



THE FOS DESIGN INTENSIVE RESOURCE LIBRARY INCLUDES:

THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO GETTING YOUR PROJECT
RIGHT



**YOU
ARE
HERE**

MATERIALS + FINISHES

WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS (AND WHAT DOESN'T)

DESIGN DO'S + DON'TS

THE MISTAKES THAT COST YOU THOUSANDS
(AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)

ROOMS + SPACES

THE DESIGNER'S GUIDE TO CREATING FUNCTIONAL,
BEAUTIFUL & TIMELESS HOMES

THE DESIGN SELECTIONS HANDBOOK

THE PROFESSIONAL SYSTEM FOR DOCUMENTING
EVERY DECISION IN YOUR RENOVATION OR BUILD

Good design is often misunderstood.

Most people assume beautiful spaces are the result of expensive materials, unlimited budgets, or naturally having “good taste.” In reality, the success of a project comes down to something much more practical: clarity, planning, sequencing, and informed decision-making.

After more than 15 years in the design and construction industry — across residential, commercial, hospitality, and large-scale projects — I’ve seen the same challenges arise repeatedly. Projects become overwhelming not because people lack vision, but because they lack a clear framework for how everything should come together.

This resource library has been created to change that. The FOS Design Intensive Library is designed to give you insight into the professional side of design and construction — the side most people are never exposed to until they are already in the middle of a project.

Inside these guides, you’ll learn:

- *How projects should be structured*
- *How to make better decisions earlier*
- *How to avoid costly mistakes*
- *How materials and finishes actually perform*
- *How to approach your project strategically rather than emotionally*

Most importantly, these resources are designed to help you move through your project with confidence and clarity — whether you are renovating, building, furnishing, or simply refining your space.

The goal is not perfection.

The goal is a space that feels considered, cohesive, practical, and reflective of the way you actually live.

Spencer





THE RENO VATORS

PLAYBOOK

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO
GETTING YOUR PROJECT RIGHT

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01 WHY MOST PROJECTS GO WRONG

They fail because of poor sequencing, delayed decisions, and a lack of clear direction. Most projects do not fail because of poor taste.

One of the most common issues in residential projects is that people begin selecting finishes before the foundations of the design have been resolved. They choose tiles before understanding layout. They select tapware before considering cabinetry. They begin construction before finalising joinery.

The result is usually:

- Budget blowouts
- Delays
- Rework
- Inconsistent outcomes
- Decision fatigue

Construction is a linear process. Each stage impacts the next. Once something is built, every revision becomes more expensive and more difficult to implement.

This is why professional planning matters.

02 THE GOLDEN RULE OF DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

One of the most important principles in the Australian design and construction industry is this:

The earlier you make the right decision, the easier and more cost-effective it is to implement. This is the foundation of a well-run project.

In residential construction, every stage builds upon the one before it. Once framing is complete, services are roughed-in, waterproofing is installed, or joinery is manufactured, even small changes can create a chain reaction of additional costs, delays, and coordination issues.

What many people don't realise is that construction itself is often the easy part.

The complexity lies in the decision-making.

The Australian building industry operates on sequencing. Trades are booked in advance, lead times are often lengthy, and products are frequently ordered weeks — sometimes months — prior to installation. When decisions are delayed or changed late in the process, it impacts not only the immediate scope of work, but every trade and supplier connected to it.

02

For example, changing the location of a kitchen appliance after cabinetry has been manufactured may require:

- Redesign of joinery
- Electrical relocation
- Stone re-measuring
- Additional labour
- Delays to installation schedules
- Re-coordination between trades

What appears to be a “small adjustment” can quickly become a significant variation.

This is why experienced designers and builders place such strong emphasis on planning and early resolution. Professional projects are not approached reactively. They are resolved strategically before construction progresses too far.

This includes:

- Finalising layouts early
- Resolving joinery functionality before manufacture
- Confirming appliance specifications prior to services rough-in
- Coordinating lighting with ceiling plans and cabinetry
- Locking in material selections before procurement deadlines

The more clarity established upfront, the smoother the project becomes during construction.

02

This is particularly important in the current Australian construction climate, where:

- Material costs fluctuate
- Supplier lead times can shift unexpectedly
- Trades are in high demand
- Variations are expensive
- Delays can impact multiple stages of the build

A well-planned project reduces:

- Cost blowouts
- Delays
- Decision fatigue
- On-site confusion
- Rework

It also creates a far more cohesive outcome overall. One of the biggest misconceptions people have is assuming that engaging a designer is purely about aesthetics. In reality, one of the greatest values an experienced designer brings is the ability to identify potential issues before they happen, streamline decision-making, and ensure all elements of a project are working cohesively together — both visually and practically.

Without that level of understanding, many decisions are made in isolation rather than as part of a larger system — which is often where inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and expensive mistakes begin.

02

Working alongside a designer — even in a consultancy capacity — allows decisions to be made earlier, faster, and with greater confidence. It helps create alignment between design intent, functionality, and construction practicality while significantly reducing the overwhelm that many clients experience throughout the process.

This is where a structured consultancy approach can become incredibly valuable.

Rather than committing to a traditional full-service design engagement costing tens of thousands of dollars, clients are able to access high-level strategic guidance at the stages where it matters most — allowing them to move through their project with significantly more clarity and efficiency.

At its core, good design is not just about how something looks.

It is about how well it has been considered before construction even begins.

03 THE CORRECT ORDER OF DECISIONS

One of the biggest misconceptions in design is that all decisions can happen simultaneously.

They cannot.

Professional projects follow a sequence.

1. Layout & Spatial Planning

Everything begins here.

Layout determines:

- Circulation
- Furniture placement
- Spatial flow
- Functional zoning
- Overall usability



Without a resolved layout, no finish or styling decision can compensate for a poorly functioning space.

Key Considerations:

- *Walkways should ideally remain between 900–1200mm*
- *Kitchen work zones should feel efficient and connected*
- *Furniture should be considered early*
- *Doors and windows should support circulation, not interrupt it*

03

2. Designing for Lifestyle, Culture & Energy Flow

A well-designed home should not only look good, it should feel aligned with the way you live. One of the biggest mistakes in residential design is creating spaces based purely on trends rather than considering the people actually living within them.

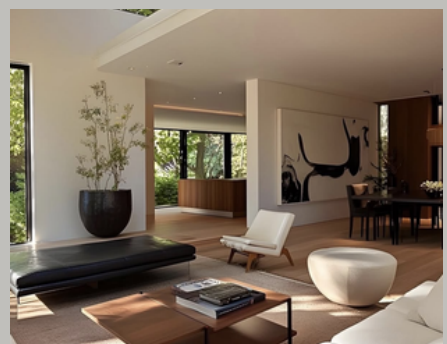
Good design is deeply personal. It should reflect - how you move through your home, how you rest, how you play and how you function day to day.

This becomes even more important when cultural practices, family dynamics, and lifestyle habits are considered.

For example:

- some families prioritise large communal spaces centred around entertaining and shared meals,
- others value separation, privacy, and quieter zones,

These considerations should influence planning from the very beginning and not be treated as afterthoughts. A home that is technically beautiful but does not support the way you naturally live will always feel unresolved.



03

Professional Insight

How a space feels to move through is just as important as how it looks. People naturally respond to flow, balance, light, and spatial harmony, which is why principles associated with Feng Shui remain relevant in modern design. When approached thoughtfully, Feng Shui encourages better circulation, stronger connection between spaces, and a calmer, more intuitive home environment.

Simple decisions such as maintaining clear walkways, creating a welcoming entry, and positioning furniture to support ease of movement can significantly improve how a space functions and feels day to day.

03

3. Joinery & Built Form

Once layout is resolved, joinery can be developed.

This includes:

- Kitchens
- Wardrobes
- Vanities
- Storage systems
- Built-in cabinetry

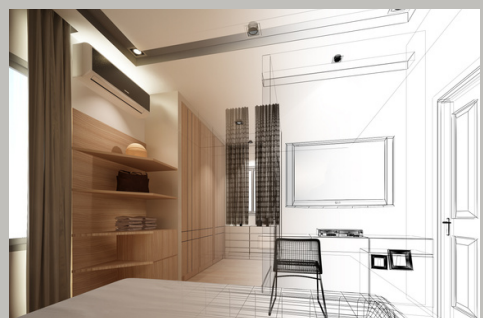
Joinery must balance:

- Functionality
- Proportion
- Appliance integration
- Storage efficiency
- Visual consistency
- Comply with Australian Standards

Professional Insight:

The internal functionality of joinery is often more important than the external appearance.

A beautiful kitchen that functions poorly will quickly become frustrating to use.



03

4. Services Coordination

Once layout and joinery are confirmed, services can be coordinated.

This includes:

- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Lighting
- Mechanical systems

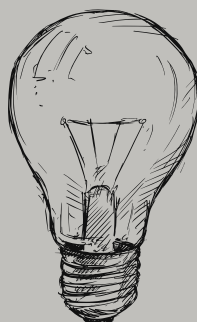
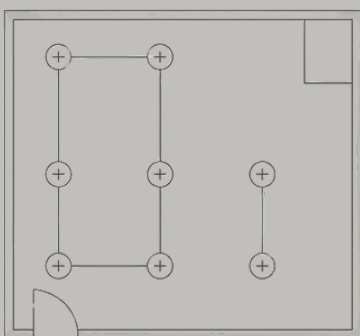
These elements should never be resolved independently from the design.

Example:

Lighting placement must align with:

- Joinery
- Ceiling design
- Furniture positioning

Otherwise, even expensive fittings can feel poorly considered.



03

Professional Insight:

Services coordination is one of the most technically important stages of any project, yet it is often underestimated until construction is underway.

Lighting in particular should never be treated as an afterthought. Well-resolved lighting enhances functionality, highlights materials, supports mood, and significantly influences how a space is experienced.

Poorly coordinated lighting, power placement, or plumbing locations can compromise both the practicality and overall design outcome of a space, often resulting in visible inconsistencies, inefficient layouts, and costly rectification works once construction has commenced.

03

5. Materials & Finishes

Material selection should be informed by:

- Spatial layout
- Lighting conditions
- Functional requirements

At this stage, decisions are made on:

- Hard finishes (tiles, flooring, stone)
- Soft finishes (paint, cabinetry)
- Fixtures (tapware, hardware)



A common mistake is selecting materials in isolation. Instead, they should be considered as part of a cohesive palette, ensuring consistency in undertones, textures, and overall composition.

Professional Insight:

Materials and finishes sit 5th in the decision-making process because they should respond to the architecture and functionality of the space, not dictate it. One of the most common mistakes in residential design is selecting finishes too early, before layout, joinery, lighting, and spatial planning have been properly resolved.

While materials contribute significantly to the visual outcome, they cannot compensate for poor planning or functionality. A well-designed space should feel cohesive because the finishes support the design direction - not because the entire project was built around material selections. Materials should be selected strategically, not emotionally.

03

6. Styling & Furnishing

This is the final layer and should enhance, not compensate for, the design.

This includes:

- Furniture
- Soft furnishings
- Decorative elements

When the earlier stages are resolved correctly, this phase becomes seamless.

Professional Insight

One of the most common mistakes in residential projects is designing an entire room around a single piece of furniture or feature item too early in the process, such as a sofa, dining table, or statement cabinet. While furnishings are important, they should respond to the architecture, layout, and functionality of the space rather than dictate them. Selecting furniture before spatial planning and built elements are resolved can compromise circulation, proportions, and overall cohesion. Furnishings sit last in the sequence because they are intended to complement and refine an already well-resolved space, not define it from the beginning.



04 UNDERSTANDING PROJECT TIMELINES

Every successful project follows a structured timeline.

Stage 1: Concept & Planning

This is where the most important decisions are made. It is also the stage where changes are easiest and most cost-effective.

Stage 2: Documentation

Drawings are prepared for construction. Accuracy at this stage reduces ambiguity on site.

Stage 3: Selections & Procurement

All finishes and fixtures should ideally be finalised before construction progresses too far. Late selections often delay trades and procurement.

Stage 4: Construction

Execution begins. Changes become significantly more expensive at this stage.

Stage 5: Completion & Styling

Final installation, furniture, and styling complete the project.

05 WHAT CAUSES BUDGET BLOWOUTS

Budget issues are rarely caused by one major problem. They are usually the result of multiple smaller inefficiencies.

Late Changes

One of the most expensive things you can do during construction is change your mind late. Late changes cause budget blowouts because they often require rework, additional labour, revised materials, and disruptions to trades and construction sequencing that have already been coordinated and scheduled.

Lack of Planning

Without a clear plan, projects become reactive. Reactive projects cost more. Lack of planning causes budget blowouts because unresolved decisions and poor sequencing often lead to rework, delays, rushed selections, and costly changes during construction.

Over-Customisation

Over-customisation increases costs because bespoke solutions typically require additional design time, specialised labour, custom manufacturing, and more complex coordination. Not every element needs to be custom. Understanding where to invest is key.

Poor Sequencing

Poor sequencing causes budget blowouts because decisions made in the wrong order often lead to rework, delays, duplicated labour, material wastage, and costly changes once construction is already underway.

06 THE VALUE OF PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

Working alongside a designer in a consultancy capacity allows you to:

- Resolve decisions earlier
- Avoid common mistakes
- Streamline the process
- Move through the project with clarity

This creates many of the benefits of professional design guidance without committing to a full-service design process costing tens of thousands of dollars.

Good design is not accidental.

It is the result of:

- Structure
- Sequencing
- Clarity
- Attention to detail

When these elements align, projects become significantly more efficient and the final outcome reflects it.



THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

PROJECT PLANNING + DIRECTION CHECKLIST

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Type:

.....

Project Address:

.....

Builder / Architect / Designer:

.....

Target Construction Start Date:

.....

Estimated Budget Range:

.....



THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

PROJECT PLANNING + DIRECTION CHECKLIST

STAGE 1 — PROJECT CLARITY

- ☐ Define project goals
- ☐ Define non-negotiables
- ☐ Define ideal aesthetic direction
- ☐ Create rough budget allocation
- ☐ Identify priority spaces
- ☐ Consider future lifestyle needs
- ☐ Determine realistic timeline expectations

NOTES:



THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

PROJECT PLANNING + DIRECTION CHECKLIST

STAGE 2 — LAYOUT & PLANNING

- ☐ Review overall floor plan
- ☐ Confirm circulation and walkways
- ☐ Confirm room functionality
- ☐ Review furniture layouts
- ☐ Confirm kitchen layout
- ☐ Confirm bathroom layouts
- ☐ Confirm laundry layouts
- ☐ Confirm storage requirements
- ☐ Layout designed to support lifestyle functionality, movement, and everyday living patterns
- ☐ Spatial flow, zoning, and cultural living preferences considered within overall planning direction

NOTES:



THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

PROJECT PLANNING + DIRECTION CHECKLIST

STAGE 3 — CONSULTANTS & TRADES

- ☐ Builder selected
- ☐ Architect / building designer confirmed
- ☐ Interior designer engaged (if applicable)
- ☐ Engineer confirmed (if required)
- ☐ Cabinetmaker shortlisted
- ☐ Key suppliers researched

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR BUILDER / TEAM

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



THE RENOVATOR'S PLAYBOOK

PROJECT PLANNING + DIRECTION CHECKLIST

STAGE 4 — PRE-CONSTRUCTION DECISIONS

- ☐ Appliances selected
- ☐ Plumbing fixtures selected
- ☐ Lighting direction confirmed
- ☐ Door direction confirmed
- ☐ Window direction confirmed
- ☐ Flooring direction confirmed
- ☐ Joinery concept confirmed
- ☐ Window furnishings direction confirmed
- ☐ Material palette started

KEY RISKS / CONCERNS:

FINAL REVIEW

- ☐ Project direction feels cohesive
- ☐ Timeline is realistic
- ☐ Budget allowances considered
- ☐ Major decisions made before construction