

IMAGINE. DESIGN. CREATE



ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU
SHOULD KNOW BEFORE
DESIGNING AND BUILDING
YOUR DREAM HOME

By **STRENGTH GROUP**

INTRODUCTION



Strength Group is an Architecture, Engineering and Construction firm located in Brooklyn, Victoria. We specialise in bespoke Residential and Commercial projects ranging from single storey dwellings through to multi storey mixed used developments.

Our firm consists of a dedicated and professional team of Architects, Engineers, Builders and Tradespersons who can provide you with a collaborative “one stop shop” service to ensure accountability and improve quality and time outcomes for your project from conception through to completion.

We know that designing and building your dream home can be a stressful experience. Especially when a lot of time and money go into this process. Doing your due-diligence and preparing ahead will go a long way. So to help you get started, we have written this e-book to help you with your journey ahead and avoid some of the most common pitfalls when designing and building your dream home.

ADITYA KUTHALAM & MARK RAPA

CO-FOUNDERS OF STRENGTH GROUP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6-9	ONE	30-33	FIVE
12-15	TWO	36-39	SIX
18-21	THREE	42-45	SEVEN
24-27	FOUR	48-51	EIGHT

“ Designing and building your dream home should be one of most exciting times of your life... ”

CONTENTS

1	ONE Do a background check before selecting your Architect and Builder
2	TWO Preparing for your first meeting with your Architect
3	THREE Designing a sustainable home
4	FOUR Ensure you have the right consultants on board supporting your design
5	FIVE Quality over price
6	SIX Contracts
7	SEVEN Communicating with your Builder during the build
8	EIGHT Aftercare for your home

**DO A
BACKGROUND
CHECK BEFORE
SELECTING YOUR
ARCHITECT AND
BUILDER**

01

DO A BACKGROUND CHECK BEFORE SELECTING YOUR ARCHITECT AND BUILDER

Doing a background check before selecting your Architect and Builder is very important. You want to ensure you have a registered, competent and reputable professional; and avoid someone who may lead you to an undesirable outcome (such as designing something you can't afford, over capitalising on your land, or having a poor quality end product)."

LICENSING

Don't sign any contracts without having confirmed that the trading entity of the Architect and Builder is registered with the Government and that they hold the relevant state registration bodies for their relevant profession.

REPUTATION

Ensure the Architect and Builder has a good reputation. This can be found through searching online forums, reviewing their past work on their website, looking up client testimonials both online and on their website, requesting to speak to past clients and through word of mouth referrals.

INSURANCES

Ensure your professional has the right business and project insurances, as this will cover you in the event that something goes wrong in your project.

We recommend obtaining the following evidence before locking in a Contract:

ARCHITECT:

- ✓ ABN and Certificate of registration of the business (if the entity is a business)
- ✓ Registration with the Architects Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV)
- ✓ Relevant Insurances (Professional Indemnity, Workers Compensation and Public Liability at a minimum).

BUILDER:

- ✓ ABN and Certificate of registration of the business (if the entity is a business)
- ✓ Registration with the Victorian Building Authority (VBA)
- ✓ Relevant Insurances (Home Owners Warranty, Contract Works, Workers Compensation and Public Liability at a minimum).

There are also ways to view this information online such as on ARBV's and VBA's register respectively.



CAESARSTONE KITCHEN

Our Hampton Townhouse client was after a modernist, clean kitchen and was after a durable material for kitchen countertops.

“ Caesarstone is resistant to cracks, scratches and stains... ”

“

Across your lifetime you will spend 27,156 hours in your kitchen. Make sure it's one you will love!

**PREPARING
FOR YOUR
FIRST
MEETING
WITH YOUR
ARCHITECT**

02

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR ARCHITECT

When meeting your Architect for the first time, it is important to feel prepared, and arrive with specific goals in mind. To make this easier for you, we have submitted 6 ways you can prepare for this meeting and how to get the most out of it.

1) Do some research with images

More than likely, you have got this covered, but the more research you can do prior to your first meeting, the faster your Architect and Builder can finalise your concept. This includes collecting images such as photos, Pinterest boards and Houzz imagines on, but not limited to, the following: 

- Architectural styles and features that stands out to you
- The facades that you like
- What you want to see in each room of your home
- What colours and materials you want in your home

2) Study (or bring) floorplans

If you have not settled on a floor plan, go ahead, and familiarise yourself with what is out there. Weight the pros and cons of different floorplans, and bring them to your Architect.

3) Consider your functional requirements

Think about the life you currently lead (or want to lead) and identify the functional requirements of your dream home. Be sure to prioritise the spaces that are most important to you and your family

4) Lock in your budget and timeframe

Two of the biggest variables in any design and build are time and money. Knowing the budget and timeframe you're comfortable working in sets realistic parameters of what you can achieve.

5) Consider where to build

Is the land on a leafy and green country acre property or within a highly packed and dense inner city urban environment? Is it on a sloping block or a narrow frontage? Location and site typology is very important in informing the design outcome and can make some designs impossible. Whilst your architect will advise you on what you can and can't achieve, it doesn't hurt doing some research on similar designs that suit your type of block.

Remember, you will have more than one opportunity to communicate everything you want with your Architect. If your Architect does their job properly, you should leave your first meeting with most of your questions answered, and feel re-assured that you will get to the outcome that you are after.



SEDDON residence



**DESIGNING A
SUSTAINABLE
HOME**

03

DESIGNING A SUSTAINABLE HOME

Sustainability is an integral part of how we should live in our environment, whilst even looking to have a positive impact our environment.

Some of the old attitudes to sustainable design have been:

- It's too expensive
- It doesn't look as nice
- It doesn't really help the environment

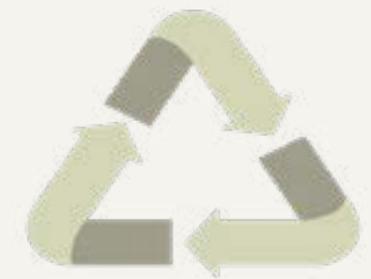
However these attitudes are proven to be wrong as sustainability makes a big difference in positively impacting your lifestyle as well as on the environment. Some of the things you can do to make your home more sustainable is to consider:

- ✓ Installing a rain water tank which uses storm water run off to flush your toilets and water your gardens.
- ✓ Installing rain gardens to grow your garden beds with storm water run off whilst ensuring nasty pollutants don't go down our creeks and rivers.
- ✓ Installing grey and black water systems to re-use water from your laundry or toilet into your gardens.
- ✓ Installing double glazed windows to stop radiant heat coming in and internal heat going out very easily.

- ✓ Designing with the sun's orientation and wind direction in mind (known as passive design) to make the most use of the natural environment to provide a comfortable home all year round.
- ✓ Placing solar panels on your roof to power your home and maybe even give energy back to the grid. Solar panels can also be incorporated as part of your hot water system.
- ✓ Changing all your appliances to electricity. By doing this you can avoid the cost of installing, running and maintaining a gas line and can have your home powered with electricity potentially from your solar panels.
- ✓ Having the right building materials and the right cladding to better thermally insulate your home.

SUMMARY:

Use sustainable building materials
 Use sustainable building features
 Insulate, insulate, insulate!
 Use of passive design
 Water use and re-use



“

your home...

should tell the story of who you are, and be a collection of what you love.

”

PRAHRAN RESIDENCE design



**ENSURE
YOU HAVE
THE RIGHT
CONSULTANTS
ON BOARD
SUPPORTING
YOUR DESIGN**

04

ENSURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT CONSULTANTS

ON BOARD SUPPORTING YOUR DESIGN

Whilst Architects are crucial to designing your dream home, did you know that there are a number of consultants that support your design and can significantly impact it in terms of quality, time and cost? Whilst not as well known, they too are essential, and here you'll find a list of some of them and what they do.

LAND SURVEYOR

The Architect cannot design without knowing the neighbourhood character, features on a property, the title and fence boundaries, easements and the slope of the land. The Land Surveyor provides all this information to you on a Feature and Levels Survey and a Re-Establishment Survey.

GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEER

Also known as the soil tester, this consultant is important in determining the impact your building will have on existing or neighbouring footings, as well as the soil bearing capacity your building's footings rest upon.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Using the footing probes and soil report generated by the Geotechnical Engineer, the Structural Engineer works on coming up with a cost effective solution to structurally support the building. This includes looking at structural supports, the travel of the building's load and specific materials that will help meet the Architect's design intent.

Did you know that in excess of 70% of Architectural home designs are never built. The downfall begins right at the beginning - when someone commissions an Architect to design their home without a Builder involved.

CIVIL ENGINEER

Stormwater can negatively impact your property especially when it comes to flooding your home. This is where a Civil Engineer comes on board to ensure that storm water is collected in a drainage retention system underground and is safely directed to your nearest storm water drain.

ENERGY RATER

As mentioned, sustainability is important and an energy rater can assist with this in providing you with a minimum 6-star rated home (needed by law) or better yet a 7 or 8-star rated home which is what we aim for at Strength Group.

BUILDING SURVEYOR

This is the key consultant in ensuring home complies with the relevant Australian Standards, the National Construction Code, Planning and Building Regulations. So having one that will work with the Architect and Builder in a constructive manner is key.



The detail that went into the planning of the build was extremely high. We were also after a builder that gave off a human nature to their business; so the ability to listen to our needs, but to understand what we wanted as home – that being functional, but also beautiful.

- Matt B

FIND VIDEO TESTIMONIAL AT:
www.strengthgroup.com.au



**VALUE FOR
MONEY**

05

VALUE FOR MONEY

When deciding to design and build your forever home, the number one thing you will really want to focus on is ensuring your budget is getting you the best value for money for a high quality finish of your new home without overcapitalising on your property. The best way to achieve this is to ensure that your Architect specifies the quality of finish within a specification document to be provided to your builder as part of your tender set. Should this not be done, see if this can be captured then by your builder's quotation which you will need to carefully review.

So what can you do to ensure quality whilst ensuring value for money?

-  Look at incorporating void spaces. Not only can this help with mitigating against heat, they let in a lot of light and make the home feel grand.
-  Ensure screw piles and bored piers are used when building on Class P soil conditions to ensure your footings are placed firmly within the property's foundation.
-  Look at using reinforced concrete slabs with under slab insulation rather than waffle pod slabs as they are still energy efficient whilst also being a lot stronger.
-  Use at a minimum 90x45 MGP10 Pine studs or greater to give a good strong frame to your home. Other great alternatives include cold form steel frames, precast panels or Dintel.
-  Use metal roofing where possible. These generally produce less leaks than tiled roofs when correctly installed and are low maintenance. They also look great on flat and skillion roof designs.
-  Use semi-commercial or commercial grade aluminium windows. These are low maintenance, durable and have better drainage capabilities than domestic windows.

 Don't be afraid to use alternative cladding types. I.e., you don't have to stick to face brickwork or foam and render alone. Instead look at Sycon Axon or Stria, ShadowClad, Metal Cladding (Colorbond or Zinc), Blackbutt or Silver Ash timber cladding or any combinations of these.

 When installing plaster, look at putting your ceiling plaster on levelled battens and straightening your timber studs before using wall plaster to provide a nice and clean look. To top it off, look at square set cornices and plastered window reveals for a clean look.

 Wall tiling in your bathrooms don't have to be just for showers and skirtings. Full height walls can provide clean lines to your bathrooms. Also consider using mitred edges to your wall corners as well as niches to create a sophisticated look.

 Joinery is another area to really make your house stand out whether this is in your kitchen or your bathrooms. Here you can look at the use of Caesarstone or other benchtops with 40mm or 60mm waterfall edges to give a luxurious feel.

 Use 2340mm high doors instead of 2040mm doors to help your hallways and rooms feel bigger. We also recommend using taller and architraves and skirtings.

 Door handles are very important to consider as they are regularly used. Not only does the colour matter, but also the feel and ergonomics of them play a great part in a high end feel.

 The look and feel of your electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning items are critical in setting a luxurious tone to your home. This includes the use of slimline light switches, branded tapware and bulkhead split or ducted air-conditioning systems.

 Timber flooring is also an important consideration in providing a quality look and feel to your home. Consider the use of wider timber or engineered timber boards with great finishes (such as Blackbutt, Spotted Gum or Silvertop Ash).

 Finally look at the carpets that you install. Plush carpets look and feel great and when combined with a nice soft underlay will leave you feeling like you want to lie down on your floors all day long.



**PRICING AND
CONTRACTS**

06

PRICING AND CONTRACTS

Once your Architectural and consultant plans and documents are finalised (or close to), you will need to get them priced by Builders in order to select one and thereafter sign a building contract to move to the building phase. There are however, some important things you need to consider:

COMPETITIVE TENDER

It is important to undertake a competitive tender to ensure you are getting the best value for money. Remember the lowest doesn't mean the best and for that matter, neither does the highest. Instead you should be focusing on what is being provided in the quote and ensure that it is in line with your project documentation.

THE RIGHT CONTRACT

Ensure the Contract you sign is the right Contract for you. We find that the Master Builder's New Homes Contract is a good contract that is weighted fairly between the Owner and the Builder. We especially encourage you to be careful of builder created contracts that aren't part of an industry body as these could have clauses that could unfairly disadvantage you. Your best bet ultimately is to get a lawyer to view your contract prior to signing.

INCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

Make sure that the plans, specifications, and any other documents critical to your quality of finish are listed in the contract. Most contracts include an exclusion clause stating that only documents covered in the contract will be relied upon

FIXED PRICE

The two most common types of contracts are a Fixed Price Contract and a Cost-Plus Contract. A Fixed Price Contract means your builder agrees upfront to a Fixed-Price for the whole job. At Strength Group, our preferred contract choice is a Fixed Price contract. Through our experience, we have noticed that if both parties completely understand the details of the contract, tender price and specifications, there is much less stress on the working relationship. The Fixed Price model sets expectations and leaves little room for disagreement.

PROGRESS PAYMENTS

Ensure you have the right amount of progress payments in your contracts. Depending on the complexity of the build, sometimes having more payments broken over smaller amounts, not only means less risk for you. This also is less risk for the builder who is often found carrying a lot of medium-term debt that could but them and your project in financial jeopardy

FINAL CHECKS

As per Section 1 of this e-book, make sure you do a background check on your Builder. This includes checking their reputation, licensing, and insurances.



Modernist
Caesarstone
KITCHEN

Here we have yet another beautifully built caesarstone kitchen. Caesarstone is a naturally stunning quartz that is built to not only endure but create a beautiful environment that inspires us everyday.

“

We use predominantly use caesarstone for our kitchen and bathroom builds

”



**COMMUNICATING
WITH YOUR
BUILDER
DURING
THE BUILD**



COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR BUILDER DURING THE BUILD

Communicating appropriately with your Builder during the build is key to ensuring a smooth experience. Limited communication by your Builder can cause feelings of anxiety whilst excessive communication can wear thin on your Builder's patience.

So here are some handy tips we recommend for appropriate communication.

“

We had a wonderful experience for our renovation project with Strength Group. We found them to be reliable, responsive, practical and always focused on their client's best interests.

”

- Samuel T

01

Try having weekly or fortnightly catch ups with your Building Supervisor or Project Manager. Having these meetings on a regular basis means that issues can be captured and resolved quickly and "... avoids issues and headaches for both yourself and your builder in the later stages of the build.

03

It is not advised to visit site unless organised with your Builder beforehand. It is very easy to regularly come on site to check the progress of the build. However, we recommend owners not to do this without communicating with the Builder first. This is because an unsupervised owner on site may not be aware of dangers onsite. It can also be distracting for the tradespeople onsite and inadvertently slow down your project.

02

Avoid communicating with your Builder's tradesman at all times. Not only will this cause confusion for both tradespeople and the builder, but this could also lead to unnecessary miscommunication or conflict between the Owner and the

04

Try to wait before raising concerns on unfinished items. It is very common to see unfinished plaster or ungrouted tiles, and be worried that they will have a poor finish. However, wait to view the completed works with your Builder before raising your concerns. Your Builder will be required under contract to fix any defects.



SEDDON residence



**AFTERCARE
FOR YOUR
HOME**

08

AFTERCARE FOR YOUR HOME

Once your new home is built and you have moved in, ensure you take the best care of it to avoid longer term problems arising such as systems malfunctioning and surfaces breaking down quicker than anticipated. After all, your home won't be new forever. Here are several things you can do to keep your new home in top shape:

✓ LISTEN TO THE BUILDER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Once your home is built, you will be taken through the property by your builder to show you where everything is located, how everything works and what recommended maintenance is needed. It is critical that you listen to everything your builder has to say, as you will need to know where the circuit breakers are, where the water shutoff valve is for the house and how to access the air filter in your furnace, as well as knowing how to fix the power when there is an outage.

✓ READ THE OWNER'S MANUALS

When your new home is completed, you will receive an owner's manual for each appliance in your home. Whilst it may not be the most exciting piece of material to read, you should read each one to know how to properly keep each part of your house in working order. The manuals are there to help tell you how everything works, how it should all be maintained and how often it should be looked after.

“ Home is where love resides, memories are created, friends always belong, and laughter never ends. ”

✓ KNOW THE DETAILS OF YOUR HOME WARRANTY

Your new home will most likely come with a warranty, either directly from the builder or a third party. This will cover certain issues that may arise within the first 12 months or so of owning the property. Should any issues arise during the length of the warranty, you'll be at least partially covered.



Warranty covers:

- Windows
- HVAC
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Airconditioning and heating
- Internal material finishes

To help homeowners know the ins and outs of home warranties for newly built homes and domestic building insurances, the Consumer Affairs of Victoria provides an information page with resources for homeowners, found at: <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/building-and-renovating/checklists/implied-warranties-and-domestic-building-insurance>.

“

We hope this e-book has been useful in preparing for your project. Whilst you need to take the design and build process seriously, know that it doesn't have to be rushed and can also be an exciting process. There are a lot more things to consider in designing and building your home, so don't hesitate to contact the team at Strength Group to guide you through the process. Contact us today for a no-obligation consultation, or even feel free to pop by the office for a coffee on us!"

ADITYA AND MARK



“

treat your dream home...

in the design and build process as your *forever* home.

”

STRENGTH
GROUP

13/640 Geelong Rd, Brooklyn VIC 3012

contact@strengthgroup.com.au

www.strengthgroup.com.au

(03) 9553 7270