

Interiors

So good it's worth letting her bring home the bacon



Chelsea flat: £500,000 later



Chelsea flat: before

What could an architect do for your flat that you, with a sketch-pad, a DIY manual and a multi-speed hammer-action power drill can't achieve over the course of many Sunday afternoons? Plenty. Because architects aren't just for the bored wives of the seriously rich or even freshly divorced middle-aged bankers in search of the ultimate space-age bachelor pad. They're also for people with big ideas but modest budgets, those who work hard and want their living space to be a

The glam builders

Architects aren't just for building design – they can expand your living room, bring counter space to your kitchen and tell you why Alexander Taylor shelves should be your storage of choice

personalised haven rather than a chintzy bolthole marred by the previous owner's poor taste. So before you let the builders loose on your kitchen armed only with your scribbled instructions, ask yourself these questions...

Why can't I do it myself?

Architecture has an image problem; national projects are often over budget and endlessly delayed while famous designers overlook crucial

practical issues in the pursuit of obscure aesthetic principles. This doesn't mean we don't need architects. Architect Richard Found points out that Britain's unhealthy addiction to TV shows about home decorating leaves us no better prepared to design our homes than *ER* leaves us able to perform emergency surgery. Even people with impeccable taste don't understand what's actually possible or really desirable. Despite this "a lot of residential clients think they know how to deliver



Modernist revolution

This 1930s Chelsea town house was redeveloped by Found Associates. A section of roof was removed and replaced with glass, bathing the staircase and top floor in natural light. The basement kitchen was replanned to increase size and daylight by the addition of a glass cube roof, and limestone tiles and sinks were used throughout



a final scheme," says Found. "It's only when they try it that they realise there's more to it." Architects should have the ability to reorganise your space and bind together the different strands of your taste. Found often receives lists of things his client likes, from floor finishes to abstract images, and his job is to reconcile them. But the architect has another role, which is to navigate through the bureaucratic nightmare of council permissions. You need Building Control Approval

for any structural work and, according to Found, "there's a lot of paperwork, it can be quite tedious".

Not that your builder thinks you need an architect. Oh no, what a waste of time that would be. He doesn't want a professional looking through his quote and pointing out that he's overcharging you, installing a boiler that's too small and re-wiring the flat with pipe cleaners. The term "project management" may not be immediately inspiring, but it's another vital part of the architect's job. It starts with a detailed schedule of works, listing every nut, bolt and piece of reclaimed timber that's going to be used, which is sent to a shortlist of builders known to the architect, saving you from the Russian roulette of picking names from the *Yellow Pages*. The architect then sorts through the indecipherable quotes, and together you make a decision. Once work starts the architect is on site most days to check that your feckless, idle and conniving builders are progressing at the speed they promised, and ▶

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doing the work to the required standard. Ideally, says Found, "we control the builder".

What input would I have?

An architect shouldn't decide how your house will look, that's your job. Ideally, you'll employ a practice whose work you like and while some of the profession's big names are famously uncompromising, this is rarely a problem (see below for a list of recommended architects). Found asks his clients exactly what they want from their home, and visits them to see how they live. His job, he says, "is to address that brief", which, for Jeremy Healey's flat in King's Cross, involved putting a stone bath in the living room. His brief for the family house in Chelsea (previous pages) was entirely different, and hence so are the results.

How much will it cost?

According to the Royal Institute Of British Architects, completely refurbishing your flat is rarely going to cost you less than £1,000 per sq m, and for top-of-the-range bathrooms and kitchens you'll be looking at closer to £1,500 per sq m. For jobs under £20,000, architects usually charge by the hour (expect to pay £55 to £95 per hour, depending on the architect). Most, however, charge between 10 and 20 per cent of the total construction job. Which means that £100,000 of building work ends up costing around £115,000. The entire process, from appointing the architect to spending the first night in your new flat, should take about six months. Best of all, this is an investment. A



good architect, according to Found, "is adding value to the property because there is real consideration going into the space planning and natural daylight". If you're lucky and employ a rising architectural star your property will appreciate in value alongside the architect's reputation – just imagine how desirable an early Norman Foster home would be now. It also means you can upgrade your pad without the hassle and expense of selling; a canny move in today's troubled housing market. Found Associates 020 8964 3667; www.foundassociates.com.