand, you select one that is cheaper than the allowance then you should receive a credit for the difference. For a meaningful price comparison between Quotations, make sure you include the Prime Cost allowances in your calculation.

Provisional Sums

Provisional Sums are allowances the Builder has included for works that could not be costed at this time because the scope of the work may not be clear until demolition works are done. It is a “best guess” by the Builder and you will typically be required to pay any amount over the allowance stated (or receive a credit if the actual cost is less than the allowance). If Provisional Sums vary immensely between quotes, ask the Builder why this is the case.

2. Quality control, warranties and construction time.

First floor home additions are a specialised type of construction, employing different techniques and systems than those used for new home construction or ground floor extensions. It is definitely the type of project where a Builder's experience matters. Here are some ideas:

- Find a Builder with a proven track record; see if they have received awards for their home addition projects
- Ask the Builder about their quality control systems. For example, to minimise potential construction problems do they verify the measurements on plans drawn by others?
- Check your Department of Fair Trading for the builder's rating
- Speak to past clients or review client testimonials

Warranties

While warranties against deficient structural work are provided through NSW legislation, having “minor” defects repaired can be an arduous process, particularly



for problems discovered only after you take occupation of the new space. Make sure that your builder provides a **minor defects warranty** for at least 6 months after completion, so that you have sufficient time to discover any problems.

Construction Time

The maximum time to build should be written into the building contract. As a guide, expect a \$300,000 addition to take 5 to 6 months to complete. If the Contract specifies a longer duration, you may be in for some unwelcome delays...

3. Address Construction Issues Before They Begin.

Construction Supervisor

You will likely be allocated a Construction Supervisor to oversee the trade contractors working on your project. The Supervisor's role is to ensure that construction times and quality are achieved and that any concerns you may have during construction are heeded. Obtain a commitment that the Supervisor will attend your site on a daily basis during construction and will keep you fully informed on progress.

Emergency Contact Numbers

Make sure that the Builder has a 24/7 contact number in case of emergency during construction, such as storm damage. You should also be given back up contact numbers in case you are unable to reach your Construction Supervisor.

Protecting Your Belongings

Your roof area and parts of the ground floor will become a construction site. Most Builders will not insure against damage to your home contents so it is advisable to remove fragile items such as chandeliers or antiques to avoid the risk of damage. You should also check with the Builder as to the precautions that will be taken to maintain property security.

Summary

The advice in this article should be checked *before* you sign a building contract. Remember, once you sign the contract you are committed to using that Builder for your home addition project.

Using a service-driven company with extensive experience in first floor home additions will avoid a multitude of worries.

Begin your home extension by choosing a Company you can trust. Cape Cod Australia has a proven track record and won many industry awards for their innovative designs and quality of construction. You will also receive a detailed, fixed price quotation so that you will know exactly what the cost of your home extension will be.