

Your guide to
choosing the right
home builder

Hall&Hart.™

Find the
perfect *design* and
building solution for
your family



Project, custom and design + construct

We understand that building a new home is a significant decision that takes years of dreaming and gathering information to get it just right. We also know that public information can often be confusing and contradictory, with many builders claiming to offer “custom homes” or be “knockdown rebuild specialists.”

This guide is designed to help you navigate the different types of builders and understand the true benefits of each, addressing questions you may not have even considered in your research phase.

DESIGN & BUILD PATHS

01. Custom Home Builder

A custom home builder has the processes and capabilities to build uniquely designed homes specified by third-party architects, building designers, and interior designers. Due to the complexity of their projects, custom home builders usually operate as a small team dedicated to one or two high-end projects at any time.



02. Design & Construct Builder

Design and Construct builders, like Hall & Hart, offer similar services to custom builders but with in-house architectural and/or other building design services. This integrated approach means you don't have to coordinate between the architect and builders, as everything is managed under one roof. Due to the higher ability to manage designs with a certain level of repeatability, they tend to operate at a slightly larger scale than custom home builders.

03. Project Home Builder

Project Home Builders rely on a predetermined catalogue of their own designs that they adapt to your block. Customisation is generally limited, as they rely on repetition of their own known designs, which have already been priced and engineered for volume production, typically at a more accessible price point than custom home and design and construct builders.





Builders and their pricing strategies

The cost of materials to build a home is generally the same for most builders. Although some volume builders claim better buying power, the difference can often be negligible. Pricing differences arise from design complexity, trade rates that the builder is paying, and the level of inclusions offered as a base starting point.

PRICING STRATEGIES

01. Custom Builders

Custom builders often rely on plans and specifications from either an architect or the owner. Due to a certain level of unknown complexity and credibility of these designs, custom builders may provide an estimate with clauses for cost recovery during construction overruns, known as “cost plus” pricing. This absolves the builder of the risk of overruns on-site.



02. Design & Construct Builders

At Hall & Hart, we price the home concurrently with the design and specification process. Our internal team of estimators, draftspeople and designers price check the home at critical milestones to avoid sticker shock at the end of the design phase. We price site and planning costs upfront with accurate figures, ensuring no unexpected costs before construction commences. Our in-house estimating team allows real-time design decisions based on pricing information, enabling us to deliver a custom home with a fixed price contract.

03. Project Home Builder

Project Home Builders also use a fixed-price contract model, where the home's price is fixed before construction begins. However, this comes with strict control of the design, specification, and engineering. However, initial tendering with Project Builders can be risky, as many inclusions start at a low level, often requiring upgrades throughout the design process to achieve the desired finish. Initial tendering may include modest allowances for critical items, driving up the price during the pre-construction period.





Knockdown and rebuild and greenfield blocks

Knockdown rebuild refers to demolishing an older home and constructing a new one, typically in established suburbs. These areas often have undulating terrain, narrow roads, and limited pre-existing infrastructure, requiring specialist builders and custom designed homes.

Greenfield construction involves building new homes in newly developed estates. These estates have been meticulously planned with extensive earthmoving, stormwater, and sewer infrastructure, making construction easier for volume Project Builders.





Types of complexity that affect the price of your home

The cost of building a home is generally the same from builder to builder.
The price difference comes from their approach to pricing complexities.

TYPES OF COMPLEXITY

01. Building Design

Two homes can be the same size with the same number of levels, yet one can be significantly more expensive. A simple box-on-box design with small bathrooms and basic exterior cladding will cost less than a design with a complex layout, large bathrooms, and high-end finishes like rendered brick. Generally, core design costs are influenced by the amount of steel required, the number and type of trades required for each milestone, and the value of the materials used internally and externally.



02. Interior Finishes

Builders have different inclusion lists, with some offering low-spec commercial products to keep initial prices down, and others providing a higher starting point. Comparing these lists is crucial. For example, a builder offering low-quality tiles will be cheaper than one allowing for engineered timber flooring. Check allowances for benchtops, ceiling heights, window heights, and other finishes. If a price seems too good to be true, it likely is.

03. Slope

Sydney's undulating terrain can significantly affect construction costs. A sloping block requires more excavation and fill, and homes must be designed to adapt to the slope, increasing costs for design and construction. High ceilings and stepped-down designs add beauty but also cost.

04. Construction Access

Limited access due to narrow roads, power lines, and other physical constraints can increase costs. Easy access allows for efficient delivery of materials, while constrained sites require more time, effort, and possibly traffic control, adding to the overall cost.

05. Regulatory Costs

Sydney's planning landscape involves numerous restrictions and controls. Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) highlight areas affected by bushfire risk, biodiversity, heritage, and more. These restrictions can increase costs through consultant reports, specific construction requirements, and design limitations. Understanding these restrictions early can help manage expectations and costs.

06. Stormwater Management

New homes often require on-site water storage due to increased strain on stormwater infrastructure. Larger homes with more roof coverage need more storage, and blocks sloping downhill may require an easement to drain stormwater, adding complexity and cost.

07. Hidden Site Costs

Established suburbs may have hidden obstacles like rock, underground water tables, contaminated soil, or unstable ground. These issues require additional excavation, engineering, and possibly remediation work, adding unexpected costs.



Choosing and working with your builder

Now that you understand a little bit more about the types of builders that predominantly build new homes, it's time for you to reflect on which one is right for you. To help, we have provided a 20 item checklist which will help you with discussions with any potential builder.

Your 20 item checklist

1. Know your budget and allow for extra costs.
2. Decide on your must-have features and style.
3. Collect ideas and inspiration for your home.
4. Research potential builders and their reputations.
5. Check the builder's experience with custom homes and KDR.
6. Look for fixed contract options to avoid surprises.
7. Make sure the builder offers high-quality materials.
8. Confirm the builder's process for site assessments.
9. Ask about the builder's communication and project management.
10. Verify the builder's ability to handle tricky land conditions.
11. Review the builder's past projects.
12. Ask for client testimonials and references.
13. Confirm the builder's timeline for design and construction.
14. Ensure the builder provides detailed cost estimates.
15. Look for transparent communication during the design phase.
16. Confirm the builder's interior design support.
17. Ask about the builder's process for getting approvals.
18. Check the builder's post-construction support and warranty.
19. Make sure the builder offers a thorough Town Planning process.
20. Confirm the builder's flexibility for making design changes.



Begin your journey

Despite the complexity that arises with building a new home, at Hall & Hart we believe it should be a journey of creativity and discovery. It's a significant investment, but one that can have a profound impact on you and your family, so hopefully with careful consideration, you decide on a builder that is right for you.

If any of your questions haven't been answered, or want to know more about Hall & Hart, contact us for a Pricing and Discovery session or if you have a question, email us at hello@hallhart.au, we'd love to help.

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