

HOME

# makeover

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# Do you need an architect?

By Frits de Vries

*An architect can enhance a home makeover, yet hiring one is a matter of choice*

**M**any questions arise when contemplating a home renovation, one of the first being, “Do I need to hire an architect?” An architect can guide you through the renovation process, but hiring one is a matter of choice, not a requirement of the law for most home renovations. So, why would you choose a registered Architect?

An Architect’s training, like that of a lawyer or doctor,

As these before and after photos of a Delta home renovation attest, and architect’s advice can lead to a superior makeover with better views, light and use of space. In this case, an underused yard, fabulous views that the house didn’t properly take in, and the fact the building wasn’t at the maximum area allowed in local bylaws proved inspiring to the project.



involves interning after graduation, before becoming eligible for the professional exams. After this lengthy process one can register with the professional association, in our case, the Architectural Institute of British Columbia (AIBC), and call himself or herself an architect. An architect is required by the AIBC to complete continuing education modules every year in order to keep our knowledge of building issues and technology up to date.

This professional training

height and placement of the existing house on the property with the building bylaws for your district, the architect can determine how much more use you can achieve. He will also compare the home's potential with less tangible qualities like light, views or feelings of openness.

### A case study

A good example of this in my practice was a residence in Crescent Beach, South Surrey. Richard and Anne Robinson were looking for

small and separate, despite being quite large in area.

In the planning stage space is allocated to uses; views, light and landscape are considered. This is an intense and exciting time for both the architect and client, since there is so much interaction.

I started talking to Richard and Anne about options, and I did a few sketches for them, showing how they might open up the tight spaces in their house, to give it a more open, light feeling. With a modest



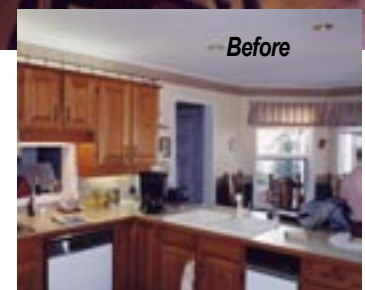
teaches an architect that his primary responsibility is to you, the client, and listening is his first task in your home renovation project. The changes you would like made, your budget, and your tastes in style are just the basics. There is no detail that is unimportant, from how many visitors you expect during the holidays, to where your favourite spot for morning coffee is.

### “What can we do with our house?”

First, an Architect will do a feasibility study to assess the potential of your property. By comparing the size,

ways to improve the livability of their Cape-Cod style home, and to make it a better place for entertaining and enjoying their retirement. Initially their ambitions only extended as far as the kitchen; Anne wanted a more functional space to suit her love of entertaining.

When assessing the potential of the renovation, I noticed that they had an underused yard, fabulous views that the house didn't properly take in, and that they weren't at the maximum area allowed in the bylaw. Like many houses of this style, the rooms felt



Before

Kitchen cabinets and counters were kept traditional, but the room was opened for more light and better traffic flow

family room addition, their kitchen, breakfast area and den would be connected, pulling in the sweeping ocean views.

While we were developing options, Richard casually mentioned that he had always wanted a pool. Considering the bylaws and their desires for the property, I did a sketch plan for them of an attached pool building. An angled wall preserved and framed the views, while creating more privacy for the garden and patios.

### **Finding Balance**

When people think about what architects do, they often just think about style. But the beauty of a building is a balance between the restrictions of budget and bylaws, the relationships of spaces within the house and between the house and the landscape that allow for the flow of daily life, and the tastes and style of the owners. A registered architect is trained to integrate these elements, so that nothing is out of place.

The Robinsons wanted a traditional, elegant feel to their house that blended in seamlessly to the existing structure. We custom designed the cabinets and counters in the kitchen

and den in a very traditional style, and used glass and lighting to make it feel bright. The pool addition was done in a more modern style, to give it a distinctive character. Relaxing in the pool building is the Robinson's in-house getaway.

### **Building Permits**

The process to get building permits can be a complicated one, but it's one that architects are familiar with. A renovation that complies with all the bylaws for size, height, location and use is relatively straightforward, requiring a building permit only. A reasonable relaxation of the bylaws may be possible with a variance, while a change in use or a "conditional" increase in area would require a development permit. Application process times are cut down substantially when working with an architect.

### **"How much will it cost?"**

Working with an architect helps to keep your project on budget. Because architects are familiar with different construction methods and associated costs, they can plan the renovation using the most cost-effective approach. When it comes to finding a contractor, your architect can guide

you through the selection process. The lowest bid may not always be in your best interest. Your architect can help to head off any potential issues with the contractor.

In the end, the fees you invest in hiring an architect can be the most cost-effective decision in your project. A well-planned and beautifully designed renovation will add livability while increasing the value of your home.

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