

Your ideal home journey



A BLUEPRINT TO BUILDING IN ADELAIDE
WITH MASTERY AND SIMPLICITY

DORNFORD

Welcome

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Building a custom home or extension is one of the biggest investments most families will make. It can be exciting, but it often feels daunting. Where do you start? Which builder can you trust? How do you make sure your budget stays on track?

This guide is designed to cut through the confusion. It's a practical toolkit with step-by-step advice, worksheets, and checklists you can use right away. Whether you're planning your first custom home, a major extension, or a complete renovation, you'll find clarity on the process and confidence in your decisions.

At Dornford Building Group, we've helped families across Adelaide navigate this journey. Our design-first approach and integrated build process give our clients peace of mind and exceptional results. In this ebook, we'll share what we've learned so you can avoid common pitfalls, budget wisely, and enjoy the process of creating a home that truly reflects you.



What's inside

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- **STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS**
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Step 1: Define Your Vision.



Before you look at plans or quotes, it's important to pause and define what you really want from your home. Many projects go off course because the homeowner jumps into drawings before thinking clearly about their lifestyle, needs, and goals.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Lifestyle:** How do you live day to day? Do you need space for entertaining, a quiet home office, or more storage for a growing family?
- **Future needs:** Will your home still work for you in five, ten, or twenty years? Consider ageing in place, kids getting older, or multi-generational living.
- **Must-haves vs nice-to-haves:** Decide early which items are non-negotiable and which can be adjusted to meet your budget.
- **Style preferences:** Explore which aesthetics resonate with you: Hamptons, Contemporary, Farmhouse, Minimalist, or a blend.



Step 2: Understanding the Process

One of the biggest challenges homeowners face is not knowing what comes next. Without a clear roadmap, the building journey can feel confusing and overwhelming. By breaking it down into simple stages, you can see how each part connects and prepare for decisions ahead of time.

The Building Stages in Adelaide

DISCOVERY & CONCEPT DESIGN

- Initial consultation to understand your goals and budget.
- Site review to check orientation, slope, access, and council requirements.
- Concept sketches and layouts prepared.

APPROVALS & DOCUMENTATION

- Preparation of drawings for planning and building consent.
- Engineering reports (soil test, footing design, structural certification).
- Energy efficiency assessments.
- Submission to council or private certifier.
- Typical timeframe: 6–12 weeks per stage.

SELECTIONS & FINAL DESIGN

- Interior and exterior finishes chosen.
- Joinery, lighting, and bathroom layouts.
- Final working drawings for construction.

CONSTRUCTION

- Site preparation and footings.
- Structural framing and roof installation.
- Lock-up stage (walls, windows, doors).
- Internal fit-out, cabinetry, and finishes.
- Final inspections.

HANDOVER

- Walkthrough with your builder.
- Practical completion certificate.
- Warranty information provided.
- Your home is ready to move into.

Checklist: What to Confirm at Each Stage

DISCOVERY & CONCEPT

- Do I have clarity on my budget range?
- Has a site review been completed?
- Do I understand the proposed design options?

APPROVALS & DOCUMENTATION

- Have soil and engineering reports been included?
- Are all council fees accounted for?
- Do I have a clear timeline for approvals?

SELECTIONS & FINAL DESIGN

- Have I chosen all materials and finishes?
- Have cabinetry layouts been confirmed?
- Do I have a full electrical plan?

CONSTRUCTION

- Am I receiving regular progress updates?
- Are variations documented before approval?
- Do I know when site visits are scheduled?

HANDOVER

- Have I received all warranties and manuals?
- Have all defects been rectified or scheduled?
- Do I know who to contact for post-handover care?

QUICK TIP

Approvals can take longer than expected. Always allow extra time in your project schedule for council delays so you're not caught off guard.



Step 3: Choosing the Right Team



The builder you choose will have more impact on your experience than almost any other decision. A good team will guide you through design, approvals, and construction with clarity and care. The wrong choice can lead to delays, cost blowouts, and frustration.

VOLUME BUILDER	DESIGN & BUILD PARTNER (DORNFORD)
Standard floor plans, limited customisation	Tailored design to suit your site, lifestyle, and budget
Focused on speed and scale	Focused on quality, detail, and your experience
Design and construction handled by separate teams	Integrated design and build team working together
Lower initial cost but higher risk of costly variations later	Transparent planning and reduced variations
Limited flexibility once contracts are signed	Collaborative, client-centred approach

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Checklist: 10 Questions to Ask Your Builder

Before you commit, ask these questions to understand how they operate:

1. Do you offer in-house design as well as construction?
2. How do you handle cost variations?
3. What systems do you use for communication and updates?
4. Can I see recent local projects you've completed?
5. Who will be my main point of contact throughout the project?
6. How do you plan for site challenges such as sloping blocks or bushfire zones?
7. Are engineering and approvals included in your proposal?
8. How do you approach budgeting and contingency planning?
9. Can I speak to past clients about their experience?
10. What makes your process different from other builders?

QUICK TIP

Don't just compare quotes, compare inclusions, communication, and process. The cheapest price up front often costs more in the long run.

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Step 4: Budgeting with Confidence



Budgeting is one of the most important parts of your building journey. Done well, it gives you control, reduces stress, and allows you to make confident decisions. Done poorly, it can lead to hidden costs, compromises, and unfinished dreams.

The goal is not to find the cheapest price, but to understand your investment clearly so you can plan with certainty.

The Three Keys to Budget Clarity

1. TRANSPARENT COSTS

- Request a detailed breakdown of inclusions.
- Make sure the proposal includes site works, approvals, engineering, and required services.
- Ask for allowances, Provisional Sum (PS) and Prime Cost (PC) items, to be listed clearly.

2. HIDDEN COSTS

Commonly overlooked items include:

- Soil testing and engineering reports.
- Council and certification fees.
- Service connections (water, sewer, power, gas).
- Site works on sloping or difficult blocks.
- Bushfire compliance requirements.

Confirm these have been included before signing.

3. CONTINGENCY BUFFER

- Set aside 10–15% of your total budget as a safeguard.
- This covers unexpected variations, site surprises, or design refinements.
- A contingency ensures your project can keep moving without financial stress.



Checklist: Budget Planning Essentials

- Have I received a detailed inclusion breakdown?
- Are soil tests, engineering, and surveys included?
- Have council fees and approvals been allowed?
- Do I understand all PS & PC allowances?
- Has the builder allowed for site-specific works?
- Have bushfire or flood zones been considered?
- Have I compared inclusions across all quotes?
- Do I have a 10–15% contingency set aside?
- Have service connections been included (water, sewer, power, NBN)?



Practical Example

A client in the Adelaide Hills receives two quotes:

- Quote A is \$40,000 cheaper but excludes site works and engineering.
- Quote B is more expensive up front but fully inclusive.

When site works and approvals are added to Quote A, the total cost exceeds Quote B, and causes months of delay.

LESSON

Always compare inclusions, not just the bottom line.

QUICK TIP

If a quote looks much cheaper than others, don't assume it's a bargain. Ask: "What's missing?"

Step 5: Communication and Collaboration



Good communication is the difference between a smooth, enjoyable build and a stressful one. Misunderstandings can lead to delays, budget blowouts, and frustration. A clear communication plan keeps everyone aligned and ensures your vision is delivered as intended.



BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- **Set expectations early:** agree on how often you'll receive updates (weekly).
- **Clarity over jargon:** your builder should explain technical details plainly.
- **Nominate a main contact:** know exactly who to call if you have a question.
- **Get it in writing:** request all variation approvals and key updates in written form.
- **Stay proactive:** ask for upcoming decisions so you can prepare in advance.

CHECKLIST: WHAT TO EXPECT IN REGULAR UPDATES

- Work completed this week
- Work planned for next week
- Decisions required from you
- Any issues identified and proposed solutions

Weekly Update Template (Example)

THIS WEEK

- Framing complete for ground floor.
- Windows delivered to site.

NEXT WEEK

- Roof trusses scheduled.
- Electrical pre-wire to begin.

CLIENT DECISIONS REQUIRED

- Confirm kitchen benchtop selection by Friday.
- Approve final tile samples.

NOTES

- Weather delays expected, roof may take an extra 2 days.
- No impact on final timeline at this stage.

QUICK TIP

If you ever feel “out of the loop,” ask your builder to discuss their project management system. A professional builder should have structured processes for scheduling, updates, and variations and be able to explain them to you.



Step 6: Design Inspiration

Choosing a style helps guide decisions on layout, finishes, and colours. Here are four of the most popular styles we see in Adelaide, with their key features:



HAMPTONS

- Weatherboard cladding, gables, white trims.
- Open-plan living with flow to outdoor spaces.
- Elegant but relaxed atmosphere.
- Light, coastal-inspired palette (whites, greys, blues).

CONTEMPORARY

- Clean lines, open floor plans.
- Materials like glass, steel, concrete.
- Minimalist colour palettes with bold accents.
- Large windows and seamless indoor-outdoor connection.

FARMHOUSE

- Gabled roofs, porches, timber detailing.
- Inviting, family-friendly spaces.
- Combination of stone, brick, and weatherboard.
- Warm, rustic finishes (timber floors, exposed beams).

MINIMALIST

- Simple, uncluttered design.
- Neutral colours, light-filled spaces.
- Focus on functionality and flow.
- Subtle finishes, streamlined cabinetry.





WANT MORE?

We have a complete Home Design Style Guide to help, just ask our team and we can get you a copy.

Inside, you will find a wide range of architectural and interior design inspirations. This includes more detailed examples of popular aesthetics, including Coastal, Hamptons, Contemporary, Industrial, Eco, Minimalistic, and more, alongside stunning project photography.

The booklet also highlights current colour trends, with ready-made palettes for interiors and exteriors, plus collections of popular whites and neutrals to help clients visualise how different tones transform spaces.

This resource is perfect for anyone interested in design inspiration because it:

- Provides a clear overview of the most sought-after home styles.
- Offers colour combinations and finishes to spark fresh ideas.
- Helps you make confident design choices for your new build, renovation, or extension.

You will gain a practical yet aspirational guide that bridges inspiration with real-world design outcomes.

QUICK TIP

Choose a style that not only reflects your taste, but also suits your location. A Hamptons-inspired façade may suit a coastal block, while a Farmhouse design works beautifully in the Adelaide Hills.





Step 7: Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Even well-planned projects can run into problems if key details are overlooked. Here are the five most common mistakes homeowners make, and how to avoid them.

1. IGNORING SITE ORIENTATION

- The Mistake: Designing living areas without considering sunlight and shade.
- The Solution: Position main living spaces north-facing where possible. This maximises natural light in winter and reduces overheating in summer.

2. UNDERESTIMATING SITE COSTS

- The Mistake: Not budgeting for sloping blocks, access issues, or retaining walls.
- The Solution: Ask your builder for a full site review and cost allowances before committing to plans.

3. CHOOSING A BUILDER BASED ONLY ON PRICE

- The Mistake: Going with the cheapest quote, only to face hidden costs later.
- The Solution: Compare inclusions, quality of communication, and project process, not just the bottom line.

4. RUSHING SELECTIONS

- The Mistake: Leaving fixtures, finishes, and colours to the last minute.
- The Solution: Make selections early, ideally before construction starts, to avoid delays and costly changes.

5. NOT INVOLVING ALL DECISION-MAKERS EARLY

- The Mistake: One partner makes design decisions without input from others.
- The Solution: Ensure everyone involved in the project attends key meetings from the start to reduce changes later.

QUICK TIP

Most costly mistakes happen because of decisions made late. The earlier you plan, the smoother your project will be, and the more certain your costs.



Torrens Park



CASE STUDY

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For a young family in Torrens Park, the challenge was clear. They loved their neighbourhood and didn't want to move, but their home no longer suited their growing needs. With a baby on the way, they needed more space, modern comforts, and a home that felt brand new.

The solution was a carefully planned extension that doubled the footprint of the house and combined it with a full renovation, transforming the property into a light-filled, contemporary family home.

DESIGNING FOR FAMILY LIFE

The extension was about more than adding square metres. It created new bedrooms, larger living areas, and modernised the existing structure to meet today's standards. By blending extension with renovation, the result feels cohesive, practical, and inspiring, designed for a family to thrive.

OVERCOMING HIDDEN CHALLENGES

Once demolition began, unexpected issues surfaced:

- Non-compliant existing work
- Asbestos requiring removal
- Ageing structures that needed replacing

Each challenge required adjustments, but careful planning and communication kept the project on track. The family moved into their upgraded home in time to welcome their new arrival.

KEY FEATURES OF THE TORRENS PARK EXTENSION

- Full house renovation, modernised throughout
- Doubled footprint with seamless old to new flow
- High-end kitchen with skylights for natural light
- Double glazing for comfort and energy efficiency
- Landscaping upgrades to outdoor areas
- New roofline and fresh paint for a revitalised look

A SEAMLESS TRANSFORMATION

One of the project's greatest successes was how the old and new blended together. With a consistent roofline, unified finishes, and thoughtful design, the home feels like a single, purpose-built residence, not an "add-on."

DESIGNED AROUND LIFESTYLE

Every decision centred on the family's needs: more bedrooms, flexible living areas, and natural light. The doubled footprint gives the home room to grow, while features like skylights and outdoor connections make everyday living more enjoyable.

WHY TORRENS PARK EXTENSIONS ARE IN DEMAND

Torrens Park is prized for its leafy streets, proximity to schools, and family-friendly amenities. Many residents choose extensions over moving, keeping the location they love while creating a home that finally meets their needs.

This project shows what's possible when extensions are planned carefully and built with precision.

A HOME REIMAGINED

The result is a home that feels entirely new, modern, spacious, and perfectly tailored to its owners. For this family, the extension was more than a building project; it was an investment in their lifestyle, their future, and their community.

Check it out on our website: [Our Projects>Torrens Park.](#)

There comes a moment when four walls stop being just a house and become the beating heart of everything that matters.

At Dornford, we exist for one reason: to build beautiful lives.

Your home is the centre of everything that matters, the place where joy settles in, belonging feels effortless, and every day feels exactly as life was always meant to feel: beautiful.

At Dornford, we create homes of exceptional craftsmanship that feel like they were always waiting for you.

With mastery in every detail, a reimaged customer journey, and stewardship that protects your legacy, we deliver far more than four walls. Recognised as HIA Small Business of the Year in 2025, we bring proven excellence to every project we touch.



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Here, you are never just a client. You become part of the team, a true co-creator. Your ideas and vision shape every decision through exceptional communication and complete transparency.

The Dornford team responds with speed and care, listening deeply, solving proactively, and turning every challenge into a shared triumph.

That's when the magic happens, when the home stops belonging to the blueprint and starts belonging to you.

This is where laughter fills the rooms at family dinners, where evenings flow with effortless connection, and where quiet mornings remind you that life is beautiful, just like your home.

Choose Dornford, and you choose more than a home. You choose a place that feels like it was made just for you, where mastery, joy and true belonging come together to build beautiful lives, built beautifully.

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Imagine a home that doesn't just shelter you, it celebrates you.

At Dornford, we exist for one reason: to build beautiful lives.

We create exceptional homes of true mastery, with a reimagined journey built on speed, transparency, and genuine partnership. Recognised as HIA Small Business of the Year in 2025, we turn your vision into a space that feels like it was always waiting for you, where joy lives in every dinner, every laugh, and every quiet morning.

Choose Dornford, and you don't just get a house. You get the place you were always meant to belong, where life feels powerfully, beautifully yours.



Your Next Step

A home becomes yours in the decisions, and in who you make them with. When you are ready to talk yours through, we would like to be in the room. Start with a complimentary review of your plans.

SCAN THE CODE, OR VISIT DORNFORDGROUP.COM/PLAN-REVIEW

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