HOW THE ARCHITECTURAL PROCESS ACTUALLY WORKS

Questions worth answering first

By Rochelle
for R.Studio Architects

STUDIO

www.rstudioarchitects.co.za

INTRO

Many people approach an architect without really knowing what the process involves — and that's completely normal.

Architecture isn't just about drawings or aesthetics. It's a sequence of decisions, conversations, testing ideas, and refining solutions over time. Most frustration on projects doesn't come from "bad design", but from misunderstood expectations about how and when things happen.

This guide explains the typical stages of an architectural project in plain English — not to overwhelm you, but to help you understand when decisions are made, what's expected of you, and why some stages take time.

There's no one-size-fits-all process, but most projects follow a similar rhythm.

— Rochelle

THE BIG PICTURE

Most projects move through the following stages:

1. Brief & Feasibility
2. Concept Design
3. Design Development
4. Technical Documentation
5. Construction
6. Close-Out

Each stage builds on the one before it.

Trying to skip ahead often feels faster — but usually creates problems later.

In my experience:
The smoother projects aren't the ones that move the quickest at the start, but the ones that take time to think properly upfront.

STAGES 1–3: THE THINKING WORK

1. Brief & Feasibility

This is where the foundation is set.

- Understanding what you need (and what you don't)
- Looking at the site and its constraints
- Testing what's realistically possible within a budget
- Identifying potential risks early

Why this matters:
If feasibility is skipped or rushed, projects often become reactive later on.

2. Concept Design

This is where ideas start to take shape.

- Overall layout and spatial logic
- How the building sits on the site
- Early conversations about scale, look, and feel
- Initial alignment with budget

This stage isn't about detail — it's about direction.

3. Design Development

This is where decisions start to carry weight.

- Refining plans and layouts
- Coordinating consultants
- Making choices that affect cost, construction, and performance

Architect insight:
Most cost savings happen here — not during construction.

STAGES 4–6: THE BUILDING WORK

4. Technical Documentation

This stage is often underestimated — but it's critical.

- Detailed drawings for approval and construction
- Clear information for contractors to price accurately
- Reducing ambiguity before work starts on site

In practice:

Good documentation saves time, money, and stress.

5. Construction

This is where everything becomes real.

- Building on site
- Ongoing coordination and decision-making
- Responding to site conditions and questions

Construction isn't a "handover and walk away" phase — it's a collaborative one.

6. Close-Out

The final stretch.

- Practical completion
- Snag lists and final adjustments
- Bringing the project to a proper close

Rushing this stage often leads to long-term frustration.

A FEW REALITIES WORTH KNOWING

Things people are often surprised by

- Design is not a straight line
- Early decisions have the biggest impact
- Changes later usually cost more
- Clear communication matters more than perfection

Final thought:
Understanding the process upfront doesn't make it rigid — it makes it calmer.

When everyone knows what stage they're in, decisions become clearer and expectations more realistic.

If you'd like to talk through where your project might sit within this process, I offer a 90-minute consult focused on clarity, feasibility, and next steps.

Rochelle
DIRECTOR AND PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT

📞 084 514 1664
✉️ rochelle@rstudioarchitects.co.za
🌍 www.rstudioarchitects.co.za
📍 38 Kerkstraat, Stellenbosch, 7600