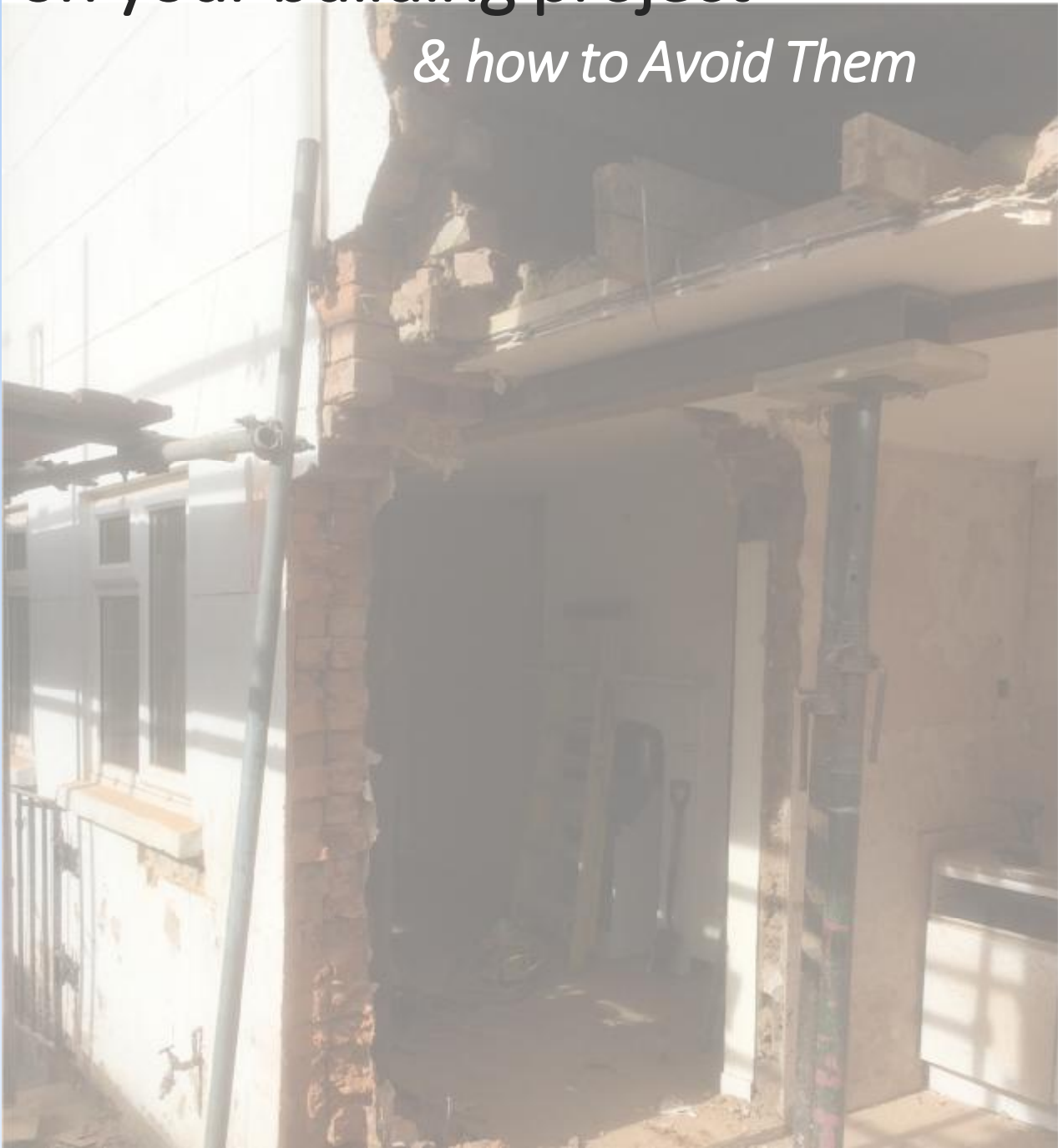




VOID :
ARCHITECT

7 pitfalls waiting for you on your building project

& how to Avoid Them



Foreword

Congratulations!

Chances are that since you are reading this you are thinking about doing some work on your own house, or buying a new (or old) one that you think needs work, or in the fortunate position of building a new house.

New houses have their own set of concerns and problems, but they offer you huge scope and potential. But far more often we are faced with work to an existing house, and faced with more restrictions and compromises. Historic homes preserve a sense of place and the feeling of home; they often have plenty of space but frequently need refitting to make them work for the demands of modern family living. Newer homes may often be warmer and dryer, but we often need more space or to make better use of the space we have.

And I'm assuming that you are even looking at a house; you might not be thinking about houses at all – you might be needing office space or a shop refit, a gallery, studio or workshop. The possibilities are (almost) endless, and it's still worth reading on; much of this booklet applies just as well to all building projects.

This booklet outlines the 7 Mistakes clients often make before they even start planning. I trust that once you have read through this booklet and addressed those mistakes with respect to your own project, you can feel confident that you are on the path to achieving a truly successful outcome upon completion.

Enjoy!

Introduction

Make sure you do the research before you start digging.

New houses, alterations, shop refits, offices, listed buildings – however you break it down there are a lot of starting points that might have brought you to this point, and at a quick glance they might all look very different. However, the universal link is the struggle to make them best suit our changing needs.

The challenge? How to do this right. And that starts with understanding the real problem.

Building from scratch is a bit like rocket science – everything has to come together, on time and in the right place, for it to work properly. Renovations and alterations are messier – you open it up, try to keep vital bits working uninterrupted, remember what went where and make sure it gets stitched back together neatly and in the right place at the end. So more like surgery.

So who do you turn to? The scientist? The surgeon? Your cousin? Someone who's watched *Grand Designs*?

As anyone who's seen that knows, the stories of people coming unstuck, trying to save money by skipping professional design or management are all too familiar. We've seen the lacklustre results, or the costs in time, money and effort to put it right, all rather than getting it right to start with.

Building projects of whatever type are a big financial, emotional and time consuming investment. It pays to do the research before starting. From many years experience with many clients I have seen the pitfalls summarised in this booklet repeatedly.

But once you are aware of them you can avoid falling into them before you start.

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1 - Are you sure?

Building work is a big commitment – is it simply better to move?

Living in the midst of a major renovation can be one of the most stressful things you can do. It pays to be prepared and organise your surroundings so that you are better able to cope with the building process once it gets underway.

We all know the term 'my house is my castle'. Well, imagine your castle being invaded by foreign knights – though hopefully your occupying force will be a lot more polite, and clean up after themselves at least some of the time. But however considerate your builders may be, the reality is that you will have a lot to deal with.

Consider your belongings – you will want your valuables safely out of the way, and it's a good time for a clear out. Building needs space, and time spent moving your belongings around is a risk of damage and a loss of building work.

Be realistic about your own ability to cope: climbing over building equipment, materials stacked in the hallway, cooking on a hot plate, blocked windows and draughts, sleeping on a mattress on the floor. And safety of your family is another point to consider; it may not be safe to have a two year old crawling around.

The process can be very stressful for some children, they feel insecure as the thing they understand as reliable and constant (their home) is undergoing change, though some families can thrive on the excitement.

It may pay to move out for a while to keep your sanity and create a bit of distance between yourself and your renovation project, and it may also help to speed up the job. Keeping you supplied with running water and power, and cleaning up daily all takes time that could be spent on the job.

2 – location – *why here?*

Is this where we want to be?

So you can face the upheaval and have decided that the disruption is worth it. But is this your best option?

Consider your location before you decide to renovate. Are you in the right location? Should you be across the street? A different street? You can't move the mountain, but you could move to the other side of the mountain to get better sun, be closer to the school your kids go to, maybe just closer to your favourite cafe. It may seem like trivial things but what we are trying to successfully create is an overall enjoyment of your whole life. To that end your home and ultimately the location of it is a huge factor in achieving this.

A lot of older homes or businesses have the best locations, the most established and biggest gardens, and local infrastructure. Lets face it, they were there first, and whether you want to renovate, extend or rebuild they can often have the best potential.

3 - Value – *is it worth it?*

There are lots of ways to assess value. Many are well established and can be very visible, some are more intangible. In looking at location we are already thinking of value - the value inherent in a property's location.

There's also the relationship of the actual property to it's location – how it fits on the site, it's relation to its neighbours. This one point is the root cause of 90% of disputes with neighbours and planning; understanding their point of view will make for a smooth process and an easy life. But it will also help to maximise the value of your project; simply filling a site with building is unlikely to do this.

And there's the value inherent in the existing property. This is easiest to see in a grand, historic, listed building, where it is easy to see that any work needs to be responsive to it. Often this will need to match in with the existing, using appropriate materials or techniques, but it can also often mean a creative, bold and new approach. It's also equally true of even the most modest and unfashionable property; they will all have their good points that you will need to identify and work with.

Sometimes this can be hard; fashions change and it can often be hard to see the appeal. But fighting it, imposing a radical change of direction, is likely to end in disappointment.

And then there's the more personal side to value.





4 – Emotion

How do you want your new house to feel?

I get it, we're British and don't really like to think about it. But basically if you do not want to talk about the emotive response you wish to create in your building, you may be wasting your time.

One of the great but often unmentioned causes of both happiness and misery is the quality of our environment: the kinds of walls, chairs, buildings and streets that surround us. What is a beautiful building? What is home? What emotions would you like to feel as you arrive at and move through your house?

Talk to your architect. Not just about floor areas, what the neighbours have built or local values. What do you like? How do you want to use your space? What things have you seen that excite you? In short, what emotional response you would like to get out of your building?

In general we should pay more attention to the psychological consequences of design when renovating, as it is the emotive side of architecture which will affect the lives, the happiness and ultimately the wellbeing of the people living in the homes created. Your architect can help make the most of your building's location, it's views and the light, but they don't know you. Yet.

Emotion should be part of every design brief and rate just as highly as the more tangible aspects of building and renovating.

5 – The Practical details

– what do you want in it?

Sort the basics, then do the budget

Building or renovating a home is a daunting task, and there is always so much to do and so many decisions to make. This is just as true for any building project, and whilst there may be other pressures in addition – public access, continuity of business or complex plant installations – the principle remains the same.

Taken all together it is easy to be overwhelmed by these. However, your basic requirements such as heating, cooling, electrical and security systems are areas you cannot afford to overlook. They need to be considered and implemented into the brief from a very early stage in order to avoid additional expense, frustration and time delays once works starts on site.

Are there other crucial things you want or need to use? What heating system? Any particular lighting systems or features? Do you plan to install inter-connected sound systems, telecoms or data networks? Any particular flooring?

They all take up room or affect other elements, and the space required must be worked into the early concept stages of your design, to make sure it will all fit. It is often difficult to know about all the services required, but a good architect will be able to talk you through the requirements.

And of course they all cost money, which brings us to.....

6 – What's your budget?

is it realistic?

It pays to be honest right from the start with both yourself and your architect. How much do you want to spend? If you are not clear on the amount you want to invest, it can be very tricky for your architect to guess. You may be flexible depending on the nature of the project and if there is a range of possible outcomes; if so then everyone needs to know where the limits are. Be upfront, you are all on the same team.

Be clear with your architect whether your budget is the construction budget or your overall budget for the whole renovation including consultant fees, consent fees, furnishing and landscaping. Remember VAT – building works tend to be quoted without it. And at 20% it can make quite a difference to costs; sometimes it can make the difference between renovation and alterations or demolition and rebuilding.

Be up front, you are all on the same team.



7 – How to hire an architect?

What should you expect from an architect? Do you even need one?

Many people are quite vague as to exactly what it is that an architect does, and yet choosing the right architect is a vital first step. Working with an architect you can communicate with and who shares your vision will ensure that your building project is everything you dreamed it would be.

This checklist is a great beginning to the conversation:

1. What sets this architect apart from the rest?

Are they specialists? Do they have a good track record? Do you like the work they have previously done?

2. Are they interested in your project?

You might need a specialist, or someone with wide experience and a fresh eye. Either way, do they share your enthusiasm?

3. Who from the firm will you be dealing with?

Big firms chase big projects; you may end up dealing with 3 or 4 architects or assistants with varying understanding.

4. What services does the architect provide during construction? How are fees established? What happens if the scope of the project changes?

There must be a clear concise line of communication on establishment of fees between the architect and the client.

5. What does the architect see as the important issues and challenges in your project?

Make sure they do any research and identify potential issues and details to carry through to the brief.

6. How do they approach setting the brief, scope and budget?

The most important part of the whole process is getting the right brief established as soon as possible.

7. How does the architect explain the different stages of the project?

What is required in terms of consents, heritage requirements, engineering and surveying?

8. How do they organise the process of getting the project completed? How long will it take? How disruptive is it?

The architect is your guide; their ability and willingness to take you through the process will affect your ability to enjoy it and feel in control.

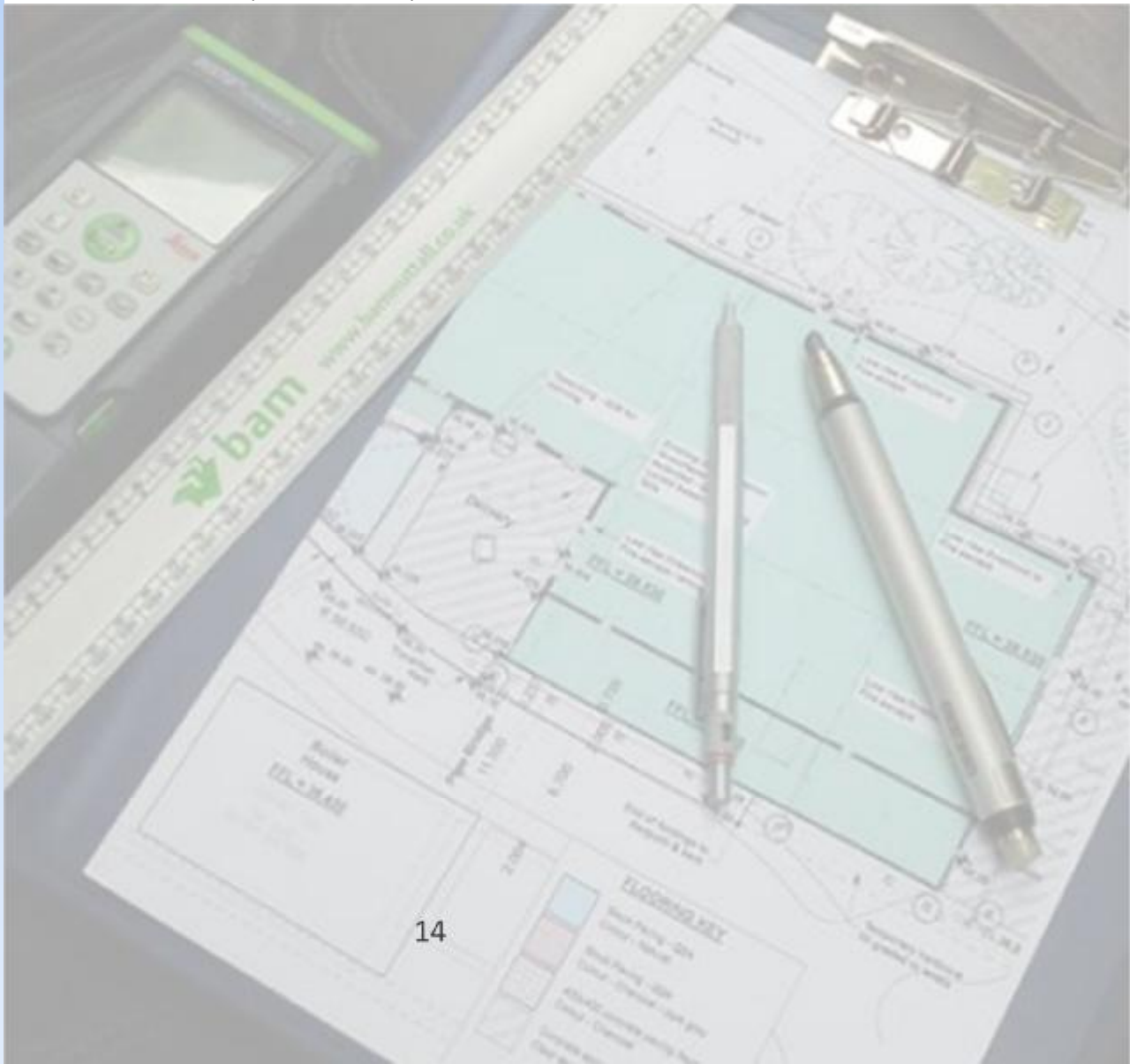
9. Does the architect provide testimonials or references?

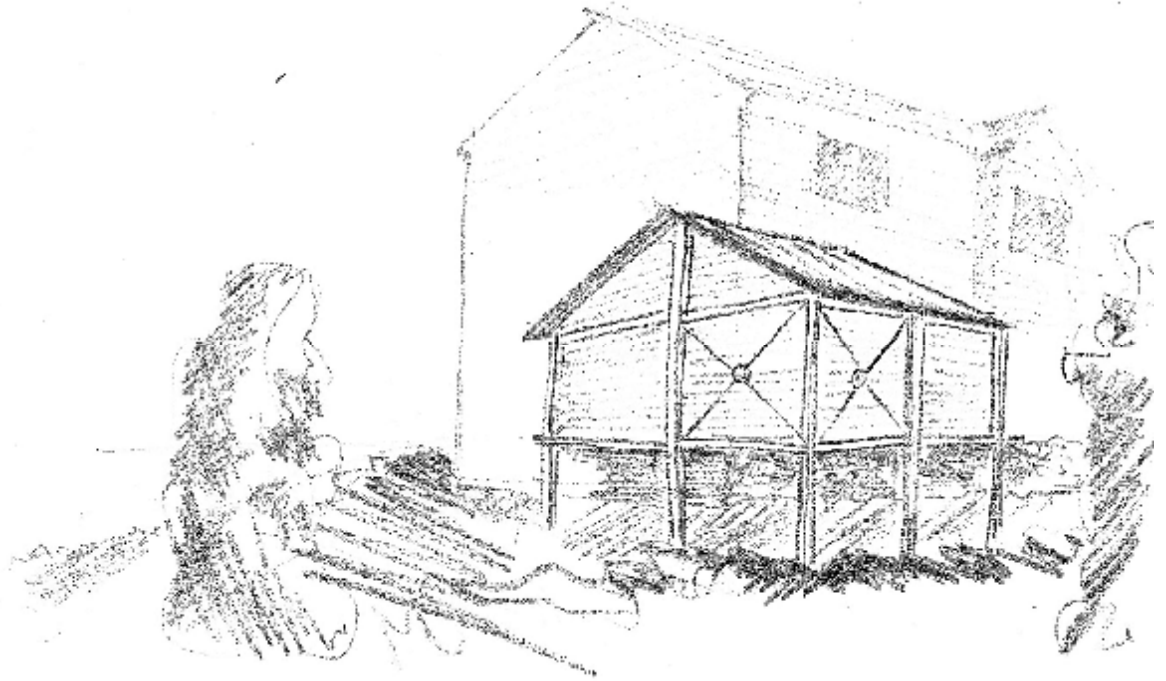
Can you talk to other clients or see similar projects.

What Next?

When you've decided you want to go ahead.....

- Decide when you'd like to make a start – or when you'd like to be finished – or both!
- Gather your plans and ideas – you don't have to use them, but our worksheets might help
- Contact us for an initial briefing – we won't give you any magic solutions at this stage, but we can:
 - Help to crystallise your plans and ideas;
 - Assess their practicality and feasibility;
 - Start to look at a way forward.
- And this is also an opportunity for you to see if we share and can help to deliver your vision.





About us

New name, same service.....Void : Architect is the new name for the architectural work of Void : Projects.

Void : Projects has been working for 30 years across a range of creative fields, embracing theatre, opera, multimedia, art, and architecture.

Peter Ireland has led the architectural side throughout, working across a wide range of building types on some very diverse, acclaimed and award winning projects.





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