



# Your Custom Dream Home Building Guide

A complete guide for the Ghanaian Diasporan

## Foreword

Welcome!

Since you are sitting with this booklet, I believe you live in Ghana or you are Ghanaian living in the diaspora and you have started to dream about the design of your new, custom home back here in Ghana.

Do you know what to do to get the best or how to start the planning process? Or do you want to avoid common pitfalls in new construction, including budget overruns, low quality construction or general unpredictability?

This guide puts together all the necessary information that you would require for creating a successful stress-free custom dream home in Ghana - from how you prepare to the final building completion and move-in.

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I trust that once you have read through this booklet and addressed the necessary things with regards to your own project, you can feel confident that you are on the path to a truly compatible, stylistically resonant home upon completion.

- *epignotects-AD*

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## Getting Started

Creating your customized dream home can and should be really exciting and soul fulfilling venture. However, too often we hear different unexpected stories of people (particularly of those living in the diaspora) infuriated while they embarked on such projects back home in Ghana.

I prepared this guide in response to the difficulties people face in the design and construction process for their home; and organizing an effective team for a successful soul fulfilling project back home in Ghana.

Whether you are remodeling the kitchen, creating your dream home, or planning a commercial or other building, working with a licensed architect can save you time and give you value for money by making your new spaces more functional, comfortable, efficient, and environmentally responsible.

This process of engaging the architect and his team could seem like a complex and frightening roadblock for those who haven't been through it before. This book would take you through time-tested method for starting and completing the very best buildings back in Ghana, even while living in the diaspora.

As you begin working with a licensed architect, or consider hiring one, it is helpful to know where you are and where it will take you. The architectural design process consists of five phases; and the architect will orient you during each phase, and work with you to get the most value from each stage of the process.

- Phase 1: Originate
- Phase 2: Focus
- Phase 3: Design
- Phase 4: Build
- Phase 5: Occupy



## Phase 1: Originate

This first phase starts with the client even before he meets anybody else. It includes all of the discussions, thought, and exploration that lead to the moment when you realize you need to build something new.

A well-thought-out design brief is the foundation for a successful project. It would help the architect understand your expectations, preferences, wants, needs, aspirations and lifestyle. If your expectations are not clearly outlined and understood by all parties, you run the risk of spending unnecessary money, project complications, and costly delays. In outlining your brief, you need to consider the following:

### Your Site:

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Do you have a site? Or will this be a subject of discussion with the architect?

- **First and foremost, ensure you have secured land** from the authorized owner, and obtained appropriate titles and it duly registered with proper documentation from the Ghana Lands Commission.
- **Scrutinize your site and get a real feel for it.** Where are the views you want to enjoy every day and those you want to exclude: houses, buildings, trees you may or may not want to see? Which parts of the site are most/least noisy? Does the site slope?
- **Put all the information you have about your site in a file** to share with your architect These should include Site Plan A – (from Lands Registry to be used to obtain Building Permit), Site Plan B (geographical survey to ascertain exact extent of site on ground for actual construction), Topographical survey of site (to ascertain exact terrain conditions with regards to gradients of slopes)
- In case of remodeling of an existing building, an exact measured drawing of existing building would be required.

## Spaces – (Indoor & Outdoor):

A good design can transform the way that we live.

Think hard about your family's current and future

needs. Listing your requirements will help both you and your architect quickly understand your priorities.



### ➤ Indoor:

How many people live in the house? How old are they? Who does what, where? Consider the number of floors, rooms and other spaces and describe their use. Make a list of who needs rooms to sleep, work and relax in. Is your lifestyle formal, casual, relaxed or active? Do you need spaces to entertain at home – indoor and outdoor? List any special requirements you have, e.g. extra storage areas, garage space, built in furniture/shelving, home office.

### ➤ Outdoor

What do you want to do outdoors? Entertain? Relax? Play? Grow enough vegetables to be self-sufficient? Do you want a high or low maintenance scheme? What features are important to you? Think of your external areas as outdoor rooms, and consider privacy and connections between spaces.

## Design Mood and Feeling:

This is going to be your home, where you may have your family and other loved ones, and you're going to have all your family memories.

- **Think about the 'feel' of your project**, do you want it to be bold, low-key, traditional, minimalist, contemporary or organic? Think about your feelings e.g. what is your favorite part of the house and at which time of day? Do you like to enjoy a glass of juice on the terrace? Describe spaces, design features and styles that appeal to you and those that do not.

- Create a 'mood board' – assemble and share your ideas using photographs, magazine clippings and anything else that can help your architect understand who you are, how you live and what you want from your project.
- **Sketch out your thoughts** (if you can), but don't get too wedded to them. If it's a new house, let your imagination flow, but be prepared for your architect to suggest other approaches. That is, after all, why you are hiring one!
- **List materials you like and dislike**, but be aware that your budget will be a determining factor in your final choice. Do you have any specific wall, ceiling and floor finishes in mind? Do you like render, timber cladding or stone finish? Do you prefer timber windows or aluminum? Much will depend on the style of building, but there are choices to be made that will determine how much you spend upfront, and how much you spend on maintenance in the longer term.



### Sustainability and Energy Efficiency:

Regulation and rising energy costs are making sustainable 'green' design an essential consideration rather than a 'nice to have'. There are lots of renewable energy solutions - solar panels, green roof, rainwater harvesting to name but a few. Although these add costs upfront, they can save you money in the longer-term. Much will depend on your budget and how long you plan to live in the building after the work has been done. Your architect will know all about these and will discuss with you how 'green' you want to and can be.

### Timetable:

Think about and share with your architect key target dates that are important to you. When do you want to start and finish the project? Bear in mind that, as a rule of thumb, it takes at least 3-6 months to agree the design, obtain planning permission and prepare construction drawings before building work can commence. You are less likely to be disappointed if you allow at least 6-12 months for work on existing buildings and about 18 months for new buildings.

### Budget:

Have an idea how much you are willing to spend on your project and your architect can design to fit within your budget. We have prepared several typical cost plans for different types of project and these are available on request.







## Phase 2: Focus

Here you define the project - its scope, features, purpose, and functionality. This is the time to select an architect, and establish an owner-architect agreement. Together with your architect, you explore your project's needs; and you develop and refine a "vision" for the project. You will identify the services you need from your architect, and the design team will begin to form a cohesive relationship and a shared concept for the final building.

### Selecting Your Architect:

Every architecture firm brings its own combination of skills, expertise, interests, and values to its projects. The challenge is to find the one that aligns most closely with your project's needs.

Some of the most frequently asked questions regarding architect selection include:

➤ **When should I bring the architect into the picture?**

As early as possible. Architects can help you define your project in every respect and may also do site studies, assist in securing planning and zoning approvals, and provide a variety of other predesign services.

➤ **How do I find suitable firms to contact?**

If there are projects that you have admired—whether similar to your own or not—find out who designed them. The internet could also be a good source to check out architects in Ghana and know what they do and you could talk to a few. Talk to individuals who have developed similar facilities and ask who they worked with.

### ➤ **Why are formal interviews desirable?**

An interview addresses one issue that cannot be covered in brochures: the chemistry between you and the architect. One obvious exception is when you already have a good relationship with an architect.

### ➤ **Should I expect a firm to deliver all the services necessary to complete the project?**

Not necessarily. You may have some expertise in the design and construction and may be capable of undertaking some tasks yourself. Discussion with your architect will establish who will coordinate or supply other services.

**Note:** A good architect will listen closely to your answers, help you solidify your goals and desires, and translate them into an effective building. Look for a good listener, and you would find a good architect.

### **Selection Is a Mutual Process:**

The most thoughtful architects are as careful in selecting their clients as owners are in selecting architects. Tell the architect what you know and what you expect. Be frank; ask for an explanation of anything you do not understand. The more you put on the table at the outset, the better the chances are for a successful project.

As client and architect jointly evaluate alternative approaches to the project's direction, priorities are clarified, and new possibilities emerge.



## Negotiating the Agreement:

The formal agreement between you and your architect

is an opportunity to ensure that you both envision the same project, requirements, and expectations.

➤ **Identify key team members and describe project tasks for each one.**

You and your architect should clarify the key team members- administrative, design, and construction tasks- essential to successfully completing the project. Also, the services required and who will be responsible for each of them.

➤ **Identify your schedule requirements**

Place all tasks on a time line, estimating duration for each, and identify those that, if delayed, will postpone completion of your project. Allow enough time to review the architect's submissions, receive any necessary approvals, and make your decisions.

➤ **The Owner-Architect Agreement.**

One thing to remember: As a provider of professional services, an architect is required to perform to a professional standard. Courts recognize this, and so too must responsible clients.

## Figuring out the Architect's Fees

The fee an architect receives depends on the types and levels of services provided, and the formal agreement you develop jointly with your architect. There are a number of commonly used payment structures, but you have to arrive at the one that is fairest to both client and architect.

Typically, an architect's fee is calculated as a percentage of the project's entire cost. Depending on the services provided by the architect, the rate could range from 4 to 15 percent. At other times, an agreed lump sum between architect and client is used.



However, when you first start the design process for your project, it is difficult, if not impossible to accurately determine the final project cost. During this initial time period the architect may charge a retainer which would be on account.

Plan your project's costs to include the construction budget as well as architect /consultants' fees.





## Phase 3: Design

Once the requirements of the project are determined, the design phase begins. Your architect gives shape to your vision through drawings and written specifications. It is important to establish a clear decision-making process with your architect during this phase. The design phase ends when you agree to the plans that will guide construction.

### Stages in Design:

#### ➤ Schematic Design stage

Architect develops study drawings, or documents that illustrate the concepts of the design and include options for spatial relationships, scale, and form for the owner to review.

Deliverables: site plan, concept design, plans and elevations and 3D renderings.

#### ➤ Design development stage

Refining of schematic drawings. It would include detailing in drawings that often specify design elements such as material types.

Deliverables: Refined plans, sections, elevations, 3D drawings and detailing of certain spaces

#### ➤ Construction document stage

Complete Detail design drawings with full dimensions and specification of material. All Drawings printed and endorsed ready for Building Permit Application.

Deliverables: Architectural drawings, Structural drawings, Mechanical drawings, Electrical drawings etc based on project specificity.

## Decision Process

Successful projects are invariably the result of effective management by both client and architect.



Decide who requires what information and whose approval is required at each stage. Keeping close track on the project requires:

➤ **Communication**

What is an effective mode of communication for you especially if you would be based abroad? Would it be by video presentations or by emailing? Or you would choose someone here in Ghana as your representative to take decisions on your behalf?

➤ **Questions**

When you have questions, ask them. Pay particular attention to design submissions at each stage since the work reflected in each submission will be further developed in the next. All questions should be resolved before construction begins. Regular project meetings provide a natural opportunity.

➤ **Documentation**

Require that contacts between architect and client be documented and the results shared with appropriate members of the project team. This system keeps everyone informed of what is being discussed and decided outside of formal meetings and presentations.



## Phase 4: Build

Once you have approved the work, you want it built as designed, and your architect is well positioned to play different roles.

In the past, clients typically developed separate agreements with both architect and contractor. Your architect would be able to help you choose the best contractor for your project. Always get multiple bids on the construction of your project – even if you already have a contractor. This is an industry standard and gives you better leverage at the bargaining table.

### Design-Build

More recently, an option that involves a combination of the two, known as 'Design-Build' has been gaining more and more leverage as clients and architects have started to understand and realize several benefits that this system brings. The architect designs and capitalizes a project, then engages the necessary labor to bring it to completion.

Advantages of the design build system include:

- **Better design through understanding construction**

A Design-Build team is a better alternative to the above because he has the ability to create and design while taking into account, structural and engineering challenges, while having an in depth understanding of the intricacies of construction. The project thereby can move on smoothly without any delays due to difference of opinions amongst professionals. The client emerges a winner in this case, since not only the project is executed in a shorter time frame, but also with integrated and smarter overall problem-solving potential.



➤ **Better construction through understanding design**

In traditional construction delivery system, the architect hands over the design to a contractor or a builder who is then required to read and learn the drawings, interpret the design and build the project.

A Design-Builder however, will already know the project inside out right from the start. The project execution will be fairly straightforward and simple since in most case any potential issues will have been addressed during the design phase itself. Any surprises during the construction are solved relatively easily since the design-builder himself has in-depth knowledge and training for both, the overall design as well as its technicalities.

➤ **Enhanced client communication**

In the traditional system, the owner would first select an architect who will design the project, then the client will usually have to find engineers from different trades, a builder and then coordinate a plan of action. Design-Build system involves having a single firm perform the entire process, starting from design through construction and execution, the client has to deal with a single point of contact for all communication on the project making his own life much easier and hassle free. Also, in case coordination issues or any other technical issue arise, it is the responsibility of the design builder and not that of the owner to tackle them.

➤ **Value based project design and results**

In a Design-Build Project, the design-builder performs a careful balancing act, weighing in design, technical as well as budgeting aspects at all times and thereby provide the owner with best possible solutions. This combination of factors proves beneficial for the owner as he can now rest assured of his project being completed on time, with minimum compromises and headaches and most importantly within budget.



## Next Step....

*Where to from here?*

- Decide you are ready to move ahead
- Gather your plans, ideas, scrapbook and land documentation together
- Call Helena for an initial briefing session.

This session would achieve the following:

- a. Get your ideas from your head onto paper and clarify your goals
- b. Have your ideas and plans assessed based on their practicality
- c. Needs & Options for the project based on the site.
- d. Provide assessment of a general investment for your early draft ideas.

## *About*

### epignotects Architecture & Development

At *epignotects-AD*, we are passionate about designing elegant custom homes. Your customized home is your sanctuary, it is the place where you'll sip that first cup of tea each day as you prepare to take on the world, for most of us it is the largest investment we will make in our life time.

We take this responsibility seriously. We are professional, licensed, Architects and Builders that approach building different than most.

We see each of our clients as partners to create the highest value, beautiful home within the budget in place. We strive to inform, guide and bring clarity to the design and construction process.

Helping you build your customized home is our life work and if we can ever serve you it would be our deep honor to help lay the blueprints or manage the construction for your dreams.

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