

HOW TO BRIEF AN ARCHITECT

A homeowner's guide to
planning your new home



BY AR. SUMON MIA

How to Brief an Architect

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Illustrative images created with AI tools.

About this guide

A good home starts long before the first drawing. It starts with a clear brief: a simple description of what you need, what you can spend and how you want to live. This guide shows you how to prepare one.

It is written for homeowners planning a new house, an extension or a major renovation, especially in hot, humid climates such as Bangladesh. You do not need any technical knowledge. Each chapter ends with a few questions to answer, and the last pages give you a one-page checklist you can print, fill in and take to your first meeting with an architect.

Use it in three steps:

1. Read it once from start to finish, with your family.
2. Answer the questions at the end of each chapter, even roughly.
3. Fill in the checklist near the end of this guide and share it with your architect before you meet.

Illustrative images in this guide were created with AI tools. Plans and diagrams are simplified for explanation.

CHAPTER 1

Why a good brief matters

The brief is the foundation of every design decision. It tells your architect what the house must do, who it is for and what limits it must respect. A clear brief saves time, money and frustration. A vague one leads to redesigns, delays and a home that fits someone else's life.

A brief is not a finished design, and it is not a list of fixed answers. It is a starting point for a conversation. Good architects will question it, test it and sometimes suggest something better. That only works if they understand clearly what you want in the first place.

A strong brief answers five questions:

- **Why** are you building or renovating?
- **Who** will live in the house, now and in ten years?
- **What** spaces do you need, and how will you use them?
- **How much** can you spend in total?
- **When** do you need to move in?

YOUR QUESTIONS

In one sentence, why are you building? What is the one thing your current home does badly that the new one must do well?

CHAPTER 2

Before you meet an architect

A little preparation makes the first meeting far more useful. Before you meet, gather the facts about your plot and agree on your goals as a family.



An empty residential plot ready for a new home

Your goals. Talk openly with everyone who will live in the house. What matters most: space, light, privacy, low running costs, a garden, room for elderly parents? Agree on your top three priorities. Disagreements are normal, and it is better to discover them now than halfway through the design.

Your plot documents. Collect copies of everything you have about the land:

- ownership documents and a clear plot boundary
- a land survey showing dimensions, levels, trees and existing structures
- any soil test report, if one has been done
- information on roads, drainage, water and electricity connections
- photographs of the plot from every side, and of the neighboring buildings

Local rules and approvals. Every city controls what can be built: how high, how close to the boundary and how much of the plot can be covered. In Dhaka, building approvals are managed by RAJUK; other cities and countries have their own authorities. Your architect will guide you through the rules, but it helps to know early whether there are any restrictions on your land.

YOUR QUESTIONS

Which documents do you already have? Which are missing? What are your family's top three priorities?

CHAPTER 3

How you live

The best homes are designed around real routines, not room lists. Before thinking about how many bedrooms you want, describe how your family lives.



A bright family living and dining space with natural ventilation

People. List everyone who will live in the house, their ages and any special needs. Think ahead ten years: children grow up, parents may move in, someone may work from home.

A normal day. Walk through a typical weekday and weekend. Who wakes first? Where do you eat? Where do children study? Where do you relax in the evening? Where do guests sit?

Rooms and spaces. Then list the spaces you need, with a note on each:

- living and family areas, formal and informal
- kitchen and dining: how much cooking, and for how many people
- bedrooms and bathrooms, and who uses each
- a prayer room, study, home office or guest room
- service areas: laundry, storage, staff quarters, parking
- outdoor spaces: courtyard, veranda, balcony, roof terrace, garden

Must-haves and nice-to-haves. Divide your list into two columns. When the budget is tested, this is the list that protects what matters most.

YOUR QUESTIONS

What does a normal day look like in your home? Which three spaces matter most, and which could be smaller or shared?

CHAPTER 4

Budget

Be honest about your budget from the first meeting. It is the single most important fact your architect needs, because it shapes the size of the house, the structure, the materials and the level of finish.

Think about your budget as the **total cost of the project**, not only the building. It usually includes:

- **Construction:** structure, walls, roof, services, finishes and fittings
- **Professional fees:** architect, structural and services engineers, surveyor
- **Approvals and legal costs:** permits, documentation and connections
- **External works:** boundary walls, gates, paving, landscaping and drainage
- **Furniture and equipment:** kitchen, air conditioning, lighting, loose furniture
- **Contingency:** a reserve for the unexpected

Why you need a contingency. Every project meets surprises: poor soil, price rises, a change of mind during construction. Keeping a reserve, often around 10 to 15 percent of the construction cost, means these surprises do not stop the work or force you to cut something important.

Budget and brief must match. If your list of rooms costs more than you can spend, something has to give: the size, the specification or the timing. A good architect will tell you early and help you choose. Your must-have and nice-to-have lists from Chapter 3 make those choices much easier.

Many families build in phases, for example finishing the ground floor first and adding an upper floor later. If that is your plan, say so from the start, so the structure and services are designed for it.

YOUR QUESTIONS

What is your total budget, including everything above? Is it fixed, or is there some flexibility?
Would you consider building in phases?

CHAPTER 5

Style and references

Words like "modern", "minimal" or "traditional" mean different things to different people. Pictures are much clearer. Collecting references helps your architect understand your taste quickly.



A mood board of stone, terracotta, timber and fabric samples

Build a mood board. Collect 15 to 30 images of homes, rooms, materials and details you like. Save them in a folder, on Pinterest or print them out. For each image, write one line on *what* you like: the light, the materials, the color, the openness, the garden.

Include what you dislike. Images you do not like are just as useful. They help your architect avoid a direction early.

Think about materials and feel. Warm timber or cool stone? Bright white walls or earthy textures? Large windows or deep, shaded openings? Materials also affect maintenance, cost and comfort in a hot climate, so your architect will help you balance look and practicality.

Stay open. References are a guide, not a copy list. The best result usually comes from combining your taste with ideas that suit your site, climate and budget.

YOUR QUESTIONS

Which five images best describe the home you want? What do they have in common? Which styles would you definitely avoid?

CHAPTER 6

Site and climate

A home that works with its site and climate is more comfortable, cheaper to run and healthier to live in. In a hot, humid climate with heavy monsoon rain, this matters more than almost anything else.



A shaded veranda during monsoon rain

Sun. Note where the sun rises and sets on your plot. West-facing walls and windows receive strong afternoon heat, so they need shading, planting or smaller openings. Morning light is welcome in bedrooms and kitchens.

Wind and ventilation. Openings on opposite sides of a room let breezes pass through and carry heat away. Courtyards, stair wells and high windows help warm air escape. Good natural ventilation reduces the need for air conditioning.

Rain and water. Deep roof overhangs, covered verandas and well-planned drainage protect walls and keep outdoor spaces usable in the monsoon. Ask about rainwater harvesting and raising the ground floor above flood levels where needed.

Views and privacy. Note what you want to look at, and what you want to hide. Neighboring windows, roads and noise all shape where rooms and openings go.

Trees and landscape. Mature trees give shade and character. If there are good trees on your plot, tell your architect early so the design can keep them.

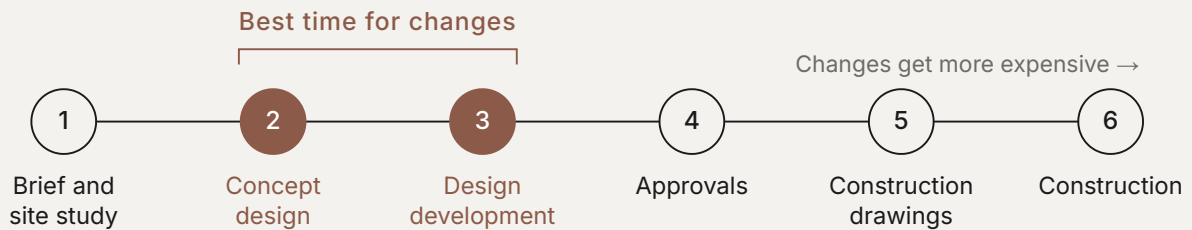
YOUR QUESTIONS

Which side of your plot gets the strongest afternoon sun? Where do the breezes come from? Are there views or trees you want to keep?

CHAPTER 7

The stages of a project

Most architecture projects move through the same six stages. Knowing them helps you understand what to expect, when decisions are needed and when changes become expensive.



- 1. Brief and site study.** You share your brief; the architect studies the site, rules and budget. Output: an agreed brief.
- 2. Concept design.** First ideas: layout, massing and the overall look, often as sketches, simple 3D views and rough plans. Output: an approved concept.
- 3. Design development.** The concept is refined: rooms, openings, structure, materials and services. 3D visualizations help you see the home before it is built. Output: developed plans, elevations and views.
- 4. Approvals.** Drawings and documents are prepared and submitted to the local authority. Output: building permit.
- 5. Construction drawings.** Detailed drawings and specifications for the builder: dimensions, structure, electrical, plumbing and finishes. Output: a complete drawing set for tender and construction.
- 6. Construction.** The house is built. The architect visits the site, answers questions and checks the work matches the design. Output: your finished home.

When to make changes. Changes are cheap early and expensive late. Moving a wall during concept design costs a few hours of drawing. Moving it during construction can cost demolition, new materials and weeks of delay. Take your time in stages 2 and 3: ask questions, study the drawings and 3D views, and only approve when you are confident.

YOUR QUESTIONS

When would you like to start construction? When do you need to move in? Who in your family will make the final decisions at each stage?

CHAPTER 8

Questions to ask your architect

Choosing an architect is choosing a partner for one or two years. Use your first meeting to understand how they work, not only what they have designed.



A couple reviewing floor plans with an architect

About their experience

- Have you designed homes of a similar size, budget and climate?
- Can I see completed projects, not only renders? Can I speak to a past client?
- Who in your team will work on my project day to day?

About the process

- Which stages are included in your service, and which are not?
- How many design options or revisions are included at each stage?
- How will you show me the design: drawings, 3D views, models or walkthroughs?
- Will you help with approvals and visit the site during construction? How often?

About cost and time

- How are your fees calculated, and when are they paid?
- How will you keep the design within my budget?
- What is a realistic timeline for design, approvals and construction?

About communication

- How often will we meet, and how will you share progress?
- What do you need from me, and by when, to keep the project on track?

Ask for the agreed scope, fees and timeline in writing before the work begins.



A residential construction site with a site engineer reviewing drawings

CHAPTER 9

Your one-page brief checklist

Print this page, fill it in with your family and share it with your architect before your first meeting.

PROJECT

☐ Type: new house / extension / renovation

☐ Why we are building (one sentence)

☐ Our top three priorities

SITE

☐ Plot location and size

☐ Ownership documents and land survey

☐ Soil test (if available)

☐ Photos of the plot and neighbors

☐ Known rules or restrictions

PEOPLE AND SPACES

☐ Who will live here now, and in ten years

☐ A normal weekday and weekend

☐ List of spaces: must-haves

☐ List of spaces: nice-to-haves

☐ Parking, storage and service needs

BUDGET AND TIME

☐ Total budget, including fees, furniture and contingency

☐ Is the budget fixed or flexible?

☐ Build in one go, or in phases?

☐ Target start and move-in dates

STYLE AND CLIMATE

☐ 15 to 30 reference images, with notes

☐ Styles and materials to avoid

☐ Sun, breezes, views and trees to keep

DECISIONS

☐ Who makes the final decisions

☐ Main contact person and how to reach them

Glossary

TERM	MEANING
Brief	A written description of what the client needs from the project
Concept design	The first design stage, setting out the main idea, layout and form
Contingency	A reserve in the budget for unexpected costs
Cross ventilation	Air moving through a space between openings on opposite sides
Elevation	A drawing of one side of a building, seen straight on
Floor plan	A drawing of a floor seen from above, showing walls, rooms and openings
Massing	The overall shape and volume of a building
Section	A drawing of a building cut through vertically, showing heights and levels
Setback	The minimum distance a building must keep from the plot boundary
Specification	A written description of materials, products and standards of work
3D visualization	Realistic images or animations of a design, created before it is built

About the author



Ar. Sumon Mia is an architect, 3D artist and creative designer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with more than ten years of experience across design studios, architectural firms and ceramics manufacturing. He is the Founder and CEO of Form3 Architects in Vilnius, Lithuania, and works with clients in Bangladesh, the UK, Europe and worldwide on architectural design, interiors and photorealistic 3D visualization.

Planning a home? Share your brief and start the conversation.

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