

PRESTIGE LIVING

THE SECRETS OF LUXURY HOME BUILDING

ISSUE 1



**\$500,000
Better Value!**

As Stress Free As

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Greta Smith is a great advocate of having an architect advise on site selection after saving more than \$140,000 in demolition costs alone and getting a far bigger home for her budget than would have been possible on the alternative site her architect advised against.

Ironically, Greta and Perry Smith's relationship with their architect, Chateau Architects + Builders' joint Director and nominated Company Architect, Roderick McDonald, started quite by accident from a sale that went wrong.

The pair had been keen on a challenging Clontarf site that came complete with a Chateau design that they loved. The purchase fell through at the 11th hour.

However, they contacted Chateau anyway and it was from this first meeting that they learned of the company's complementary pre-purchase site advisory inspection service.

This early service advises prospective clients on the design opportunities and restrictions of a particular site as well as potential site costs to consider, available services, orientation, development limitations and so forth.

When the pair became enamoured of a waterfront site with views through Sydney heads, Chateau quickly brought them back to reality.

"The first site was a sloping block, very difficult and something I'm glad Chateau convinced us not to proceed with because it would have been a definite blowout," Greta said.

According to Architect Roderick McDonald the unusual site constraints could have added as much as \$500,000 to the overall cost of building the same size home.

"We were trying to build a family home and Rod pointed out the site didn't allow for flat areas for the kids, not to mention the demolition costs alone would have been 11 times more than they were for the site we eventually settled on".

When Rod first inspected the couple's 1200sq.m Seaforth site it was all positives. He strongly recommended it on the basis of its North facing back yard, minimal site costs that would allow a bigger home for their budget, available services and a 20m frontage that would allow the scale of home they were considering to fit comfortably and still be compliant with Council's development guidelines.

Greta's next task was to brief Rod on their dream home. In a six hour session she talked him through reams of photos the pair had taken of properties in Mosman and the Blue Mountains, together with her scrap books of magazine clippings from the United States and England containing detail items such as windows, staircases and much more.

Having both built before, the pair were as one on their dream and with Perry snowed under at work and both of them preparing for a six week European break, the task was left to Greta.



Building Can Get



She was more than well equipped. Both her father and brother were builders. Her brother, who she describes lovingly as so fastidious he is almost painful, had built the pair's previous home at Fairlight as well as one home for each of her two sisters – all of which were flawless in every detail.

Greta wanted to take a Mosman house and blow it up to a full two storeys without losing the old style effects of traditional, wrap-around balconies and attention to intricate detail. It was to be stylish and authentic, with a high level of fittings, materials, inclusions and finishes.

"I wanted it to look like it was an old, established home," she said.

She also wanted a design that considered the site in totality, designed to incorporate not just the home, but also the pool, spa, cabana with separate kitchenette, housed

pool filter and garden store, alfresco area with BBQ, cubby house area, terraced gardens and a spacious outdoor amenity.

Rod undertook to have floor plan drawings prepared to meet their brief by the time Greta and Perry returned from Europe. To their delight he did, as well as completing the elevations and a proposal for design of the whole site with pool, landscaping and the like within the timeframe and Greta "absolutely loved it."

"It was exactly what was in my head."

As Chateau prides itself on a holistic building approach, Greta and Perry were a little worried that their insistence on some tried and proven companies they wanted to bring in as sub-contractors for areas such as the imported French oak flooring might cause ructions. But this only served to cement her opinion of Chateau as

builders of the same particular and exacting standards as her own brother.

"Once Chateau was convinced that these people were up to their own high standards it was all OK," Greta said.

Even the building process more than impressed Greta. All communication was in writing to eliminate any margin for error, reports were regular and prompt, problems were solved immediately – "It was as stress free as building can get," she said.

But the real litmus test was the ruling of father and brother.

In what Greta describes as the ultimate compliment, her fastidious father and brother were impressed.

"They were impressed by the price and they were impressed by how well it was built. I simply can't stress enough how happy I am with the job that Chateau did from start to finish. I recommend them to everyone that I can".

Integrating Building And Design

When Roderick McDonald finished his architectural studies, the furthest thing from his mind was joining his father's building company. Then came a call to "just help out for a while" when the firm's designer suffered a mild stroke. That was 25 years ago and the rest is history.

Builder Malcolm McDonald and designer Neville Hopkins started Chateau Constructions with the vision of creating a holistic service providing everything from design to building and fit out.

But it was still a case of one was a builder and the other a designer.

Rod, who grew up visiting building sites with his dad, now melds the two disciplines, advocating that great design is nothing without quality construction and vice versa.

"They are two sides of the same coin and must not only blend seamlessly to achieve the best result, each must inform the other along the way. As the architect ensures the integrity of design and detailing during construction, construction input during the design phase is invaluable as improved build-ability ensures great design is also affordable".

This basic philosophy has been successfully followed for more than 42 years in a company that now occupies a unique niche at the upper end of the prestige market.

"Chateau had always provided a holistic service, but our true advantage now is that there's no disconnect between architect's design and builder's practical limitations. Everything is discussed from the outset, at critical stages of development and through to completion. Often I wear the builder's hat as well as the architect's.

"We are also pleased to provide a quality build-only service for externally produced architectural designs of new homes and welcome this opportunity to add value for other architect's clients too."



Rod McDonald Architect/Design Manager

He cited a home in the Kuringai Local Government area that set a new price record when it was sold just four years after being built. Another client, himself an architect, averaged around \$300,000 profit on the sale of each of 7 houses he had Chateau design and build...

For clients the most obvious measureable benefit of Chateau's approach is a fixed price contract. Prices are locked in at the developed design stage.

Before clients commit to the design going to the next stage of DA drawings, they know what the price is, held for up to six months in advance.

"There are simply no unexpected surprises, no skeletons in the closet. Everything has a level of price assurance and we bear full responsibility for that price," Rod said.

As Architect and Design Manager, Rod believes Chateau has taken the holistic approach to the ultimate level, even to site selection.

"There are many examples where this process has saved hundreds

of thousands of dollars, money our clients were unaware would be needed to develop a potential site.

"Our recommendations on the style, size and type of home for a specific suburb is also critical to ensuring clients maximise investment potential," Rod said, citing a design in the Ku Ring Gai council area that set a new price record when sold four years after completion. Another client, himself an architect, averaged around \$300,000 profit on the sale of each of seven houses he had Chateau design and build for him over seven years.

"One advantage is that we do not design in a bubble. We design knowing how every project goes together exactly, using our own building methods, systems and procedures.

"We don't just design the home, we design for the whole site including the landscaping, pools, cabanas, play and Al-Fresco areas, courtyards and the like.

Chateau has only ever done one-off individual homes and has never repeated a design in 42 years.

For many years, mainly due to the nature of the established Sydney suburbs in which the company mainly builds, and by dent of the ages and tastes of its high net worth clients, Chateau primarily designed and built new homes to suit 50-year-old street scapes.

"No sooner had we completed one 'traditional' home, we would have three new customers wanting something similar. Now, though, the mix is 50/50 traditional versus modern / contemporary.

Annually Chateau designs and builds 12-18 high end homes a year and throughout its history clients have been the primary source of marketing, advertising and, naturally, repeat business.

"Some years we have to close our books to ensure the level of service we promise is delivered and the design and build quality expected of us is maintained."



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