ORA Office of Regional Architecture

HOUSE DESIGN BRIEF

Your home, your story

Your details	
Name(s)	
Phone / email	
Site address	
Date	

Welcome

Most briefs start with bedrooms, bathrooms and square metres. This one starts with how you want to live. Room counts and sizes still matter, but they are far easier to get right once your values are clear, because you can measure them against something real.

There are no right answers, and "I don't know yet" is a useful one. Skip what doesn't speak to you, write in dot points, or sketch instead. Don't polish your answers into what you think an architect wants to hear. First thoughts are usually the most honest. Some questions are personal, so share only what you're comfortable with. We're just as happy to talk it through in person.

Everyone who will live in the home should have a say. If there are two or more of you, try answering separately first, then compare. Where you differ is often where the best design ideas come from.

How we use it: please send your completed brief back to us before our first meeting. We read it beforehand, so that meeting can go straight to the conversation that matters. This brief is a conversation starter, not a test. Neither of us will get everything right the first time, and that's expected. Your brief will become clearer as we talk, sketch and test ideas together, and we'll keep updating it as the design develops.

Before you start — a week of noticing

For a week before you fill this in, notice how you use your current home. Jot down anything that comes to mind. Leave sizes, sketches and costs aside for now.

Notice...	What you found
What annoys you	
Where you avoid going	
Where clutter collects	
Which rooms you drift towards, and when	

Part 1 — About you

We want to understand the people before the building.

Who lives here (or will)	Age / stage of life	What they love doing	What they need from home

Include pets, regular visitors, grandparents, adult children who come home, or anyone who stays often.

1. Tell us your story in a few lines. How did you come to be here, on this site, starting this project now?

2. Is there anything about your work, health, culture, faith or family life that the home should quietly support?

Part 2 — Time, rhythms and rituals

How you actually live tells us more than any room list.

1. Walk us through your perfect Saturday morning, from the moment you wake up. What are you seeing, feeling and doing?

2. What is the single most chaotic 30 minutes of your week, and what is happening, and where, at that time?

3. When the household winds down, how do people share the home: together in one space, or in separate zones?

A normal day

Think about a normal day, not an ideal one.

Time of day	Where are you, and what are you doing?	What would make it better?
Early morning		
Getting out the door		
Daytime (including working from home)		
Coming home		
Dinner and evening		
Night		

Your week and your year

4. How is a weekend different from a weekday?

5. How often do you have people over? How many, and what happens? A cuppa, a long lunch, a big family Christmas?

6. What seasonal rhythms matter? Harvest, shearing, school holidays, summer heat, winter fires, visitors from away?

7. Where do muddy boots, wet dogs, bikes, groceries and deliveries end up?

Part 3 — Identity and aspirations

A home can support the person you are becoming, not just the life you have now.

1. If this home could help you build one new positive habit or hobby over the next five years, what would it be?

2. What does success or peace look like at the end of a long work day, and how could this house help you make that shift?

3. What do you want this house to make easier about how you see yourself?

4. If a friend who knows you well moved in for a month, what would they notice you never use?

5. How might your household change over the years? Children arriving or leaving, parents moving in, a new business, retirement? Would you like to be able to age in this home?

Part 4 — Values and connection

Your values shape every trade-off we will make together, so we ask about them early.

1. When you think about the word "home", what childhood memory or past place comes to mind? What was the light like, or the feeling there?

2. How do you see your connection to the outside world here? Completely private and protected from the street, or connected to your neighbours and the life of the street or town?

3. How does this project connect with your values around legacy, footprint or the environment? Which matter to you: solar, rainwater, on-site wastewater, going all-electric, recycled or local materials, passive heating and cooling?

4. Where else do you feel most at ease? A holiday house, a shearing shed, a café, a friend's verandah, under a particular tree? What does it do well?

5. Which objects must have a place in the new home? Family furniture, artwork, a piano, books, things you've made?

Pick your top five. Mark the five words that matter most to you in a home, then rank them 1 to 5. Add your own if something is missing.

Value	Rank (1–5)	Value	Rank (1–5)
Calm		Connection to nature	
Togetherness		Privacy	
Generosity / hosting		Simplicity	
Comfort		Durability / low upkeep	
Creativity		Low running costs	
Independence		Treading lightly on the planet	
Character / history		Flexibility for the future	
Light and openness		Security / safety	
Craft and honest materials		Community / belonging	
Other:		Other:	

How should it feel? Mark where you sit on each line with an X. Describe the feeling, not the finish; we will find the materials and details that create it.

This...	1	2	3	4	5	...or this
Cosy and enclosed						Open and airy
Bright all day						Cool and shaded
Everyone together						Places to retreat
Lived-in and relaxed						Neat and minimal
Rustic, worn-in						Crisp, new
Blends into the landscape						Stands out from it
Quiet						Lively

Part 5 — The trade-off reality check

Most of us want more than our budget allows, and that's normal. These questions help us work out what matters most and where your money will make the biggest difference to everyday life. More often than not, living well comes from a home that works for the life you want, not from building more.

1. If you had to choose between a smaller, beautifully made, very comfortable home that fits your daily habits, or a larger, standard home with more rooms for occasional guests, which way do you lean?

2. If budget and values collided, what would you give up first?

3. Which single room or space would you protect no matter what?

If you had to choose. For each pair, circle the one you would favour.

Option A	or	Option B
More space	or	Better quality in less space
Finished now	or	Built in stages
Lower build cost	or	Lower running costs
A special feature room	or	Even quality throughout
Generous outdoor areas	or	Bigger indoor rooms
New and low maintenance	or	Reused materials with character

Part 6 — Your three themes

Now read your answers back and look for what repeats. Ideas that come up in three or more answers are your non-negotiables. They usually describe daily routines rather than rooms.

For each theme, write one sentence about what you want your home to make easier. These sentences will do more in our first meeting than any list of room sizes, and they become the one-page values brief that sits above the room list.

Theme	What I want my home to make easier
1	
2	
3	

Part 7 — The practical material

Only now, the numbers. Once your values are clear, rooms and areas are easier to get right. For every space, ask which value it serves, and whether a smaller, better-resolved space would serve it better.

Your site

We like to work with what your site already has, rather than clearing it. Its trees, slopes, views and history often give a home its meaning.

1. What drew you to this site? Which trees, rocks, sheds, old buildings or other features would you hate to lose?

2. How does the site behave through the day and the year? Where are the sunrise and sunset, the wind, the views to frame or hide, and the hot, cold, boggy or dusty spots?

3. Do you know the history of the land, its Traditional Custodians, or earlier owners? Is any of that important to you?

Spaces

Space or activity	What happens there, and which value it serves	Must have	Nice to have	Not needed
Bedrooms (how many?)				
Bathrooms / ensuites / powder room				
Kitchen and pantry				
Living / family room				
Dining				
Study / work from home				
Guest space				
Laundry / mudroom / drying				
Storage (linen, gear, bulk food)				
Outdoor living / verandah				
Garage / carport / workshop / shed				
Hobby or creative space				
Other				

Budget, timing and constraints

1. What is a realistic budget range for the project, and does it include fees, approvals, landscaping and furniture? Is there any flexibility?

2. Will you fund it all at once, in stages, or through a loan or grant? Do you plan to do any of the work yourself?

3. Are there any approvals, covenants, bushfire, flood or access issues you already know about?

4. Is there a date you need to move in by, or a season you want to avoid building in?

Your homework and what happens next

Send these with your brief before our first meeting, as many or as few as you like. You don't need plans.

- ☐ Photos of places that feel right to you, each with one line on why
- ☐ Photos of places that feel wrong, with why
- ☐ Notes or a marked-up aerial photo showing how your site behaves through the day
- ☐ A floor plan or sketch of your current home, marked with what works and what doesn't
- ☐ Photos of furniture, artwork or objects that must come with you
- ☐ Any existing surveys, reports or plans, if you have them

What happens next

1. You send us your completed brief. We read it before we meet you, usually on site.
2. We talk through your answers and your three themes, and agree on the values the design must serve.
3. We turn those into design moves we can test, such as zoning, the way you arrive, morning and afternoon light, storage where clutter lands, and how indoors meets out. We write it up as a working brief for you to check, knowing it will change as we go.
4. Concept design begins. Each sketch is a chance to talk: your reactions sharpen the brief, and the sharper brief shapes the next design.

Send your completed brief to

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