

www.aaarchitect.com.au

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney



Sydney Architect **Adam Pressley** runs a residential practice designing homes.

"We work to our clients brief, design in 3-dimensions, offering a partial or full service."

Architects Guide to Buying a House in Sydney Introduction:

Buying a house in Sydney can be challenging for many reasons. This guide will help you identify a good property quickly and give you the confidence to ignore the unsuitable ones.

The guide is in **5 basic parts**, and includes a checklist that you can use for each property you assess.

This is more of a beginners guide, so it does not use jargon or be too technical.

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive in its coverage of the topic, and it is written from an Architect's perspective, not a builder's, not an agent's, not a banker's or a solicitor's. You may well need advice from other professionals.

For more information on our architectural services visit our website www.aaarchitect.com.au

Part 1 - Initial Planning

Priorities, planning and locations ...

Getting your 'must have' items sorted, thinking about possible long term goals (future planning), deciding on your favoured suburbs and locations.

Part 2 - Property Research

Google maps, solar orientation and street side ...

There are at least 2 important things to check out online, and I'm not talking about the agents site, floor plans or photos. The sites orientation to the sun and its position on the street can be the most important.

Part 3 - Check the Contract

s.149 certificates, planning opportunities, critical info ...

Focus on the block or site and ignore the house for now. There are many items which are worth a good look or a query to the agent.

Part 4 - Open for Inspection

Good access, potential, sloping land ...

Once again, it's not really about the house, but more the surrounds, the potential, opportunities and other issues.

Part 5 - About the House

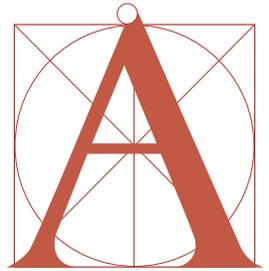
The architecture, pest and building inspections, asbestos and architects approval ...

This is about making your own subjective assessment along with the more pragmatic investigations.

15 Point Property Assessment Checklist

Property address, information, notes, 15 point list...

You can use this checklist with each and every property you investigate.



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au

www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

Architects Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007



Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Part 1: Initial planning

Getting your brief down on paper is always a good way to start the process. Don't be surprised if your brief evolves during the process of finding your ideal home.

1 Get your 'must have' items (priorities) sorted:

There is no point rushing in to buy a home and then finding out that you really wanted a big backyard or space for 2 cars. You should also include some sort of \$ value or budget here, but purchase price / value is not a factor discussed in this guide.

As an architect I often visit a home and find out that what my clients want is just not feasible on their home site - they bought the wrong home. If you are unsure about a property's renovation potential ask an Architect before you buy.

Some common 'must have' items include, number of bedrooms, bathrooms and car-parking, but should also include more obscure items such as a lap pool, space for a boat / trailer, proximity to the right schools, granny flat, views from a future upper level addition. What are yours?

List of 'must have' items (priorities):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2 Possible long term goals - future planning:

Despite what you might think right now you may want more from your property in the future.

It is worth understanding that some homes are easier and cheaper to renovate and add to than others. While some

are just impossible without a complete and very expensive rebuild.

These days the cost of stamp duty, advertising, agent's fees and legals could make you think twice about buying and selling a property for short term use.

Future goals are similar to 'must have' items, except that you can live without them for now.

Possible long term goals (future planning):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3 Your preferred suburbs and locations:

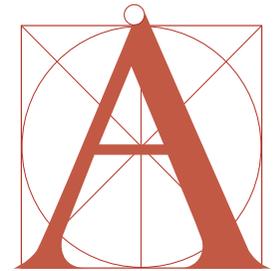
To start with, let's ask a few questions;

- * Where do you want to live, ie: N. Beaches, Inner West?
- * Walking distance to cafes or beach?
- * Where do you need to travel to, now and in the future?
- * Do you need to be near transport or certain schools?
- * Are there particular council areas or suburbs you like?
- * What areas, locations or streets can I afford to live in?
- * Are there friends or family I want to live close to?

Now make a short list of areas to consider further.

List of suburbs and locations (preferred):

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au

www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

**Architects
Guide to
Buying a House
in Sydney**

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007

Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

www.aaarchitect.com.au

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Part 2: Property Research

Now let's assume that you have found some properties that interest you. They are in the right areas, you have ticks on your list of 'must have' items and have thought about your 'future goals'.

Now don't waste your time visiting properties that you can possibly eliminate with a visit to Google earth / street view or even Apple's 3D maps.

As an architect that provides pre-purchase advice regularly, I always check Google first and it sometimes saves our clients a call-out fee.

If you aren't that Internet savvy or are unsure what to look for just give us a call, and we can often assist you over the phone free of charge.

4 Where's the sun - what's the orientation?

What is the home's orientation? Does it get enough sun? The agent's photos always look bright so what's the best orientation anyway?

Generally speaking the best orientation is one that allows you to take best advantage of the sun. This means sun to living areas and backyard (or private space). The best and most controllable sun comes from the North. Refer also our guide [AAA-Thermal-Comfort-Assessment-Guide.pdf](#)

A good orientation will also allow you to cast less shadow on your neighbour's home and block (if you add another level in the future) and protect you more from your neighbours possibly overshadowing you.

"Generally, the best orientation is south to the street, which gives you a 'north facing' backyard."

You will have to work this out for yourself because properties vary in shape and orientation, and many agents will claim every backyard faces north. If you can't get north, then West is the next best orientation for the yard because it offers afternoon sun.

Another reason to have south at the front is privacy. If the north sun comes from the front, opening the blinds to let the sun in may affect your privacy.

5 High side of the street:

Almost all sites have some slope and it is generally much better to slope down to the street.

"Generally, high side of the street properties are the best."

There are quite a few reasons for this but the most important one is stormwater runoff.

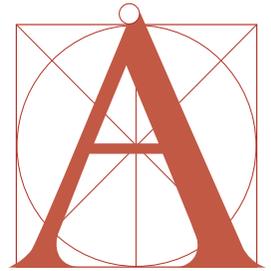
These days many councils have controls that can force you into very expensive stormwater systems. If you can't drain your roof or surface water to the street easily you may need pump out pits, pumps, dispersion trenches, and the like, and possibly an 'on-site detention' system (OSD).

In some cases it is almost impossible to get adequate drainage without an easement. Easements can be very expensive and take a long time to get.

Beware of battle-axe blocks on the low side of the street that don't have the use of a drainage easement or a water frontage, especially if they are smallish blocks with clay soil. Don't risk it.

If you are unsure about a site's drainage I suggest you get specific advice from a stormwater engineer who is familiar with the council's controls.

Now visit Part 3 - Ask the agent, check the contract



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au

www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

**Architects
Guide to
Buying a House
in Sydney**

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007



Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Part 3: Check the contract

This part checks the planning aspects of the property that may limit future options for your property.

6 Check the s.149(2) and/or s.149(5) certificate:

Every contract for sale must come with a current section 149 (s.149) certificate which lists the following information and more about the property for sale;

- * Council locality & zoning
- * List of applicable codes & legislation
- * Complying Development Codes
- * Local transport services & on-street parking
- * Easements and services, ie sewer mains
- * Heritage or conservation issues, incl. neighbours
- * Bushfire danger levels (BAL)
- * Geotechnical hazards or flood prone land
- * Acid sulphate soils
- * Scenic protection or foreshore protection areas
- * Environmentally sensitive areas, (critical habitat)
- * Road widening and re-alignment
- * Tree preservation orders
- * s94 contributions
- * Restrictive covenants (some old covenants may be extinguished by current planning codes)

There are also other possible issues that may come up, depending upon the property in question.

"If you have any doubts or concerns after looking through the s.149, ask the agent, or alternatively you can talk to the duty planner at the local council or ring an architect / planner familiar with the area."

This guide does not give legal advice. For issues to do with forms of 'title' you should seek legal advice / talk with your conveyancer.

7 Check the sewer diagram:

Sewer diagrams usually come with the contract of sale - if not ask the agent.

It's important to check this diagram (A4 size plan) as many properties have a sewer main running through them, and while it is not usually impossible, it is certainly more expensive and time consuming to build over a sewer main.

This is especially true if the sewer main has an inspection chamber - and sometimes these chambers are underground (not visible on site at all). It is also worth noting where the sewer line goes as it may need complete replacement during a renovation.

8 General Housing Code (Complying development):

This is part of the State Environmental Planning Policy (NSW), which aims to simplify the design approval process. If the project meets this code's basic requirements, new single or two storey houses and alterations and additions can receive a faster approval.

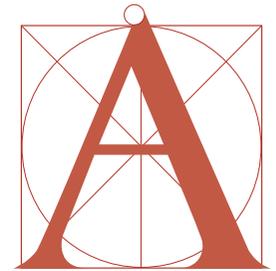
It is definitely a plus if the property can achieve approval under this code - because it gives you a quicker and less expensive alternative to the whole Council DA process.

For more information about this code visit the FAQ section of our website.

- * [Complying Development Code](#)
- * [Council vs Complying Development Code](#)

Just check the s.149 certificate for information about complying development and approval under each of the 'Exempt and Complying Development Codes 2008', and specifically the General Housing Code.

Note, s.149 certificates issued prior to 25th Feb 2011 are not current with regard to complying development.



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au

www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

**Architects
Guide to
Buying a House
in Sydney**

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007



Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Part 4: Open for inspection

Once again this part is more about the site and surrounds, and only a little bit about the house. The house is the last item we look at (but often the first thing the average home buyer looks at).

9 Good Access

This is such an important item and one that every builder understands - it is the first thing they look for.

It's not just access to the house or garage, but also to the driveway, entry and exit from the street, a space to park, space for turning, space for visitors, deliveries, heavy vehicles like moving vans, fire engines, cranes, and the like.

A driveway that you need a 4WD to use, or a busy road that you have to back your car onto blind, may be impossible to rectify.

10 Potential,

Properties are often bought and sold on potential, but what is potential really? In our opinion it can be something positive or negative. You might buy for the positive and sell for the negative.

On the positive side, you might enjoy spectacular views from a new upper level, or fulfill the opportunity to transform an old house from a dark cellular cottage into a bright flowing period mansion.

Some other positive potentials:

- * Subdivision
- * Dual occupancy / strata
- * Granny flat
- * Additions, extensions, garages, pools
- * Water, district or bush views
- * Renovation potential ie: classic old home

* Large block, relatively underdeveloped

On the negative side, there may be the possibility of losing views, or sun or privacy because of neighbouring development.

Some other negative potentials:

- * Having to demolish unapproved building work
- * Tree problems that keep happening
- * Possible flooding, bushfire risk, landslip

11 Sloping land,

I'm not against sloping land - some sites are fantastic because of the slope. But it has to be said, on the whole they have the potential for lots of problems and regularly cost a lot more to build or renovate on than flat sites.

A site with significant slope can have serious problems now and in the future.

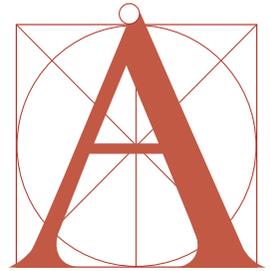
Problems like land slippage (geotechnical issues), surface and sitewater drainage, problems with access or increased bushfire risk.

Sloping sites are generally a lot more expensive to build on because of extra design complexity / different levels, high cost of retaining walls, difficult foundations, substantial drainage systems.

Many sloping sites also don't have access to the project home market, and project homes are the most cost effective homes to build. The cost of building a 'one-off' custom home is often twice the cost of a similarly sized project home.

If you are considering a sloping site, make sure it is giving you back something worth the extra cost and potential for problems in the future.

*



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au

www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

**Architects
Guide to
Buying a House
in Sydney**

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007



Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

www.aaarchitect.com.au

Architect's Guide to Buying a House in Sydney

Part 5: About the house

Now we can look at the house itself. I'll start by assuming that you have followed the first 4 parts of this guide and the property you are interested in is still coming up trumps!

Let's revisit your 'Initial Planning' items, and tick them off;

- 1 - Does it have all the 'must have' items ?
- 2 - Do you think it might work with your 'future goals' ?
- 3 - Has it got the location I want ?

To make this sort of assessment a little easier I have prepared a 15 point checklist (last page) for you to use. You can use it on every property you consider.

Now let's finish up with my final 4 items;

12 How's the architecture

This item is a mixture of many things but you should first ask yourself how well is the house laid out? As some houses suffer from being designed 'back to front'.

What are the bones of the house like - will it be cheap to renovate and improve or will almost everything have to be changed or be replaced?

Many homes are of a particular style, from an era, have history or heritage value? It's hard to weigh up the value of street appeal / charm / character / architectural features versus today's modern lifestyle, future maintenance and energy costs.

"Try asking yourself if it's a house you could fall in love with."

13 Pest and building inspection

These reports are important, but often their value is limited by what the inspector can get access to during their visit. Ideally these reports should assist you with the following;

Is the house healthy to live in now?
Is the electrical wiring in safe condition?
Could there be rising damp, toxic mould?
Are there condensation problems?
Are there structural or foundation problems?
How much repair or maintenance work needs to be done right now / very soon?
Does it show evidence of termites, are there current termite treatments in place?

"Pest and building inspection reports are important, but understand that they are often full of standard / general warnings and pessimistic disclaimers - best to focus on the specific and clearly identified issues."

14 Asbestos

More than 60% of homes in Australia will contain some form of asbestos. Any home built before 1990 could contain asbestos products - talk to your building inspector or get a specific asbestos assessment report done.

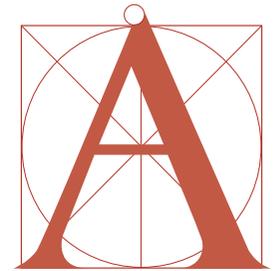
If you are planning on doing some of your own renovation work - be absolutely sure that you are not breaking, cutting, sanding, screwing or grinding any asbestos containing building materials, as it can be very harmful.

15 Architect's approval

That's right - before you buy, talk to an architect. When you have been through all the parts - get an architect involved and go over it again, you may have missed something.

"We can even give you some more specific advice on possible renovation costs."

This 'Pre-purchase Advice', is generally cheaper than the cost of a pest or building report, and just as essential.



ALL AUSTRALIAN
ARCHITECTURE

Suite 206, 20 Dale St
Brookvale NSW 2100

M: 04 12 348 575

info@aaarchitect.com.au
www.aaarchitect.com.au

ABN 95 492 673 232

**Architects
Guide to
Buying a House
in Sydney**

Adam Pressley FRAIA
Nominated Architect
NSW Reg. No. 6007

Member
Australian Institute
of Architects

