

## Five Common Mistakes When Planning Your Building or Conversion Project



Many home and building owners find themselves faced with the awkward decision of whether to move or improve. They may have a problem caused by a lack of space or they just wish to maximise the value of their property.

There certainly appears to have been a steady increase in the presence of home, property and design information across all of the media for many years now and it is a trend that shows little sign of stopping .

I've been involved with a wide range of design projects over the years from furniture and exhibitions through to multi million pound housing developments and so when I hear of yet another 'Building Site Nightmare' story I often think how many of the problems those clients encountered might have been avoided.

Instead what begins as an oversight or a niggle sometimes escalates into full blown conflict, which I'm sure you'll agree, is far better avoided wherever possible.

While I often work with experienced clients, an equal part of my own work is in helping individual householders that are considering a major refurbishment or construction project of their own buildings for the first time.

So although there are plenty of these potential pitfalls to avoid, what follows here are just 5 of the most common and general mistakes I come across, offered here in the hope it might just save some of your precious time, energy and money.



**Ragozzino Architects**

[mail@ragozzinoarchitects.com](mailto:mail@ragozzinoarchitects.com) / [ragozzinoarchitects.com](http://ragozzinoarchitects.com)

0207 100 3666 / 0845 123 3940

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### 1. Relying on magazines and TV programmes for factual information.

Now don't get me wrong, there are some excellent titles available, that are fantastic sources of inspiration but do remember these aren't just consumer interest, they are also entertainment or trade press (advertising space). So they're not always the best place to gain accurate advice, particular to your own situation, that is your house...in your postode. I can't stress this enough. Obtain some real qualified advice.



### 2. Accepting the advice or service of the nearest (cheapest) individual to hand.

This is true for both architects and contractors, the key words above being 'nearest' and 'cheapest' because it will either limit you to the extent of their knowledge, or what they want you to know.

Most of us including me prefer a personal recommendation (I'm quite happy to acknowledge this, as the majority of our work is gained this way.)

Precisely because there is so much information available to you out there, why not verify the advice being offered.

When it comes to professional advisers and service providers though, you really want to know that they are at least members of a professional association that ascribes to minimum standards, provide references and carry some form of insurance for their work.



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## 3. Not addressing unrealistic expectations

There is no denying, construction work is difficult to be around. It's noisy, messy and expensive. Quotations almost always exclude VAT. If you are just moving a doorway or knocking down a wall, you can probably work with a reputable builder, (not forgetting the Building Regulations, though in which case you're probably not looking for an architect!). If on the other hand you are 'planning a project' then you really ought to be clear on whether your aspirations match your budget. If not then you must cut your cloth accordingly. Otherwise, buy furniture, decorate or take a break but please don't put yourself through the time and frustration of building work, particularly if you intend on living onsite during the work. Always allow an adequate contingency sum, otherwise the three legged beast of time, cost and quality will start to stumble over the rocky ground of the design and building processes. It is usually a case of 'You get what you pay for'.

The final two mistakes come under the umbrella of Failing to understand how bespoke 'building arrangements and processes' are... and because that might sound a bit woolly I've broken it down into two separate 'mistakes'.

## 4. Time

I've lost count of the initial conversations where a householder has said to me "We're thinking of having it done by the summer". The facetious response (which of course I've never actually used!) is... "Ok then, which summer is that...?"

I promise there is no agenda and nothing dogmatic here, just the plain and simple facts of ordinary lives but for anyone who is serious about undertaking a project to transform a building (requiring even the most straightforward permissions) it is usually well into a new calendar year before they are able to enjoy the fruits of their efforts.

Depending on your perspective, this is not always a bad thing. It can be a slow and at times frustrating experience, particularly if you are remaining in the building throughout but it can also change your life for the better and be a terrific investment into the bargain, which almost always makes it worthwhile.



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## 5. Not acknowledging that Building Construction is 'different'

Construction is not like any other type of transaction, it even has it's own branch of law and because it usually involves figures that are in excess of our day to day expenses, in the order of larger transactions such as property and cars. It's not just the danger of viewing all these ordinary tasks through the same perspective as your 'everyday figures' but in failing to acknowledge the impact that time and variations/ changes WILL have on any given building project. For example, the weather or ground conditions to name just two, often have real financial consequences ...And the law recognises this, so they must be accommodated in your calculations.

It really is sensible to enter a project with permissions in place, funding arranged and a realistic time frame in mind. Trusted advisers, a recommended contractor and a system for decision making and cost control agreed- (not quite the same as immovable) so you are able to proceed with the goal of transforming your place into all that you had imagined ...and more.

You see, we've all become so used to hearing the horror stories portrayed in the media that it is easy to forget that creating new space is almost always a sound investment.

So if you are thinking about undertaking the sort of project described here, I hope these insights will help you feel confident about taking the next step towards transforming your own house or building.

Why not make a start by contacting a few people or having a conversation or two.

...And yes, this is the same space as pages 1+2



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