

Get started!

6 Easy steps towards creating a successful design brief

The following elements are the basis for a simple brief. Rest assured that whoever you employ as an architect will ask you additional questions over and above what you have outlined, so this doesn't have to cover everything. This serves as a way for you to introduce yourself, the project goals, your priorities and some inspiration in an organized manner.

Element #1: Cover sheet

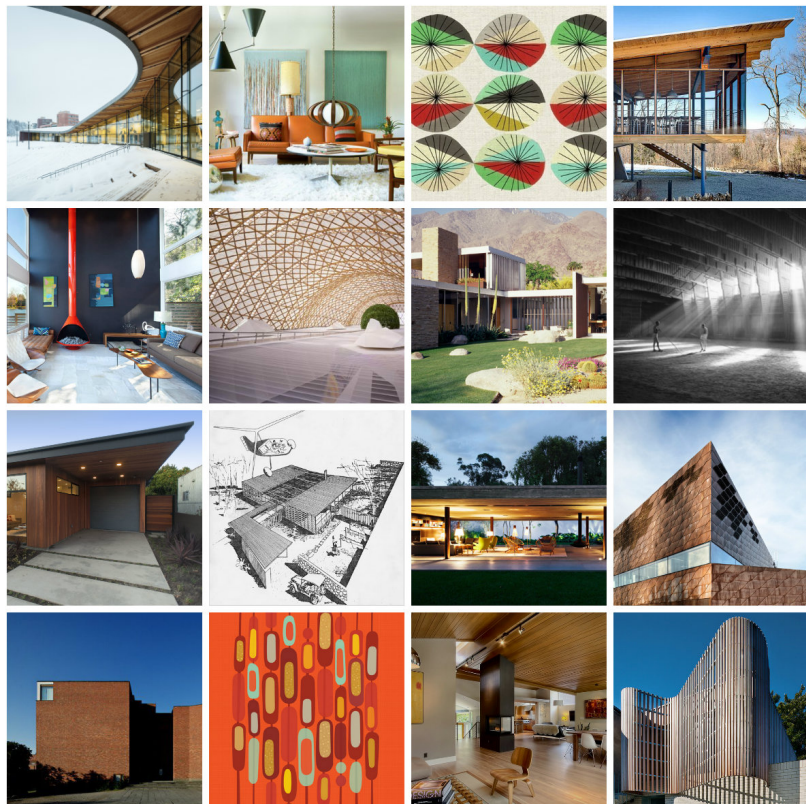
This may seem unnecessary but this is a perfect place to name your project, add descriptive elements and share some images. Compare *The William's Remodel*, or *The William's Sun-drenched Master Bedroom Suite*. The second title conjures up a more descriptive image that hints at the project goals. Coupled with some images that relay a feeling of the space or the structure, this cover page can convey quite a bit. Make sure to select images that are descriptive of the material or nature of the space rather than trying to convey a specific style. The design brief is about telling a story of who you are and how you live, it's a narrative and the style or aesthetics of a project will organically appear as part of the design process.

Element #2: Introductions

This page defines everyone using the space, whether it's your home or your workplace - introduce the players and define some important characteristics such as age, vocation, hobbies, special needs, etc.. Feel free to add images here as well, designers are definitely visual people and having a face in mind while designing reminds us of who will be using these spaces.

Element #3: Principles

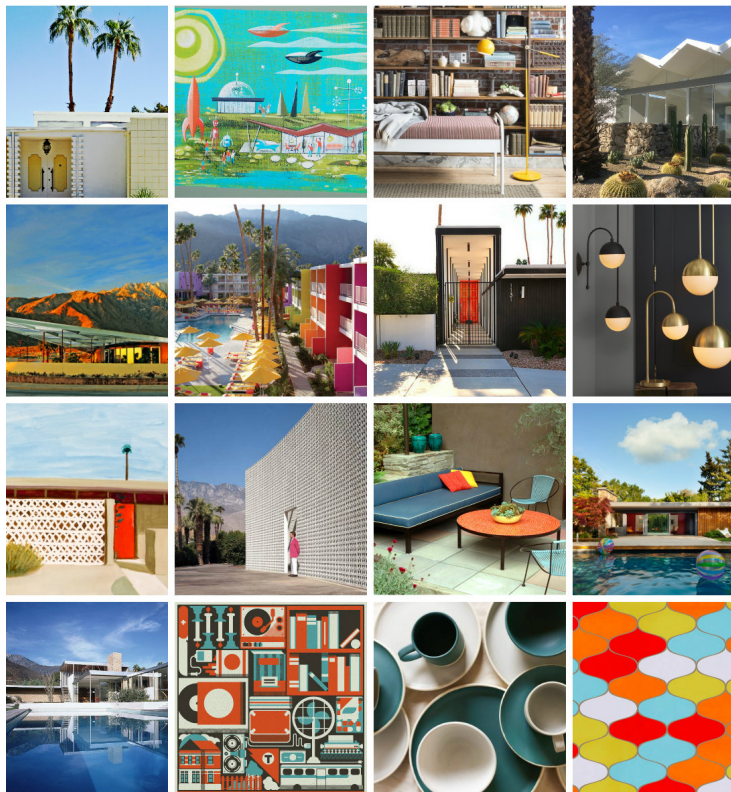
This may be one of the toughest elements in the design brief, synthesizing your vision. List three or four of your top priorities that, when executed, would define this project as a success. Some examples may be related to the design & quality of the space: open, vaulted, distinct spaces, transitional uses, indoor/outdoor, space efficient, courtyard based, etc. Another may be related to the materials: light, crafted, tactile, textural, glossy, industrial, glassy, solid, etc.. What materials do you want to see and touch on a daily basis?



This doesn't mean that every wall is wood clad based on your love of wooden boats, but will be prioritized for areas that you come in contact with every day. A third principle may outline the type of construction you're interested in. Is this a home you see being passed down through the generations? Then you may prioritize durable, low maintenance materials. Sustainable approaches are integral to design but specific paths such as utilizing Passive House standards or targeting a self-sustaining net zero home should be documented. Is timing a critical issue? Then perhaps pre-fab or modular construction is important to note.

Element #4: Naming your needs

At this point, we can start being more specific about what your practical goals are. What prompted you to make the decision to engage an architect? The simplest approach would be to begin with main topics like bed/bath, main spaces, activity spaces, secondary spaces and outdoor. Beneath each heading, elaborate on what is needed. How many bedrooms, bathrooms, what types of main spaces and can they share space, how big of a garage, is there an additional shop or ADU (in-law unit)? If your project involves a workplace, the main topics may be entry, work spaces, meeting spaces, secondary spaces. Breaking these down further into reception, waiting area, number of work spaces and general size, number and type of conference rooms, secondary spaces like kitchenettes, bathrooms, storage rooms, IT closets, etc.. This is also a good time to note if your thought is to phase the project and what will be done within the phasing sequence.



Element #5: Prioritizing budget

Listing your needs leads into the next step: being clear about your budget. As an architect our role is to advocate for you, your goals and your budget. Knowing your budget, or a budget range, allows us to confirm that your finances are on or off target with what you want to achieve. By knowing a project's parameters, a designer can appropriately suggest and select all the components in a project based on the principles previously outlined in Element #3. As well as your budget, listing your budget priorities as a list of must-haves versus nice-to-have is necessary for aligning with the reality of your financial plan.

Examples of must-have priorities may be high end kitchen appliances, wall of sliding doors for indoor/outdoor entertaining, water cisterns, integrated speaker systems, etc.. Some nice-to-have items may be a pool, an elevator, a craft room, a wine cellar, etc.. This is an important step in successfully moving forward with the project and meeting your expectations within your budget. As the project moves along these priority items will serve as benchmarks to consistently check in with and realign to.

Element #6: Inspiration

Ending on a high note, this is your place to share what inspires you and why. Typically in the design process there's a lot of collaboration including images being shared back and forth. Ideabooks on Houzz.com, Instagram images, Pinterest boards - there's no shortage of platforms to curate stunning visuals. The challenge then is to select a few for this page, knowing that you will have the opportunity to share much more when the project kicks off.

These are the key elements for creating your design brief. Feel free to customize this for your unique situation. For instance if your project is to build a new brick & mortar store for your business, consider describing what you see as a typical day, or specifics around how things are displayed or organized, etc.. If your project is developing a piece of property, maybe one of the elements is sharing qualities of that space or environment and it's unique characteristics.

Creating a design brief sets a strong foundation for your project. Now's the time to share your goals with an architect and make it a reality! You can certainly share your design brief with your designer of choice, but why not just go to the source and engage one of the talented designers at studio RALLYMADE!

To continue with the Working with an Architect 101 series and further information, contact:

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