



A GUIDE TO BUILDING A DREAM HOME

How to find the right Architect and how they can help you.

By award-winning Architect, John Dyer Grimes

DYER GRIMES
ARCHITECTURE

“The Architect’s job is not
to give clients what they thought
they wanted, but what they
never dreamed they could have.”

SIR DENYS LASDUN

BY
JOHN DYER GRIMES

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John Dyer Grimes – age 2

ARCHITECTURE IS IN MY BLOOD

My father was a celebrated Architect, and I followed in his footsteps around construction sites as a child until working in his studio as a man. I started in the days of pen and tracing paper and learned practical experience laying bricks and digging holes on site. At 24, I opened my own practice, and 18 years later I have the great pleasure of leading a world class team at Dyer Grimes Architects.

From our Putney practice on the banks of the Thames, we produce creative, practical designs to transform ordinary places into amazing spaces. Everyone in our team of ten has their own specialist skills, united in a design ethos dedicated to deliver beautiful homes. We keep our scale small, intimate and personal so we can provide the best possible client experience. It's not about ego, it's not about showing off. It's about listening to the client and building everything around their dreams and aspirations.

In my lifetime I've seen my discipline transform as new technologies, materials and methods help us create better, more beautiful, more sustainable homes. I'm learning every day, but I feel it's time to start sharing the knowledge I've built up over my career. There are certain questions and concerns that have kept popping up over the hundreds of projects I've completed, so I've prepared this guide as a convenient and comprehensive means of answering those queries.

I hope this guide helps you to take your first step in creating a space fitted perfectly around you.

John Dyer Grimes
Managing Director, Dyer Grimes Architects

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10 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE CONTACTING AN ARCHITECT

Converting your home, or building a new one, is one of the most exciting events you can experience. It can also be one of the most stressful. When things go wrong, differently to how we expected or we find demands outweigh our capacity to meet them, cracks form in our plans and our wellbeing. To ensure your build is a time you'll never want to forget, rather than a time you can't wait to, here are 10 easy to remember considerations which will have you better prepared for what to expect and what is expected of you.

1 WHAT ARE YOUR NEEDS?

Whether you want to be practical or extravagant, the first step to planning your build is to honestly and thoroughly consider your needs. It could simply be a matter of needing more space, or you want a home built around your personality from the ground up. Think about how you use the house and how long you're likely to live there. Do you enjoy holding social events, or is it a space just for you? Will it be designed to satisfy the single life or do you want to fill it with a family? By determining your needs early, both current and future, you'll be able to plan every aspect of the design specifically for you.

2 HOW CAN THOSE NEEDS BE ADDRESSED?

Every problem comes with a range of solutions, and those that seem obvious at the start are often not the most ideal. Space, for example, is a commonly misunderstood concept. More is not always better, and clients are often surprised at how comparatively simple conversions to their existing homes can create a more open, welcoming environment. It's fun to think big, but it isn't always practical. Whether you're extending your current home or building a new one, consider the methods of maximising space while minimising scale.

3 WHERE DO YOU WANT TO LIVE?

It's common knowledge that location is an essential factor in choosing a home, but where you live needs to be considered even more closely when you're building a new one. Cities have many conveniences, amenities and lifestyle options, but all this comes with a hefty price tag on the land. Land in the countryside is cheaper and there'll be less planning to negotiate, but facilities and schools may not be readily available. No matter where you choose to build, will you still want to live there in ten or twenty years?

4 WILL PLANNING PERMISSION BE REQUIRED?

Whether you're modifying your current home or building a new one, the first step is finding out from the relevant authorities whether planning permission is required. This is especially pertinent in areas with a lot of old buildings or a certain local character. There are specific conservation areas where significant deviations from the traditional style are all but impossible. An Architect with local experience will be able to work with local councils to increase the chances of having your plans approved.

5 HOW MUCH CAN YOU INVEST IN THE PROJECT?

Where you live, what you build and what you build it out of is determined by how much you can afford to spend on the project. An extension is usually funded by savings, while a brand new house typically follows from the sale of an old one. Very, very few houses are a no-compromise construction, so setting out a firm, realistic budget will allow you to figure out what features are most important to you. Costs also change throughout the project, so make sure you have enough to cover every stage. Remember that a smart design can significantly increase the resale value of your house, so an investment now may make you a return in the future.

6 WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE FOR THE DESIGN?

How hands on you want to get with the design process varies from person to person, but if you enjoy sketching out ideas then putting pen to paper – or mouse to software – can help you to develop a sense of your spatial and functional requirements. You may find you need to widen some walls to fit your prized furniture, or that the layout of rooms doesn't flow as well as you expected. No matter how vague or precise your ideas are, the right Architect will translate your imagination into reality.

7 WHAT WILL THE INTERIOR OF THE BUILDING LOOK LIKE?

Leading on from the layout of the house is the interior design. Much of this will be determined by the design of the structure itself: the height of the walls, the amount of natural light, whether it's open plan or separate rooms. But people don't move into empty boxes. Think about how your furniture, fittings, carpets or tiles will complement the design of the house. Certain colours can create entirely different moods and transform from day to evening. Some features, like the paint, can be changed easily, while others, like floorboards, require more judicious selection. If you're planning entirely new furniture for your new house or extension, make sure to consider these costs in your budget.

8 WHAT WILL THE EXTERIOR OF THE BUILDING LOOK LIKE?

We all want to make a good first impression, and the same applies to our homes. Do you want to have a striking design which stands out or one which fits elegantly into its surroundings? Do you want a modern or a period look, or perhaps a combination of the two? Remember when choosing exterior materials to consider how they will age, especially exposed wood or stone, as well as how they react to extreme temperatures. Present your Architect with some examples resembling what you want to achieve, but remember that planning permission will determine much of what is possible. An Architect with local experience can negotiate the design with the authorities and can navigate local constraints without significantly compromising on your vision or your needs.

9 WHO IS REQUIRED FOR THE PROJECT?

Some Architects will be involved in the entirety of the build and will supply project managers to oversee the construction and find contractors and suppliers, while others will provide only the design. You may also not need the Architect to be involved entirely, either because you can oversee aspects of the project yourself or you have separate professionals helping at different stages. Make sure you've found the right people for every stage, including service engineers, CAD and party wall surveyors.

10 HOW LONG WILL THE PROJECT TAKE?

It's much easier to deal with the long wait and disruption of building work if you know exactly how long it will take. While you may want to oversee the process yourself to save money, an experienced project manager will deliver a project on time, saving you a great deal of stress in the process. If you're building a new home, make sure you've secured alternative accommodation for the duration of the construction period and that you've counted the costs of this accommodation into your budget.



John Dyer Grimes – Period Architecture – Parkside

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10 STEPS TO CHOOSING AN ARCHITECT

Your home should be the most precious place in the world. We all need a space where no matter how many stresses and worries there are in the outside world, you can shut the door and enjoy comfort and relaxation. Creating such a haven requires delicate planning and close attention to detail, so if you're leaving your home in the hands of an Architect, you need to make sure you find the right one. You need an Architect you can trust implicitly, with whom you can form a bond of understanding and creative vigour.

To help you narrow down your selection, I've prepared 10 steps to finding the ideal Architect.

1 ARE THEY A REGISTERED ARCHITECT?

As with any professional from whom you require services, you want to make sure your Architect has official, accredited evidence of their skill. A registered Architect is fully trained and professionally qualified, covered by indemnity insurance and bound by the Architects Act of 2003 and the Architects Code of Conduct and Practice. Choosing a registered Architect is absolutely essential. It means that not only is your build likely to be completed to a high standard, but if anything goes wrong during construction then your significant investment will be protected and the Architect will be held accountable for any breach of their promise.

2 DO YOU KNOW THEIR SPECIALITY?

Everyone works best within their area of expertise. As much as an Architect may enjoy the challenge of the new, you don't want your project to be their very first home build. An Architect who specialises in offices, shops or tower blocks may be able to bring over much of their knowledge, but designing and building a house requires a unique set of skills and disciplines. After all, a home has a very specific function for you, and you probably don't want to live somewhere that reminds you of an office. Seek an Architect who intimately understands the comfort, versatility and flow that goes into the design of a perfect house.

3 HAVE YOU SEEN THEIR WORK?

Once you've found an Architect who specialises in homes, you need to look into whether they build the kind of home you want to live in. There are as many variations in house design as there are people to live in them, and you no doubt have some very specific and personal requirements and tastes. Any decent Architect will be proud to show you examples of their work, so feel free to request examples and don't hesitate to ask to see the little details which can make all the difference. While a style you find attractive is a good place to start, also look for evidence of versatility in their work, as an Architect who only builds in a single style may not be willing or able to adapt to your vision.

4 DO THEY HAVE REFERENCES?

Ask your prospective Architect for a shortlist of their previous clients with contact numbers so you can ask directly about the quality of work and personality of the Architect. Most people are more than happy to share their experiences, so find a time when they can give you a detailed account of the whole process. If the clients are of a similar taste or lifestyle to you, then you'll be able to ask more personally relevant questions. Ask if they would personally recommend the Architect to you, and arrange a home visit if possible so you can see their work first hand.

5 IS YOUR PROJECT TO THEIR SCALE?

An architect who primarily works on alterations to an existing house which cost around £100,000, won't be ideal or even capable of a brand new build with a budget of £1 million plus. The opposite can be just as true, as a large scale architect may put your project on hold or not dedicate their full attention to it, if a more expensive project is available. Remember a bigger budget doesn't just mean a different design, it also balloons the management costs and responsibilities as the volume of moving parts, the type of work and the number of contractors increases. An architect used to your scale won't just produce a more suitable design, they'll have the experience to plan and manage your project correctly.

6 ARE THEY KEEN AND AVAILABLE?

When you describe your desired project to the Architect, do they seem genuinely interested in taking it up? Are they happy with your budget and do they think that what you want to achieve is realistic? Are they confident that the build can be completed within your required timescale and are they able to fulfil your brief right up until the end of the job? If an Architect is excited by your project, that excitement will be evident in every aspect of the build, from design to dedication.

7 ARE THEY PERSONALLY SUITABLE?

Your home is the most personal space in your life, so it's only right that you have a personal bond with your Architect. You need to be able to communicate clearly and candidly what you want from your home, what lifestyle you lead, what your future plans are. Talk with your potential Architect and develop a sense of whether they empathise and understand you. Ideally you will have a friendly rapport with them, and they will listen to your needs and explain how they can meet them with patience and without pushing their ideas on you. Remember that the role of an Architect is to transfer your vision into reality, not make their vision your reality.

8 DO THEY HAVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE?

An Architect with recent local experience and contacts in your area, along with a thorough knowledge of council permissions and other particular controls, will have a far better chance of having your designs and planning permission approved. They will also know the best contractors and suppliers, as well as the general character of the area to maximise the value of your house. Local knowledge does not necessarily require being based locally, as many experienced Architects are widely travelled. Many clients make the mistake of overrating an Architect because they're based round the corner. More important than whether an Architect is based near your planned area, is whether they've worked there before.

9 CAN THEY OFFER THE WHOLE SERVICE?

Aim to find an Architect who is willing and experienced to provide the full service, from consultation to design and project management. Some Architects won't do work on site, others are not geared for providing interior design or producing technical drawings. Make sure you're aware of every service they offer so you can plan around any additional professionals that need to be brought on to the project. If there's a particular service your Architect doesn't provide, then they will likely have trusted recommendations for someone who can fill the gap.

10 HAVE YOU COMPARED THEIR QUOTES?

Every Architect offers a different level of service with a different fee attached to it. You need to balance what you're willing to pay with the services you prioritise, as you would when choosing an airline. One may be a budget airline with no frills, no luggage space or food and drink, subject to delays and inconveniences. In contrast, there is a business class flight with luxury seats and service, a VIP car collection to and from the airport together with an exclusive lounge to relax in while you wait. Of course, there's a whole spectrum of options in between, and the same is true with Architects. Additional services like a thoroughly tailored design, out of office hours meetings, 24/7 support and guaranteed turnaround times may be important to you, or perhaps you just want a standard, off the shelf design which offers value by sacrificing bespoke service. Compare your selection of Architects based upon the level of service and price that you feel comfortable with.



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10 COMMON MISTAKES

After a lifetime of building homes I've had the pleasure of witnessing hundreds of projects fulfil their owner's wildest dreams. I've also witnessed people fall foul of mistakes which cause their dreams to crumble before them. Some are seemingly insignificant, some should be common sense – either way these are the 10 common mistakes which can undermine the foundations of a project and waste time, money and effort.

1 STARTING WITHOUT A MASTER PLAN.

Many people start on small-scale renovations without considering the full implications for the house as a whole and the budget required. It's easy to contract a partial repair, such as a having a door mended, but when the builder comes on site the project may start to expand. Rarely can significant work be done in one area without affecting another, or the change you make may no longer sit well with the rest of the house, causing you to want to pursue further alterations. Before you know it, you're working without a plan and things start going wrong. Failure to plan may also result in failure to research and notify the relevant local authorities. Over the years I've met many clients who have started work on a project only to find out half way through that planning permission is denied, or they never bothered requesting it in the first place. Working with an experienced Architect can help you avoid any nasty surprises down the line.

2 UNDERVALUING YOUR PROPERTY.

Whenever undergoing any property related endeavour, it's wise to understand the property market. You may want to disregard the world around you and build a house only suitable for yourself, but considering how to make your property saleable in the future is essential in protecting your investment. Life changes no matter how certain our plans. If a few years pass and you find yourself needing to sell, you don't want to find you've inadvertently decreased the value of your investment. Those two bedrooms you converted into a living room may have granted you extra space, but at the cost of making your house unavailable to families. It's a delicate balance between enjoying your daily life while maximising resale value, so seek advice from your Architect on how to design your perfect home without compromising its future potential.

3 ONLY THINKING SHORT TERM.

It's tempting to build or modify a house to satisfy our immediate needs, but if you haven't considered how the space will be used in the future you may find yourself torn between your dream home and your dream life. You want to keep the two united for as long as you can, so think ahead to make the design adaptable to the changes you expect. Can your home accommodate any children you may want? Will it be able to cope with the strain of them growing inside its walls? Are there disabled or elderly relatives or friends you want to be able to visit in comfort and safety? People are living longer than ever, so if you plan on staying in your house through your golden years, consider where you place your bedrooms and showers and whether you may need lifts installed. Share your dreams and lifestyle with your Architect so they can advise on how to future proof your home.

4 SKIMPING ON THE DESIGN TO SAVE MONEY.

You may consider design fees an unnecessary cost and feel capable of working with builders directly to save money. This is particularly common with those operating on a limited budget. However, the truth is, the best advice is more valuable when you have less to spend. Someone with deep pockets can afford to make mistakes, while if you have only one shot you need to make that first attempt the last. You want to achieve exactly what you want the first time and to the highest level possible within your budget. It means you can plan the whole project and reduce the costs of hiring suppliers and contractors. Using an expert to design and source the myriad of options available will ultimately save you time, money and from potentially disastrous errors. Remember that a registered Architect provides the necessary insurance to protect your property.

5 NOT ASKING THE ARCHITECT TO SAVE YOU MONEY.

I don't need to tell you that it's an Architect's job to be skilled at planning and design. What you may not have considered is how those skills can be applied to your project to cut costs over both the short and long term. You may be low in space and determined to have a costly extension added to your house, while an experienced Architect will look at space differently. They may see that your existing structure is poorly planned and they can provide you with additional space without having to add to the property. Most people don't need more space, they need more intelligent use of space.

You should also ask how money can be saved for you long term. There have been great advances in sustainable design, materials and technology over the past years, which mean that new builds have ongoing maintenance and running costs simply unachievable by older structures. Many people forget to include the long term costs in their budget, so plan carefully with your Architect how your design today could save you money tomorrow.

6 TRYING TO ESTIMATE PRICES FROM PLANNING DESIGNS.

The designs you submit to the council to be granted planning permission are primarily concerned with the exterior of the building and only provide a basic sense of the entire structure. These documents should not be submitted to builders in order to estimate prices, as incomplete information will inform only vague estimates. This will lead to the incorrect items and materials being delivered and onsite changes to the design, making you vulnerable to ballooning prices and delays. Make sure you're working from thoroughly prepared designs from your Architect, detailing every material from the foundations up to the roof and everything in between, from tiles to tap fittings.

7 IMPATIENCE.

Every client I meet is eager to have their project completed, and every Architect understands that the wait for moving into your new home can be agonising, but patience is essential in making your home exactly what you want it to be. Take your time at every stage and give yourself room to change your mind. A project needs to be able to adapt to your desires, which can often evolve through the process. Changes are far easier to implement before the concrete hardens. By giving the project the space it needs to grow, the end result will be a home you can love for a lifetime.

8 NOT HIRING SUITABLE SPECIALISTS.

As covered in this guide, there are many factors to choosing the right Architect for your project. After whether or not they are registered, the most important consideration is whether they specialise in the type of build you require. This extends to everyone who is working on your project. Specialists will cost more, but if you want to cut costs by hiring Jack-of-all-trades then expect lower quality results after multiple delays, as they try and familiarise themselves with the work on the go or force incompatible methods onto your build. An Architect who specialises in homes will also know the relevant specialists for all aspects of the project, so hiring the right person from the start is the first step in ensuring you have the best minds in charge at every stage.

9 NOT STATING BUDGET ACCURATELY.

Most people understate their building budgets. If your budget is not clearly stated then there will be difficulties and delays for you and your Architect. An Architect designs precisely to the budget you've given them down to the decimal. If you understate the amount you're willing to invest in a project, you may end up with a design you're not satisfied with. Adding more funds halfway through a project may seem like a good idea, but as the design is so thoroughly intertwined with the budget, more money to play with just means more work and delays. Plan a concrete budget with your Architect and make sure it is set before the design phase is complete.

10 NOT UNDERSTANDING QUALITY AND VALUE.

Only an elite few can simply ask for what they want regardless of cost but even the wealthiest client still wants to maximise their value. Spend time with your Architect to determine what level of quality and finishing detail you can afford and make sure to avoid any disappointments. Prices can vary hugely on relatively minor details. Prioritise your spending on the aspects of the design most important to you, where you want only the best materials and where function is more valuable than form. Would you rather invest extra funds into the bathroom or the kitchen? Are there alternative materials which can provide the same look and feel for a fraction of the cost? Is something that seems expensive now actually cost effective in the long run? It is very important that you know exactly the right level of quality and value you're going to achieve.



THE DYER GRIMES DIFFERENCE

We're an award winning architectural practice who have proven our skill and dedication on over 500 homes. Most recently we were honoured to receive the Best Family Home Award from the Sunday Times British Homes Awards 2013. As gratifying as it is to be officially recognised, we thrive on the pleasure of turning a client's dream into reality, and we approach every project with the same attention, care and high standards of craftsmanship. It's not about ego, it's not about showing off. It's about listening to the client and building everything around their dreams and aspirations.

Through such experience we recommend only the highest quality and most reliable contractors, and our local knowledge means we have contacts in council planning offices, estate agents, local suppliers and builders. With our own interior design and planning teams, you get the full package built from the inside out.

Your project will be overseen by our specialist project managers who possess exacting attention to detail and vast experience managing and liaising with builders. They'll ensure your house is delivered on time, on budget and at the standards which will meet or exceed your expectations. Along with project managers we can recommend a vast array of trusted specialists, from structural and service engineers to CAD checks and party wall surveyors.

Our projects are guided by a three step plan we call Concept, Plan, Build.

"We found John to be a true professional. He listened and took on board exactly what we were looking to create and worked very closely with us. We found him to be highly motivated, very communicative, flexible and very easy to deal with. He assembled a great team around him and delivered on everything. I cannot recommend him highly enough."

Tony Maude, White Lodge client

Winner of Sunday Times and Design Et Al Best Family Home Award 2013

1 CONCEPT

So you've had this brilliant idea which you've gone over and over in your head until it aches. But will it work and what's it going to cost? Rather than plunging headlong into the more costly stages of getting detailed plans drawn up, why not get your idea road tested by our team of architectural designers here in London?

Based on your ideas, we'll sketch out some initial design concepts and tell you what's involved to take it to the next stage and fulfil your dream. This service is stage one of the journey and can be provided in isolation or as part of a full "clicks to bricks" service.

2 PLAN

To take your idea to the critical planning phase, we develop more detailed design concepts and scale plans, together with full design and build budget estimates. Our team of in-house experts in our offices in London are able to provide clients with an accurate 3D 'walk through' of their new home to help them make those last minute, but crucial, design decisions.

Detailed planning application documents are developed, using our extensive experience and negotiating power with local councils to ensure the process runs as smoothly and quickly as possible. Our 90 per cent success rate in client planning approvals across London and Surrey reflects our skill and determination in this field.

3 BUILD

Once a project has the go ahead of planners and clients, we will provide detailed technical plans which meet all legal obligations and allow for accurate construction costs to be submitted. We will obtain fixed prices from selected contractors and organise contracts on behalf of clients.

Whilst some of our clients choose to manage the construction of works themselves, many have opted to use us to co-ordinate every aspect of the build, from managing builders and consultants, to monitoring the progress of building works through to successful delivery. We have a great track record in keeping projects on course and on budget with an unfaltering attention to quality and detail.

TESTIMONIALS

“After falling in love with a rather ramshackle Victorian house we were then left with the daunting task of refurbishing it to transform it into our family home. Having never done anything like this before the job turned out to be much bigger than we had anticipated and after considerable delays and problems we lost confidence in the project and ourselves.

Our first meeting with John restored our confidence and got us excited about the house again and what could be done. John and the whole team at Dyer Grimes Architecture are very personable and professional. They listened to us and took on board what we wanted to achieve. Immediately they presented us with ideas and suggestions about how we could fulfill our goals, explaining that by thinking about the house as a whole would be better than just limiting our alterations to one area as we had previously envisaged.

It’s a testament to the design that when you look at the house everything works perfectly as a family home while retaining the charm of the original house. It’s been brilliantly modernised and is exactly what we wanted Working with the team at Dyer Grimes Architecture has been great fun and we couldn’t be happier with our beautifully finished home”.

Mr. & Mrs. D Luxton, Surrey

“Having found our dream plot of land, we started the daunting task of choosing the right Architect to work with us on building our family home. What struck us about JDG was the passion for immaculate design as well as an obsessive focus on the detail. Given we were attempting to build a contemporary modern sustainable home on a tight budget this gave us comfort that it could be done.

Having taken our design brief the JDG team came up with a design that we both fell in love with, and addressed the primary challenge of designing a house that could be both modern / contemporary and yet a family home.

We received planning at the first attempt which given the history of the site (5 years of applications and still no build) was a credit to the strategy employed by the JDG team. Throughout the detailed design stage the team continually came up with great detailed ideas on all aspects of the design ranging from lighting, colours, through to our beautiful cantilevered staircase”.

Mr. A Aman, Sussex

“When we bought our house in 2013 we realised after a previous renovation that we would require the use of an Architect. After talking to a substantial list of firms we fortunately came across Dyer Grimes Architecture, who instantly gave us confidence that they had the skill and experience to unlock an awkward 1930’s layout and turn it into our dream family home.

Straight from our first conversation John understood exactly what we wanted and how we could achieve it. Both John and Olly made the design process an enjoyable and stimulating one, ending with a design fully thought out for aesthetic and practical points. Since starting our project we have recommended Dyer Grimes Architecture to two other people who’ve also been as happy with the outcome as we have been.

We wouldn’t hesitate to recommend Dyer-Grimes Architecture and wouldn’t think twice using them if doing another project”.

Mr. & Mrs. T Guest, Richmond upon Thames, Surrey

“Faced with an uphill planning battle to turn our near derelict house in a conservation area in Kingston upon Thames into a vibrant family home, we met with several Architects.

John Dyer Grimes stood head and shoulders above the rest and was the obvious choice given his reputation for winning difficult planning approvals. He worked closely with us to come up with a daring and innovative scheme and turned around the plans and surveys required very quickly and to exceptional quality. His attention to detail and professional, calm manner made him a pleasure to work with, and he provided excellent advice and support during the entire planning process.

John was responsible for overturning near impossible planning odds to get our design approved, without any changes to the original designs, or additional conditions imposed – all in less than four months from the date we completed on the purchase.

We are truly delighted with the end result and have no hesitation in recommending John and his team at Dyer Grimes Architects”.

Mrs. C Chang, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey

“We initially stumbled over Dyer Grimes while searching the Internet looking for Architects to look after the conversion of four flats into one. After interviewing several Architects it became immediately clear that we wanted to appoint Dyer Grimes. So what made the difference?

Besides from the fact that we love their work, John Dyer Grimes, Michael Gwynn (Associate Architect), Leila Latchin (Interior Designer) and John Rookyard (Project Manager) showed their ability to listen carefully to what we wanted and come back with great solutions to how to achieve it and make it even better.

John Dyer Grimes rightfully prides himself as someone who really understands what he’s doing. The team was always very responsive and available to discuss issues and changes that were inevitable for any project of this nature.

An Architect is only as good as the builder who delivers the goods. Kevin Gale, from Gallowers Builders, was instrumental in delivering the project to the highest standard. We all had really good fun as well. Would we work with the team again – absolutely”!

Mr. A Schwager, South Kensington, London

“Finding a good Architect is never easy. John Dyer Grimes and his team were presented with a difficult task that they approached with sympathetic understanding and a freshness of ideas that were exciting and innovative.

Every detail was well thought out and discussed beforehand and the final design surpassed our expectations. John possesses an ability to combine imaginative ideas with a sound knowledge of materials that he is then capable of communicating to his clients.

The use of 3-D graphics allowed us to envisage the final outcome and any alterations were easily accommodated during the planning process. We were more than pleased with the results and would have no hesitation in recommending Dyer Grimes Architects to anyone who believes in quality”.

Mrs. P O’Rooke, Richmond upon Thames, Surrey

“In our experience, John has an approach that I believe people will find very rare and refreshing these days. He is extremely accommodating and friendly throughout the entire process.

Not only he is extremely knowledgeable about both the architectural and contractual aspects of the business, but he also has a great natural sense for what the client is looking to do.

Whether it’s layout design or material selection, he’s got an opinion, and has the right approach in sharing it. He is a pleasure to work with and I would strongly recommend him and Dyer Grimes Architects to anyone looking for architectural design or construction management”.

Mrs. S Duquette, Putney, London

“Having lived in a listed manor house for decades, the decision to buy and knock down an existing bungalow and build an ultra-modern new home was not an easy one. John worked with us through the purchase process and thanks to his original feasibility study; we had the vision and the courage to embark on our dream house.

John proved to have great conceptual ability with our brief and demonstrated meticulous attention to detail. Throughout the project John and his team worked closely with us, and our builders, meeting regularly to ensure that our home evolved at each stage and any necessary adaptations progressed into satisfying solutions without compromising our vision.

John’s expertise, flexibility and empathy led us to the beautiful home we have today – our collaboration was invaluable and we would highly recommend Dyer Grimes Architects to anyone who is after a home that is unique to them as individuals”.

Mr. & Mrs. T Maude, Oxted, Surrey



My father was a celebrated Architect, and I followed in his footsteps around construction sites as a child until I could work in his studio as a man. I started in the days of pen and tracing paper and picked up practical experience laying bricks and digging holes on site.

At 24, I opened my own practice, and now have the great pleasure of leading a world class team at Dyer Grimes Architects.

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This book shares the results of our journey and our principles. In the coming pages, you won't find any commercial developments, any reproductions or any by-the-numbers design. What you will find are one of a kind homes, all extensions of our clients' lives and personalities – as individual as they are. I hope it plants a seed in your imagination to inspire your own perfect home.

John Dyer Grimes

SELECTED CLIENT LIST

Rob Brydon, *Actor, Comedian and TV Presenter*

Mark Baker, *Director Astley Baker Davies, co writer Peppa Pig animation series*

Olly Murs, *Singer and TV Presenter*

Jermaine Jenas, *Professional Footballer*

Kate Silverton, *Journalist at the BBC*

Tom Guest, *Professional Rugby Union Player*

Ron Kalifa, *Deputy Chairman at WorldPay*

Nathan Davison, *Head of Prime Services Distribution at Barclays*

Akshaya Bhargava, *CEO Barclays Wealth & Investment Management*

Dr Halit Cingillioglu, *Turkish Ambassador to Holland*

Rob Calcraft, *Founder of REN Skincare*

Andrew Schwager, *Western Europe Sales & Marketing Director for British American Tobacco Holly*

Tucker MBE, *Founder & President of NotOnTheHighStreet.com*

Mark Cardwell, *Chairman at Echo House*

Ulrica Ludqvist, *Director at Tech21 Impactology*

Graham Bosher, *Co-Founder & Non-Executive Chairman of Graze.com*

Andrew Morgan, *CEO of Diageo Drinks*

Anthony Cockett, *Director at Citi*

Simon Peachey, *CIO British Telecom*

Douglas McCallum, *Chairman at Photobox and Trainline, CEO eBay*

Colin Banfield, *Managing Director at Citi*

Chris Boehringer, *Senior Vice President at Oaktree Capital Management*

James Mahoney, *Senior Managing Director at CVC Capital Partners*

Julian Schiller, *Senior Vice President at Brookfield Asset Management*

Dominic Luxton, *Co-Founder of Gamesys*

Ben Latreuille, *Partner at Wilton & Bain*

Tim Field, *Partner at Addleshaw Goddard LLP*

WILDWOOD

Michael and Helen had lived in their existing house for 30 years, which had been built in 1950 as a typical two-storey red brick suburban detached house. It sat on the most stunning mature rear garden and to the front of the site was a circular green, shared with a dozen neighbours. They didn't want to move but the house was falling apart.

Helen had dreamed of living in a Georgian Country house and together we developed up a design for a 5,500 ft² new home. The clients hated the red brick of their neighbours' houses so we negotiated with the planners to use a stunning yellow London stock brick, with specialist weather struck pointing, and Portland stone external architectural features.

The site was in a designated archaeological area, so we had to have specialist teams visit the site during the demolition and foundation stages. We even discovered the ruins of an earlier house during the process. Ecology consultants had to carry out nighttime bat surveys to ensure no protected species would be injured during the demolition of the house.

We designed for "Lifetime Homes" standards and installed a lift so that Michael and Helen could live in the house forever, but it also turned out to be a real benefit for their elderly parents when they stay at the house. With multi-generational living being more prevalent, we designed the second floor to have a kitchenette. This allowed carers, guests, parents or their children and grandchildren to have a floor entirely of their own in the house.













PARKSIDE

This magnificent new build Wimbledon home offers a seamless blend of classic architectural grandeur and state-of-the-art modern living. Nestled within meticulously landscaped grounds, the property is a true sanctuary that honors its heritage while providing every contemporary comfort.

Securely positioned behind a classic brick wall and ornate wrought-iron gates, the home is approached via a sweeping gravel driveway. The stately front facade commands attention with its beautiful, light-colored stone, perfectly proportioned sash windows, and an elegant classical portico entrance. In the spring, mature magnolia trees burst into pink blooms, framing the property with breathtaking natural color.

While the front of the home exudes historic charm, the rear reveals a stunning architectural surprise. A magnificent, full-width contemporary glass extension spans the ground floor, flooding the open-plan kitchen and living areas with natural light. This modern addition creates a flawless transition between the interior spaces and the breathtaking gardens. Above the glass extension, beautiful purple wisteria gracefully climbs the original stone facade, softening the transition between old and new.

The rear garden is an entertainer’s dream. It features a pristine, glass-enclosed swimming pool perfectly integrated into the terraced patio. Beyond the pool, an expansive, manicured lawn stretches out, bordered by expertly structured box hedges, lush flower beds, and mature trees that provide ultimate privacy.









PEEK CRESCENT

The client had long wished to realise her two dreams: living in the beautiful neighbourhood of Wimbledon Village which has a distinct historic character, and building a contemporary Modernist inspired house. They did not just look to create a home, but also wanted to make it a grand space to showcase and enjoy their extensive art collection which included many sizeable sculptures.

They were fortunate to find a suitable site occupied by a grand, turn-of-the-century period villa. Despite having been altered by a modern side extension built in the 1960's, the property retained its stunning historic character. This was recognised by the local authorities, who designated the house as a Building of Townscape Merit in 1991, making it a local heritage asset, distinguished for its historical and architectural interest.

Unfortunately the client's collaboration with a previous Architect did not yield successful results. Their design of partly demolishing the house and extending it took the contemporary aesthetic too far, failing to respect the architectural value of the original house. Ultimately it was viewed negatively by the planners at the pre-application stage.

Following this first attempt, the client turned to DGA to lead a new design team and find ways of achieving their practical and aesthetic goals, while preserving the charm of the old house. DGA adopted a new approach: designing the *exterior* of the new extensions as sympathetic to the original dwelling, constructed in matching red brick, making reference to original architectural details and incorporating metal frame glass doors and a conservatory. Simultaneously, the *interior* of the new home was designed as a contemporary space, abundant in natural light, grand rooms, carefully selected modern materials, accents of rich textures and sleek detailing. These provided a neutral yet engaging backdrop for the client's stunning art collection.

One of the main features of the proposal was a basement, fully concealed under the existing house and the new extension. This contained a generous wellness and spa suite, complete with a swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna, gym, and entertainment room. DGA's new design approach, paired with an extensive restoration of the original house and a garden transformation, was welcomed by the local authorities who granted planning permission for the scheme so construction could get underway.

Construction was not without its challenges, given the complex engineering involved in constructing a basement under an existing house, paired with our client's attention to detail in interior design, where we were instructed to source only the highest quality finishes and fittings. However, with an experienced contractor on board and DGA's project management skill set and design leadership the project was successfully completed. The transformed house blends in with the historic character of Wimbledon Village, while on the inside it provides the client with the modern living environment they have always dreamt of.



DRAX AVENUE

Louise and Sandro dreamed of building a new home in Wimbledon and started searching for a suitable site. The design conscious couple love the blend of old and new with a strong belief that contemporary interior design can sit harmoniously within a traditional building. They longed for a light open kitchen living, dining area with full height windows to provide stunning views of the garden.

They finally found a 1930's house and commissioned an Architect to submit for Planning for a Contemporary home. Unfortunately Merton Council refused the application and this was when Louise contacted DyerGrimes Architects. Our approach was to design a traditional house which reflected the local Architectural vernacular, the street has Georgian and Arts and Crafts style houses. Through our long-standing relationship with Merton Conservation Officers we were able to convince them to grant planning for a taller house with elegant proportions.

They agreed that the new house would compliment the streetscape and the fact that it would be built to the highest thermal standards and be carbon neutral was seen as a great benefit. We successfully negotiated a beautiful new landscape design in exchange for permission to remove a number of mature trees on the site. The end result was a stunning period property which accommodated the family's need for space, light and contemporary living, whilst making a positive contribution to the private road.









BROAD BEECH

True architecture doesn’t just sit on the land; it belongs to it. This project represents a meticulous study in Palladian and Georgian classicism, reimagined for the 21st century. By utilizing traditional massing, disciplined proportioning, and exquisite local craftsmanship, we have created a home that feels as though it has anchored here for centuries, while discreetly possessing the ultimate in modern luxury.

The Architecture of arrival: the approach to the principal elevation instils a sense of quiet authority and timelessness.

Classical Proportions: The façade is defined by strict symmetry and a rigorous fenestration pattern, featuring traditional six-over-six timber sash windows.

Masterful Masonry: Crafted from hand-dressed, locally sourced Ashlar, the building’s edges are anchored by subtle rusticated quoins.

Elegant Detailing: The eye is drawn upward from the pedimented portico supported by Doric columns to a traditional lead-hipped slate roof, complete with symmetrical chimneys, classically proportioned dormers, and a refined stone balustrade.

Framing the Forecourt: Flanking stone screen walls extend seamlessly from the main block, framing the gravel drive and giving the residence a commanding, estate-like presence while screening the private gardens beyond.

A Masterclass in Topography and Transition: While the arrival side presents a formal historical face, the rear elevation reveals the project’s contemporary genius. We utilized the natural slope of the landscape to introduce a substantial subterranean level without compromising the classical proportions of the main house above.

The Modern Podium: The traditional structure rests upon a meticulously integrated stone podium. This lower level houses a contemporary wellness and living suite, featuring expansive, dark-framed glazing that floods the interior with morning light.

Sweeping Staircases: Twin returning stone staircases gracefully connect the formal raised ground floor to the modern pool terrace below, bridging the gap between classical grandeur and relaxed, contemporary outdoor living.

Seamless Indoor-Outdoor Living: These modern doors open entirely to a sunken, stone-paved terrace and an integrated linear pool, creating a private, sheltered sanctuary.

This country home proves that one never has to choose between historical elegance and modern living. It is a legacy property, built for today, designed for forever.









ATHERTON DRIVE

The client brief was to design a beautiful new build Georgian style house with associated parking and landscaping to provide a higher quality of accommodation and standard of living than the existing 1930's house occupying the site. The existing house had been the subject of many unsympathetic changes and reconfiguration over its lifetime and the land around the property developed, making the house feel oddly placed on the site with no clear visible entrance or relationship to Atherton Drive.

We were able to finalise a design, after much back and forth with planning and conservation officers, that complemented the area and preserved the landscape without a single compromise to our clients' plans.

A red brick facade and detailing contrasted with bold white conservation french doors and sash windows perfectly emulates the classic aesthetic of the area, overlooking an expansive front porch and driveway with its striking purple plum trees.

Behind this traditional exterior is an open, contemporary space that can easily transform to suit work or play. Pocket doors can transform the ground floor from an expansive, seamless entertainment space complete with piano and bar into segmented, intimate meeting rooms or studies.

The first and second floor are dedicated to bedrooms, providing pure relaxation when the day is done. Five rooms provide more than enough resting places for guests and live-in staff, who can enjoy their own space thanks to a separate living room and kitchen on the top floor, not to mention the en suite for every room.

With work and rest accommodated above, the basement floors provide life and leisure. An open plan kitchen, dining and TV room fill the lower ground floor, while the floor below houses a swimming pool, gym, sauna room and art store.

Light wells, ventilation and meticulous subterranean design keeps the basement floors bright, cosy and dry – even with the pool and sauna. It's a fully equipped underground retreat where the pressures of work life can be melted away, unified by a stairwell that stretches right from the bottom up to the first floor.

More people work from home than ever but there are few structures so perfectly suited for both professional and home life as this luxurious, adaptable new home in the heart of one of London's most desirable locations.









CLAPHAM COMMON NORTH SIDE

Situated with sweeping views over Clapham Common this residence stands as a testament to the enduring appeal of classic Queen Anne style London townhouses. The exterior presents a respectful restoration of the property’s period heritage, where elegant brickwork and meticulously refurbished sash windows hint at the grandeur within. By preserving the historic façade, the home maintains its authoritative presence on the streetscape while serving as a quiet threshold between the bustling energy of the city and the private, tranquil sanctuary inside.

Passing through the front door, the architectural narrative seamlessly shifts to a thoughtfully reimagined interior layout designed for modern family life. We focused on enhancing the home’s original features, restoring period elements such as tall skirting boards and wooden wall panelling. This robust architectural framework is balanced by clever spatial interventions, ensuring that the flow of the house feels both expansive and intimately connected, drawing abundant natural light deep into the centre of the home.

The master bedroom occupies a principal position in the house, at the front of the piano nobile, utilizing the grand ceiling height of the first floor to create a true retreat. Here, the restored wall panelling provides a classical backdrop, while tall sash windows frame the changing seasons of the mature trees outside. The layout of this room prioritizes a sense of calm and volume, allowing the architecture to breathe and providing a generous, light-filled canvas for the layered interiors. These were created in collaboration with our interior designers Eadie & Crole, and have been featured in many publications.

In their vision for this sanctuary, Eadie & Crole have leaned into a sophisticated, soft palette of blush pinks, warm neutrals, and rich textural details. A magnificent bespoke four poster bed, complete with a gathered fabric canopy, anchors the space, adding a layer of romantic dramatism. This is complemented by floral armchairs and curated lighting; from the striking multi-globe brass floor lamp to deep green ceramic bedside lamps; culminating in a lifestyle of quiet refined luxury where the homeowners can unwind in absolute comfort.

Ascending to the upper floors, the architecture embraces the playful character of the roof structure, where sloping ceilings and eaves have been utilized to create imaginative children’s and guest bedrooms. Bespoke joinery, custom beds and shelving nestled neatly into alcoves maximise the floor space while providing a cozy sense of enclosure. Wall panelling painted in soft sage greens and teals unifies these rooms, while vibrant accents, vintage ski posters, and classic car prints inject a spirited, personalized charm that balances childhood with timeless design.

Ultimately this project represents a harmonious dialogue between historic architectural preservation and vibrant timeless interior design. Every finish, texture and fitting, as well as every layout improvement have been considered through the lens of the family’s lifestyle; balancing the need for sophisticated adult spaces with the practicalities of a busy household. The result is a home that feels carefully curated yet deeply personal, offering a comforting, beautiful and functional place for modern family living.













EMPEROR’S GATE

Swiss clients Andrew and Frederike loved their period mansion flat so much that they bought the one above and the one below. The vision was to seamlessly join the three floors together with a beautiful sculptural staircase and to transform the new top floor into a luxurious bedroom suite with balconies overlooking the square. Japanese gardens in the basement were to act as light wells and allow their young children a space to play outdoors.

The ground floor apartment comprised a large beautifully appointed living room with 3.5m ceiling heights and a series of smaller cellular rooms including a cramped kitchen and long dark hallway in the centre. The basement apartments had suffered many adhoc alterations and additions. Dark and tired, they were in dire need of attention but did at least provide access to a side light well and rear courtyard. The challenge was to reconfigure the internal structure of all three floors and link them to create a comfortable three-storey family home.

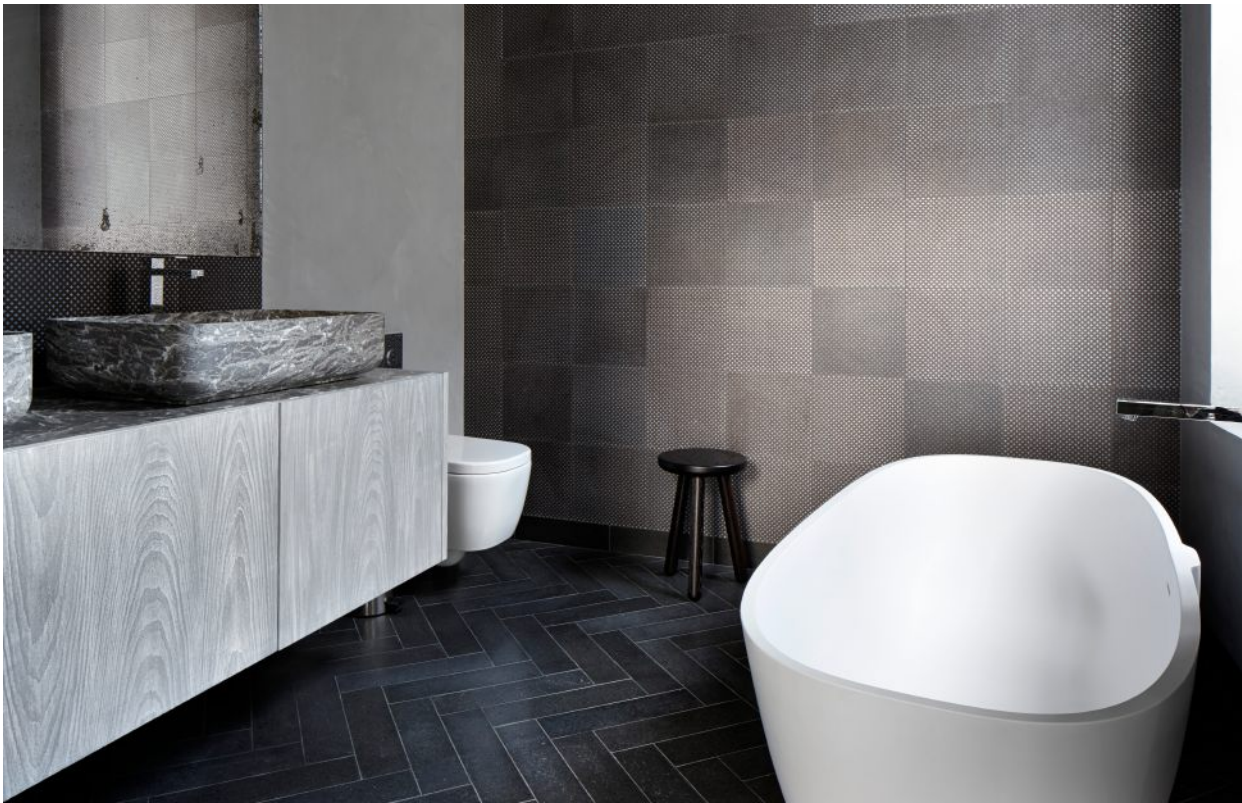
Dyer Grimes Architects created a stunning centre point to the house, bringing the three floors together via a generous atrium and sculptural staircase. Our designs provided views and light to the centre of the plan, linking the large living room at ground floor with the open-plan kitchen and dining room, and courtyard spaces in the basement.

The first floor was transformed into a luxurious master bedroom with bespoke dressing room, designer bathroom, sitting room and a roof terrace – true six-star luxury. Our interior design team made the most of the original Victorian features of the upper floor, whilst linking them seamlessly to the contemporary basement with its polished concrete floors, exposed brickwork and top-of-the-range Italian kitchen. Through our extensive network of the finest local craftsmen and suppliers, we were able to secure great value for money and the highest quality finishes for our clients.











SPRING TERRACE

Chantal had always dreamed of re-creating her childhood home so when a derelict Georgian house came up for sale in Richmond, the opportunity was too good to miss. The house was listed and, true to its period, comprised small dark rooms not suitable for modern family living. The goal was to restore the house to its former glory and increase its footprint by a third, creating a stunning new extension in contemporary glass below ground leading into the garden.

Richmond Society, together with the Listed Building Officers required that any extension to the property should match the existing style of the building. There was also the small matter of a ten-metre Scots pine tree with a preservation order which was growing right in the middle of the proposed extension works and would need to be removed. Dyer Grimes Architects also had to find the most effective way of keeping our client, who was 6000 miles away in Hong Kong, fully informed and up-dated with progress as well as consultatively evaluating the finishes, fixtures and fittings.

Through our long-standing relationship with Richmond Conservation Officers we were able to convince them to grant planning on a minimalist glass extension that complemented the original Georgian architecture. We worked closely with Richmond Archaeological Society to develop a structural solution that would allow us to excavate the basement and build the extension. Furthermore, our overseas client was involved every step of the way. Using our in-house virtual 3D modelling service, the family was able to ‘walk around’ their new home via their computer desktop in Hong Kong. The end result was a stunning restoration of a period property which accommodated the family’s need for space, light and contemporary living.











BELVEDERE AVENUE

23 Belvedere Avenue is an early twentieth-century, locally listed home situated within a Wimbledon Village Conservation Area. The client's brief required transforming the property for a young family by adding a rear extension and comprehensively reconfiguring the layout to provide contemporary spatial flows, abundant natural light, and modern services, all while respecting the building's historic Arts and Crafts character.

Prior to the refurbishment, the home had not been significantly updated since the 1960s and retained many original features, which guided the major design interventions. A key architectural move was extending the original central staircase—which previously only reached the first floor—upward in front of the large oriel window. Newel posts, spindles, and handrails were meticulously copied from the surviving originals to create a seamless continuation of the historic stair.

Alongside the staircase, surviving decorative plasterwork and cornices were carefully conserved. Missing or damaged elements were expertly recreated and adapted to suit the new layouts, matching new plaster profiles to historic samples to maintain the period character and ensure a cohesive transition between the old and new volumes.

On the ground floor, a new brick rear extension accommodates the primary living spaces, including a large kitchen, formal and informal living areas, and a central office. Designed to match the existing façade, the extension features contemporary details like slender steel-framed doors and large glazed panels that frame views of the 100-foot garden and establish the space as the social hub of the home.

The upper levels were completely reorganized to comfortably accommodate the family, providing five bedrooms, all with modern ensuite facilities to improve circulation. This includes an extensive master suite occupying roughly half of one floor, featuring a large dressing room and a bathroom strategically positioned to take advantage of the rear garden views.

Ultimately, the project successfully balances traditional timber joinery and historic integrity with clean, modern finishes. By utilizing a sensitive, conservation-led approach, the design delivers the technical and spatial requirements of a contemporary family home while honoring the building's heritage and its wider setting within the Conservation Area.





