

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The background of the lower half of the page is a black and white photograph of a modern building with a curved facade and many windows. Two large circular patterns are overlaid on the image: one with white diagonal stripes on a black background in the upper left, and one with orange diagonal stripes on a black background in the lower right.

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**MELBOURNE'S EXTENSION & RENOVATION
SPECIALIST**



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What kind of service is provided in a preliminary agreement?

Preliminaries (or 'prelims') provide a description of a project that allows the builder to assess the work required to formulate a scope and or a cost analysis.

Depending on what stage the client is at, some of the preliminary work provided by Expert Extensions may include:

- Evaluation of existing dwelling and the clients design requirements
- Detailed and Contour survey
- Identification Survey
- Soil or geotechnical report
- Concept design and working drawings
- Budget Analysis
- Engineering design and specifications
- Cost analysis/Quoting
- Town planning advice (DA)
- Certification – council and building approvals (BA)
- Other specialist consultant reports

A client in the very early stage of deciding they are wanting a renovation, or have yet to engage a designer/architect, may require us to perform some or all of the tasks listed.

If the client has already got these documents in order, Expert Extension may be required to review the documents and produce an accurate quote.

What order does all of this happen in and what do I need to do next?

In most cases clients get in contact with us with only some rough ideas (some more detailed) in mind about their project, which is fine this is what we specialise in. Firstly, we offer a free onsite consultation and project assessment. While doing this we both determine what your wanting done and what stage it is that your up to with your plans and documentation.

Here is the common schedule of events for most renovations and extensions (some of these may not be required or you may have already):

- Onsite project assessment – meeting with the client to discuss your project
- Preliminary agreement is signed outlining what documentation you require to be able to start the project
- From here we take care of the rest
- Architectural plans – concept drawings – working drawings
- Soil test (extensions, earthworks, structural concreting or footings)
- Engineers plans and specifications (the backbone to the build)
- Cost analysis / take offs / quoting
- Contract signing
- Certification – building approvals
- Congratulations your ready to start your project

Why we don't provide a square meterage rate?

We get asked that a lot. How much a square meter?

The reality is, for a custom built project, there is no set rate. That's because no two projects are ever the same, no site conditions are the same, and no clients are the same.

A square meterage rate can be useful at the outset when formulating a starting budget. If the client has X amount of budget, then the size of the building is approximately that divided by the rate. This rate needs to be verified by the builder by doing a proper quote. More often the rate applied at the beginning of the design process is different to the ultimate cost.

A proper quote requires the builder to fully understand the plan, the scope of work, site condition, and time constraint. Like building lego pieces, each component is priced accordingly before assembled to produce the final figure.

Other builders provide a free quote, why do you charge a fee?

In order for a quote to be meaningful, it has to be accurate, contain clear and detailed information for both parties. An accurate quote takes a significant amount of time and money to prepare as each project is different in scope and site conditions.

It is easy to get a free quote, but those builders will not want to spend the time or effort. They can apply a square meterage rate or low ball the quote and make up their margin by lowering standard or adding extras during the build. Too often the owner engages the lowest cost builder because it is hard to understand the quote. What sounds like a good deal in the beginning can end up more costly or project just fails to achieve the desired outcome.

A paid service allows us to spend more time to investigate deeper. In particular for renovation work, multiple site visits and confirmation may be required. If we are willing to enter into an agreement with you, we are committed to producing a quality quote with all the scope assessed, unforeseeable items allowed.

We also acknowledge that if we do not win the job, our expenses will NOT be recouped from the fee we charge. During our initial consultation, we will estimate if the owner's budget is workable. If we believe there is a mismatch, we will not offer this service.

We like to provide a personalised, transparent service with a tender that will give you confidence and certainty that your project will be completed to an exceptional standard, on time and on budget.

Do we provide an alternative to this model?

Yes, we can provide.....a rough estimate which takes a couple of days, but this is not very accurate and is usually just a square meter rate. This is used for budget estimates only and should not be the only pricing for the project. This could lead to costly variations and project cost blow outs.

This is usually because others don't spend the time and effort producing accurate take offs, sourcing quotes from suppliers or sub-contractors, or finding out what it really is that you after in detail.

This practice often leads to unnecessary variations, disappointment and disputes during construction, not to mention extension of the construction period costing you time and money.

We can provide an 'budget estimate' the same as other builders on your plans for a small fee.

What documents are required for a quote or estimate and how long does it take?

If we are provided with accurate and detailed documentation, the quote produced will be precise. For a typical project, a 4 week turn around can be expected.

On the other hand, if the document is lacking, the estimating process can be done in a couple of days. This is often the case if the client is seeking an estimate during the design process. A basic concept drawing can be used provided that the client understands accuracy will be poor and this is only a 'budget estimate'.

Ideally, a detailed set of architectural drawings, engineering design, soil test report, schedule of finishes, and fitting will be a basic minimum requirement for any accurate quoting to be achieved.

How much do you charge for a cost plan / quote?

The fee ranges between \$550 to \$1,500 depending on the complexity and size of the job.

What is the difference between a Bill of quantities (BOQ) provided by a Quantity Surveyor (QS) and a builder's quote?

For a custom build project over \$1Million, it is normal practice to engage the service of a Quantity Surveyor (QS) and work of Bill of Quantities (BOQ) early in the design process. The main purpose of a BOQ is to itemise and define a project so that all tenderers are preparing their price and submission on the same information.

It is not uncommon to find that the quotes from builders differ to the BOQ report, this can be due to:

- Tendering builder's capacity and workload in their pipeline
- Quality of the trades that the builder employ
- General market conditions at the time of tender
- Builder's different assessment of the project risk

Each builder has a different assessment to the project risk and applies a different methodology to run the project. Expert Extensions ensures all projects we deliver are tested through our rigorous quality assurance program before it is handed over. We have developed systems and procedures to allow a consistent level quality.

What are Prime Costs (PC) and Provisional Sums (PS)?

To make the quote/contract as accurate as possible, you need to define what exactly is going to be included down to details such as what light bulb you are going to use. Sometimes, that is not possible at the time of quoting or contracting. There are two common terms used to allow for such variables and these make the quote more transparent for the client to see what the builder has allowed for:

Prime Cost Item (PC):

Confused about these building industry acronyms, don't worry some builders don't know the difference either.

PC stands for Prime Cost item. A Prime Cost item is an amount of money which has been allowed for an item in the project for which the labour which goes with that item has been included within the total price of the project. The PC amount is to supply the item only.

An example is a toilet suite. The labour for the plumber to install the toilet is included in the total project cost but the exact toilet may not have been known at the time of pricing, therefore an allowance was made which could be varied once the toilet was chosen. Regardless of which toilet was chosen the cost for the plumber to install is the same so there is no need to make the cost variable, therefore its included in the total price.

PS stands for Provisional Sum. Provisional Sum items are similar in that they are an allowance for an unknown item but in this case it includes materials and labour. PS allowances are often used for excavation where the exact quantities are not known or things such as a kitchen which the price would include to supply the cupboards and bench tops as well as the labour to install.

While PC and PS items allow the contract to be flexible, we always recommend choosing as much as possible before signing the contract and lock away these costs so the whole project cost is known before it even commences. The less to sort out during construction the better, there will be plenty to do, you may as well get the things you can ticked off the list as you can early.

We hope that helps you to distinguish the difference, it sounds a little complicated but basically, it's just a more transparent way to show the client what we are allowing for, instead of over allowing or purchasing the cheapest fixtures and fittings possible after the contract is signed.

Where Prime Cost Items (PC's) and Provisional Sum (PS) allowances have to be shown in a quote or contract document, the amount shown should be inclusive of GST. e.g.:

- Tile allowance PC \$35/m² (inclusive of GST)
- Landscaping Provisional Sum \$10,000 (inclusive of GST)

How PC and PS can affect the contract price?

Unlike a variation, PC and PS are adjustments to a contract. If you want a water tight contract, it is better to have as little PC and PS as possible, making the builder carry all the risk of supplying the items. This is usually quite difficult due to the client not yet having time to decide on the item, or the item having a certain amount of known to it.

If you want to share some of that risk, having an agreed PS or PC can work in your favour, plus let you choose what you want, it's your home.

For example – if the builder was to allow \$35/m² for 10m² of floor tiles based off the quality range specified by the client = \$350.00 – then the client was to choose floor tiles for \$30/m² for 10m² = \$300.00 – then the builder would then deduct \$50.00 from the contract price. PC and PS items only usually make up around 30% of the overall project so the majority of the contract is usually fixed price.

Do we need architectural plans, design concepts and working drawings for our project?

You've decided to do some renovating. To save money, you're thinking of drawing a sketch instead of hiring a drafter or architect. This can be your first mistake. You might save a few dollars initially, but your sketch will probably cost you more than the cost the professional to do it later on.

You might get away with not hiring a specialist for a very small renovation project, but for anything larger, from a kitchen or bathroom renovation, to a home addition, you need to know that no details have been left out. This isn't for your sake, only. The builder and all tradesman that will be required for your project will want to be confident that the job they're doing is what you really want them to do and conforms to Australian building standards.

Plus, if your obtaining multiple quotes for your project, once it's on paper you know that everyone is going to quote on the exact same design and specifications, comparing apples with apples.

A specialist will give you detailed plans that will enable you to do accurate costings for your project. They may even be able to save you money by recommending cost-cutting design changes plus most people find it hard to envisage what they are wanting done until it's on paper.

Nowadays you can even request 3D drawings of the whole project or individual areas to help you picture what is going to look like, or you can go one step further and request a full 3D walk through of your project, so you can gauge space and look around your new home before anything is even started.

What is Soil Testing and why do I need it?

In short, the engineer who provides the footing or slab design needs to know what is underneath the ground or what the structure is sitting on. In order to obtain this information for their plans and specifications, they require a soil test. This is usually a large drill mounted to the rear of a truck or ute that can drill a hole in your land to find out what is below, giving them the engineer all the information they need.

What are engineers plans, I thought we have those already?

Unfortunately, most people who have already arranged for their design to be carried out prior to speaking with us assume that's the only plans required to build. The architectural drawings, concept or working drawings is just the design of the project and is commonly lacking all of the structural information, or the backbone to the build. There are many occasions when a structural engineer is needed in order to get council approval (BA) for a residential project or renovation. Their job is to provide the technical knowledge to ensure a weight bearing structure is capable of handling the load placed on it. Some typical projects structural engineers can report on or design include:

- Internal or external wall removal or relocation
- Structural beam design – timber or steel
- Structural slab or footing designs
- Second storey additions
- Retaining walls (over a certain height)



Because the structural engineers specify these 'backbone' items of the project it is near impossible to accurately quote on the project until they have been engaged to carry out the plans and specifications.

What is council approval or certification, and do I need that?

Traditionally a 'building approval' (BA) is referred to as 'council approval'. This is because previously the 'council' came out to inspect all extension and renovation work. Nowadays a private licensed building certifier carries out these tasks and lodges all of the information in to council to speed up the process.

The building surveyor is responsible for assessing whether proposed building work complies with the 'Building Act 1975' and associated codes and standards. The building certifier who issues the BA must also carry out certain inspections to determine if the building work complies with the approval.

The surveyor usually provides council with:

- Title / infrastructure / flood level searches
- Relaxations to boundaries
- Site inspections (frame and final)
- Building approvals
- Compliance assessments

Most extension or renovation work requires building approval. Especially anything structural, this way when you go to sell your property all documentation is listed with the Local Council and there will not be any problems. The surveyor is independent of Expert Extensions but looks over all of our work and signs off on it being done correctly.

Other documentation that may be required but isn't as common

What is an Identification Survey, why do I need one?

A survey which is required for the purpose of identifying existing buildings and improvements on a parcel of land is referred to as an Identification Survey or just Ident. It may only be undertaken by a Registered Surveyor.

It is always recommended to engage a Surveyor for an Ident survey when you are purchasing a property. Your solicitor will normally obtain an Ident report as a matter of course. He does so to protect you against any problems which can only be detected by a Surveyor. The Vendor Disclosure

Legislation requires obligatory warranties and other statutory information from a vendor of the property. The Ident report can supply other required information and speed up the sale.



Through your Identification Survey you can be sure that you are not buying any problems that may make the property difficult to sell in the future or create anxiety with neighbours or public authorities before you even move in. More importantly, you are sure that you are buying the property that you have been shown and whether or not the property has any defects which may devalue it.

A Surveyor measures the site involved to determine the location of buildings on or adjacent to the land and any fences present. He will check for the existence of Easements (for drainage, etc.), Covenants and Restrictions on land use, and whether or not the subject land complies with the terms of these conditions. The Surveyor pays special attention to any encroachments by or upon the land or upon any easements. In the instance of a residence the Surveyor will report on the distances of the walls or eaves and gutters from the side boundary of the land.

What is Contour and Detail survey?

Detail surveys are a basic prerequisite for building and land development. In most cases, the purpose of detail surveys is to indicate features on, and adjacent to, a property.

There are a number of site features and levels required by architects and planners. A topographic survey is a vital component of a successful development application for any development of your land.

Features of general detail surveys include:

- Levels & contours related to Australian Height Datum (AHD)
- Tie into cadastral reference marks & plot approx boundary on planField survey of site detail & features
- Field location of visible services pot levels & contours over site
- Detail of significant trees on site over 0.2 diameter trunk
- Note of retaining walls, changes of grade etc onto adjoining sitesLocation of existing and adjoining houses/structures and floor and apex levels
- Pickup of road & kerb details at site to crown

Dial before you dig searches

Projects involving excavation will require an assessment to find out what services are underground around your property. Common searches include:

- Telecommunication location
- Gas lines location
- Sewer main and water supply lines
- Storm water main
- Underground electricity supply



Expert Extensions can advise if there are problems connecting your house to the mains, common problems can be

Town planning and overlay constraint

Part of the preliminary searches will involve extracting information from council regarding your property. Most of these searches are done through publicly available data. Expert Extensions can help you make sense of the search result. We pay attention to these common constraints:

Zoning of your property

If the old house is protected if you are seeking to knockdown and rebuild

If the property is affected by flood, or is in the overland flow path

If there are protected vegetation

Heritage listing

Bush fire zoning

The result will determine if we need to call on other specialist consultants such as a town planner, or hydraulic engineers.