



# THE ELEMENTAL GUIDE TO BUILDING YOUR CUSTOM HOME

HOW TO  
BUILD





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## INTRODUCTION

It is a major decision for anyone to build a custom home, and the process can be stressful and nerve-racking. For most individuals, especially first-timers, planning is thrilling and inspiring. Our guide will help you understand what to expect to ensure you feel confident as you embark on this adventure. Rather than adapting to the layout of an existing home – this is an exciting opportunity to create a space specific to your family’s needs.

There are several things to consider and decide, the size and type of house you want, heating, arrangement of rooms, windows, doorknobs, counters, etc., so it is easy to feel overwhelmed. When that happens, take a minute to remember why you want to take on this endeavor. When building a beautiful custom home, you can fine-tune every detail perfectly to meet your wants and needs.

Every dream you have had about the perfect home can be indulged: a craft room for the family, the ultimate man cave, a chef’s kitchen with a breakfast nook where you will sit with your family to create everlasting memories, with your creativity and imagination, it is ALL possible.

It will take a lot of organization to bring your ideas to life, but with time, commitment, a sprinkle of patience, and the right team of experts, building a custom home is exceptionally rewarding.

In our guide, let us walk you through the process step by step, so you will know how it all works and begin with the end in mind.



## CHOOSING & PURCHASING LOT OR LAND

The first question to answer before you can build your home is where you are planning to build. You may already have undeveloped land or purchased a lot, but if you are still shopping around, there are many different things to consider as you view potential building lots, including:

### NEIGHBORHOOD

Location, Location, Location. Where do you want to live? What sort of view do you want? Do you need to consider school districts? Do you want to keep your commute under a certain timeframe? Are you looking for a secluded hideaway, tight-knit community, or a mixture of both?

### LOT SIZE

How big is the lot? Is it big enough to accommodate the kind of house you are imagining? How big of a garage will you need? Do you want a big yard, a place for kids to play, room for furry babies?

### LOT COST

Are you willing to spend more in a desirable area or move further out to a site in an up-and-coming area? What are the property tax rates? Is there a trend in property values in the area to consider?





If you are still looking for the perfect location, consider getting a licensed realtor and builder on board before you buy. Having both involved to advise you as you select your site can be invaluable. They know how the different aspects of a lot can affect the cost and timeline required to build your custom house and help you choose one that suits your needs and lifestyle.

## LOT FEATURES

What do you see when you close your eyes and imagine the perfect setting for your home? Are you in the middle of a lively street or tucked away in a cul-de-sac? Do you see mature trees bordering the property? Are you on a waterfront overlooking an English bay or a body of freshwater somewhere tucked away?

## LOT SHAPE, ZONING, EASEMENTS, BUILDING RESTRICTIONS, SETBACKS, OR DESIGN GUIDELINES

Some lots come with design challenges, which does not mean they are not workable: with a competent builder and an experienced architect on your side, anything is possible. That said, you should be aware of factors like these since they can affect the cost and the flexibility of your dream design.

## SOIL CONDITIONS, VEGETATION, GEOLOGY, AND TOPOGRAPHY

A site with steep grades will need a lot of excavation and fill. Expansive soils lurking under the surface can drive up costs before the build even begins. If you have a wooded lot or even one with a scattering of mature trees, you may need to remove some to make space for the house. It is also critical you learn about stormwater retention and drainage and whether the lot is in a floodplain.

# CUSTOM HOME PROCESS MAP

## GET A DREAM TEAM

- Custom Home Builder
- Architect
- Designer

STEP  
01



## ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAMMING AND DESIGN PHASE

- Preliminary design
- Preliminary estimate
- Final plans, design selections, specifications & engineering
- Detailed budget & rough schedule

STEP  
02



## PRE- CONSTRUCTION PHASE

- Apply for building permits and approvals
- Secure financing (if necessary)
- Finalize selections with interior designer
- Refine & finalize budget
- Finalize project schedule
- Finalize and pick up building permits
- Bring on key sub trades/vendors (i.e. foundation, framing, roofing, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, etc.)

STEP  
03



## CONSTRUCTION PHASE

- Site requirements & foundation Building the framework and getting to lock up stage (eg. framing, roof, exterior doors, windows)
- Mechanical trades (eg. plumbing, hvac)
- Electrical wiring and panel installation
- Insulation
- Drywall
- Exterior work
- Flooring, trim & interior finishes
- Final finishing of plumbing, electrical & hvac

STEP  
04



STEP  
05



## MOVE-IN

- Final building inspections
- Final client walk-through
- Time to move into your custom home!

STEP  
06



## WARRANTY PHASE

- Our work doesn't stop at move-in.
- All warranty items are handled quickly & effectively by our team at Westgate.



## ASSEMBLING YOUR DREAM TEAM

The timeline of building a custom home is a long-term project. Over the weeks and months of planning and constructing, you will spend a lot of time with the professionals you choose.

Your architect and custom home builder will make an enormous difference to your experience; you need to have similar mindsets to feel confident that you can fully trust the team of experts you have hired. Do they listen and communicate well? Do they understand your needs and priorities? Do they share your vision to bring it into reality? Is your project going to get the time and attention it deserves? How many projects do they take on simultaneously, and what kind of staff do they have to handle that workload? Getting the answers to all these questions and more requires an interviewing and selection process.

Many people choose their architect first and then look for their builder. Others begin with a trusted general contractor to look over their site and advise on the possibilities before approaching an architect for a design proposal. For your peace of mind, it is better to have them both begin from the initial planning stages.

Meeting potential builders is a vital stage of the building process. Slow down and take your time. Ask as many questions as you wish: a good builder will be more than willing to answer them. Discuss their process and find out how organized, effective, and capable they are. You are also entitled to proof: ask to visit a job site and a finished home with them. Request references and talk to previous homeowners, architects, and designers about their experiences with the company.

As you prepare to meet with experts, try to plan your budget, the main points of what you want and need, and the kinds of houses you find inspirational. Clarity of vision will streamline things, as you will have a common point of reference, but you do not need anything set in stone this early, so do not worry:) Your design /build team of professionals will help you get clarity on your project as you move through the design and planning process.



## CHOOSING YOUR BUILDER

Finding the right builder can be difficult, but keep these key considerations in mind, and you will start great:

- **Uncompromising quality**

A good builder listens, but a great builder will understand. A great builder has walked in your shoes and like a trusted family member, will relate and guide you clear of the pitfalls before they occur. They will keep your best interests in mind and execute your will at their hand. They will also have the trusted contacts and experience to keep your project on time and budget. They will be firm on the quality level of the materials and workmanship throughout the project. Quality control is paramount. From structure safety to the final cosmetic finishes, every detail must be chosen and executed to the highest standard.

- **Overriding Commitment to Quality**

The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price has been forgotten - Benjamin Franklin

Cutting corners during the building process does not pay. Your new house may be in your family's name for many years and would be an investment in their future. Choosing sub-par subcontractors or skimping on key building materials or hours to save money is economically false and will cost you more construction delays and repairs. That can negatively impact the value of your investment in the future.







- **Experience**

We all start somewhere; when it comes to a project of this size and complexity, having a competent experienced professional by your side is a must. In British Columbia, a builder must have a valid builder's license. Yet it does not stop there. There is a lot to building custom homes that you can only learn after years on the job and schooling. Every single homebuilding project comes with its unique challenges.

There will be times when things do not go according to plan. How your construction team will deal with those situations is everything. Experienced builders have seen it all; if they are professionals, they never panic or act negatively when there is a bump in the road. Good project managers will know how to solve the problem, so take the time to investigate the reputation and history of your potential home builder. It can save you time, money, and frustration later.

- **A diverse portfolio**

Chances could be that you have decided to build a custom home because you want a residence that tailors to your lifestyle and taste, so do not settle for someone who churns out slight variations on the same project repeatedly. What you need to look for is a versatile, well-rounded builder, who understands you, the architect, and then makes it happen. No matter what style you are planning, your builder should work in that type of design. Review their portfolio of past projects: what do you see? A wide range of styles and sizes is a great sign. It means that they have the skills and flexibility to execute your vision.





- **Reliable subcontractors**

A home builder is in the ‘promising’ business. He makes a promise to you, and to fulfil that promise, an average of fifty to seventy other people will need to fulfil their promise to him. No matter how skilled a builder might be, one bad subcontractor can stall a home project for weeks or months, throwing the budget and timeline into disarray and delaying your move-in date. The team is only as good as its weakest player. Do not choose a custom home builder who depends on a fly-by-night casual workforce. You want to find a builder that fosters strong, long-term relationships with an extensive network of proven, trustworthy subcontractors who are guaranteed to come through every time.

- **The key to good home building is Organization**

Do it right. The administration side of building a home is as equally important as anything on the job site. There are hundreds of small decisions and calculations to decide every day and over the months of a project. Your builder should track the moving parts of the project, which includes the schedule and budget. They must also communicate with you, the architect, designer, subcontractors, and vendors.

When choosing materials and finishes, they should have a concise and effective way of soliciting and recording your selections and then placing the necessary purchase orders.

Interviewing candidates is a vital stage of the process. Take your time and ask as many questions as you want. A good builder will be more than willing to answer them. Ask about their process and find out how organized, effective, efficient, and competent they are. You are also entitled to proof: ask to visit a job site and a finished home with them. Request references and talk to previous homeowners and architects about their experiences with the company.



## FINDING YOUR ARCHITECT

Over the years of building custom homes throughout British Columbia, we had the privilege of working with extraordinary architectural artists. We get that it is important to find the right architect for the right job; it is a big decision. They are the ones who will take your ideas for your home and translate them into a design that is suited to your needs. How will you narrow it down with so many architects to select from? Choosing an architect is a subjective process, but here are some questions you can ask to determine whether you have a good fit:

### **WHAT IS YOUR FEE STRUCTURE, AND WHAT KIND OF COSTS SHOULD I EXPECT?**

There are many different fees. There are flat fees based on proposals. Another may charge hourly rates or a stipulated sum per unit (the number of rooms or square feet in the home.) Or one may charge a percentage of the total construction cost, you may encounter fees that include a combination of the above, and all are valid, but be clear from the start. Be open about your budget, find out what is in their basic services, and what changes and customized specifications will incur added fees. It will avoid unpleasant issues/surprises as you proceed ahead.



## WHO ON THE TEAM WILL BE MY TEAMMATE?

Whether you are interviewing an independent architect or with a large firm, in either case, it is good to know who your point of contact will be. You may initially meet with a senior partner, but you should have the chance to talk with whoever will be doing most of your project. What are their roles and responsibilities? Are they amicable? Do you feel at ease speaking with them and comfortable asking questions? When they answer, are their explanations clear and concise?

## HOW MUCH TIME AND INPUT DO YOU EXPECT FROM ME AS A CLIENT?

Some people tend to put the job into the hands of a professional and step back. Others want to be intimately involved at every step and stage of the design process. Both are fine choices, but you and your architect must agree with what the expectations of each other will be. It is also good to set parameters around how you will communicate: email, phone, in-person meetings? How often should you meet or be in touch? Weekly? Monthly? Whenever there is a milestone? What meeting times make the most sense: can you meet during business hours, or do you need an architect who is available for evening or weekend meetings?

## EXPLAIN THE DESIGN PROCESS AND HOW WILL YOU SHOW ME WHAT YOU ARE CREATING FOR ME?

The workflows, timelines, and review process should be concise from the beginning to reduce the potential for miscommunication, confusion, and delays. When can you expect updates or documents which require your input, and what kind of turnaround times do they need from you for your approval? How are your decisions and approvals documented? Can you refer back to them throughout the process? It can also be helpful to find out how the architect will present their work to you at each stage of the design process. Sketches and drawings or 3d clay Models? Computer renderings using Rivet or BIM?

## WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING? WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE PAST PROJECTS? WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO MINE?

The best home-building experience happens when the client and architect are inspired and passionate about the project. Check out the architect's work and whether it aligns with their methodology. Some architects have a distinctive style, and if that is the type of home you dream about, then it may be a match made in heaven.



Other architects take pride in the diversity of their past works and their ability to create and design anything a homeowner can envision. When you are speaking to an architect who has displayed a wide range of styles, it can help to ask about the projects they loved working on the most. Look at the recent projects to find out where their true strengths lie and see if your tastes and sensibilities are a good fit.

### **WHAT KEY CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS DO YOU FORESEE IN THIS PROJECT?**

Experience is like having a crystal ball. So, a good architect can shed light and spot potential problems before they arise. It is the mark of a true professional. Whether there is a conflict between ideas, the visions, the soft cost budget, a complicated build site/ lot, or any potential design challenge, your architect should identify and communicate any deadhead and steer clear before work commences.

### **HOW DO YOU WORK WITH A CUSTOM HOME BUILDER?**

Your architect and home builder needs to work as a team. They also must work well with you. The relationship you have is long-term, and the relationship between these professionals is symbiotic. Working as a coalition will make the process much easier. Will he/she/they collaborate and communicate with your custom home builder and project manager as members of the same team?

There is more than one architect out there who will do a spectacular job designing your home. Every architect has a method, style, and way of working through a design and construction process. Sometimes, it is only a matter of finding the right match, and it will be no different selecting your project manager or homebuilder. It is always your right to take as much time as needed. Ask as many questions as required until you feel confident in your decision.

### **ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAM AND DESIGN PHASE**

“The Cream always rises to the top,” so dream big! Now is the time to embark on step one of the most creative and exciting parts of the custom home building process: the architectural programming and design phase.



Here is where you start to compile your thoughts to make something uniquely yours, melodic themes with a tangible design for your beautiful custom-built home. Your architect will lead you on this phase to create a preliminary design.

Once you sketch out your ideas with him/her, it is a great time to bring your interior designer and project manager into play. At Homes by Westgate, we are more than happy to offer our expert advice and services at this stage. By being intimately involved from the start, we act as your advisor and advocate, applying our vast construction knowledge and real-world experience while helping navigate your way through the complexities of the design and a custom building process.

### HOW IT WORKS:

- **Preliminary Design**

At this stage, you will be collaborating closely with your chosen architect, so compile and collect pictures of things you like (and do not like). Using websites like Houzz or Pinterest are good places to start or clip pages from magazines like Architectural Digest. It is your chance to make something great, so at the start – go big on ideas, and as things move forward, adjust these ideas to the budget, zoning, timeframe, land, and other realities.

Your architect will advise you of limitations on the height/ square footage of your home (based on zoning restrictions and neighborhood ordinances). The preliminary design for a custom home typically will consist of a basic floor plan and elevation (side view), which factors everything you want from your home: the size, space planning (layout of the space), desired aesthetic, and all the vital details to cater to your family's needs and lifestyle. This initial draft of your design is the raw information we require to help you with the next stages:

- **Preliminary Design and Estimate**

In this economy, you need to know the cost, which is a vital part of the project; the earlier you get a clear picture of budgetary costs, the smoother the entire process will run. Rank your desired features in order of importance. Prices can vary on custom homes, so this will help you make difficult choices later. Luckily, our team at Homes by Westgate will take your preliminary design model to ensure that it aligns with your desired budget. Using our highly detailed databases, we will review your design elements against historical product costs with current up-to-date materials, labor pricing, and lead-time availability.



If there is a large gap between the cost of the home design you want and the budget you have set, we will catch it early. Adjusting changes at this stage is much easier and less expensive than it will be later. Once we put this preliminary estimate in place, it will set the tone for the remainder of the architectural design phase.

- **Engineering & Final Plans**

Collaboration. At this stage of the process, we work closely with you and the architect to fine-tune the details to finalize your home plans. We have much to offer with construction insights, design ideas, build-smart solutions, and tricky and complicated challenges based on multifaceted experience and what has worked for us on previous construction projects. We consult with building specialists to ensure that your home plans are the greenest options and as energy-efficient to Net-Zero (ZNE). Our field and classroom experience with every day and historical construction costs and logistics allow us to identify any issues to create cost-saving, better known as “value-engineering”, alternatives for your home building before you sign off, saving you painful expense revisions later.

- **Interior Design Space Planning and Finishes**

While creating your home during the architectural stage, it is also time to select the design details with the interior designer. This is a super exciting part of the process where you pick out the finishes you will be enjoying when you turn the key. Flooring, lighting, kitchen cabinets, countertops, bathroom tiles with heated floors—all the things which make a house your home.

While this is a time of excitement, it can be overwhelming. Paralysis by overanalyses is real. Fortunately, your interior designer and Homes by Westgate will ensure that choosing your finishes is easy.

Our project managers will collaborate closely with you and your designer so that your choices and approvals are streamlined and recorded efficiently and effectively. It will make life easier for you and ensure no unexpected delays. We will also update and fine-tune the budget via room-by-room cost analysis to accurately reflect current costs.



## • Draft Schedule and Detailed Budget

Now you and the architect have finished your “issue construction plans”, we begin working on the innermost details of what your home will cost and how long it will take to construct. During this time, we have a diligent team of experienced in-house estimators who will compile a fully comprehensive budget for your home building project, so you do not need to worry about upsetting surprises down the road. They will spend time studying your plans and specifications until they know them inside out.

Next, they will gather and vet dozens of bids from our extensive network of high-quality subcontractors to find you the best deals and put together the most accurate budget possible. We will also begin to sketch out a schedule of work to give you a rough idea of how long the project will require. We will also begin to sketch out a schedule to give you a rough idea of how long the project will require. We take the time to get the details right at this stage because we know this is one of the best ways to reduce stress for our homeowners.

## Pre-construction Phase

As you see above, the pre-construction phase works in tandem with the architectural programming and design phase, and when you choose us to build your custom home, we will help you get everything lined up for construction.

## FINANCING, APPROVALS, CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS, AND PERMITS

After we complete our detailed budget for you, the pre-construction phase is where we oversee the standard red tape and documentation needed before we break ground. Do you need help securing financing? Westgate Koenig assists with that.

If you are building in a neighbourhood with a Homeowner’s Association and need approval from their board, we can facilitate and complete the submission process. It is time to sign construction contracts so the actual building part of the process can begin in the construction phase. We also prepare and submit plans for building permits to the relevant city. We have a dedicated team of administrators and project managers on staff who can ensure that everything is smooth and stress-free.





## AWARD PURCHASE ORDERS TO SUBCONTRACTORS AND FINALISE PROJECT SCHEDULE

Westgate Koenig will gather the best team for the job. We will take care of procurement, qualifying, signing on, and paying the experts working on every aspect of your custom home. Homes by Westgate has been working with many of the lower mainland's finest subcontractors and vendors for many years, and after countless projects, we work together as a dream team.

Every subcontractor who is part of our network has a record of value and reliability, which makes planning your construction schedule efficient and effective. With this intelligence, we can give you a projected move-in date.





## CONSTRUCTION PHASE

After all the planning and strategy, it is time to start the actual building part of the process. Your home will begin to take shape, moving from blueprint to reality.

Our experienced construction supervisors and quality control officers are there in the field, watching every detail. They coordinate and supervise all the subcontractors and vendors on-site to enforce our strict measures. In our office, our project coordinators are monitoring the budget, coordinating your finishes, and managing the contracts and admin for the rest of the team.

While constructing your home, we will meet weekly for updates on the budget. You can log in to our client portal for transparent, up-to-date information about your new home's budget and construction schedule and see progress photos.

### SITE REQUIREMENTS AND FOUNDATION

Your property will need to support your beautiful new home; we have this. Layout Geotech engineering, grading, leveling, and filling. Once the site is ready, they construct the concrete forms and pour wet concrete to form the foundation.



## GETTING TO LOCKUP STAGE

The lockup stage refers to the point in time where you can ‘lock up’ the house. The bones of the house go up first. You will see the framing, roof, and exterior windows and doors take their place, providing a framework for the rest of the home.

## MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL STAGE

PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL, AND HVAC are like the nervous system in a human: they make your home alive and functional. They are put into place by our experts in key stages throughout the construction process. We will lay all the groundwork for your plumbing, electricity, automation, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning to ensure a safe and comfortable home.

## INSULATION AND DRYWALL

Now they will insulate the interior for energy efficiency and comfort. After insulating and barriers, drywall is hung on the framework to create the blank canvas of your custom home’s interior.

## INTERIOR FINISHES AND FINISHING CARPENTRY

From painting, wallpapering, crown moldings, and cabinetry, this is the exciting part of the project that makes your home take form.

## EXTERIOR PHASE

This includes everything outside, from your home’s siding, stonework, landscapes, and paint. At this stage, artisans put in their experience, talent, and expertise, ensuring your home shows its best face to the world.

## FINISHING: PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL, HVAC

They installed all these systems early in the build. Now it is time to add sockets, light switches, return air grills, plumbing, and lighting fixtures so you can control the light, water, and temperature in your house.

## FLOORING

Hardwood flooring, tiles, and carpet: flooring choices are among the last things to install in your new home.





## WALK-THROUGH, FINAL INSPECTIONS, NOW IT IS TIME TO MOVE-IN!

Upon completion of the construction, your home will be thoroughly inspected by a local team of independent third-party experts. to ensure that it meets all the required standards and specifications outlined in the contract. Once we receive the green light, we will invite you to join us for a walk-through of your new home.

This magical moment marks the culmination of your investment of time, effort, and money, as well as our commitment to delivering superior craftsmanship. Together, we can take a moment to appreciate the outcome of our collective efforts!

We encourage you to make yourself at home and get comfortable, knowing that while your hard work is complete, ours continues.

At Homes By Westgate, our support extends beyond the construction phase. Our dedicated and professional construction and project managers will ensure that any outstanding items are resolved efficiently and effectively, should they arise.

Homes by Westgate has coverage by National Home Warranty. New homes built in BC are protected by 2-5-10 home warranty insurances, as set out by the Homeowner Protection Act of BC. This includes a two-year coverage on labour and materials and the twelve-month coverage for defects in material and labour for your home. It also includes twenty-four months for defects in material and labour for major systems (heating, electrical, plumbing, etc.), five years on the building envelope, including coverage on unintended water penetration, and ten years on major structural items.

We guarantee your home’s structure; rest assured your team will be on hand throughout the warranty period and beyond to help you with whatever you need. We want to know you for a reason, a season, and a lifetime because we are in the ‘promising business’. Our promise is service with integrity and an overriding commitment for quality-built homes by Westgate!





We trust our guide has given you a good perspective of our process of building a home.

As you walk this path on your journey, do not lose sight of the one-of-kind experience building your own home can be. Trust your gut and the experts you select to advise and guide you and let yourself enjoy the step-by-step journey.

Life brings challenges, but by working with a good team, the moment you step foot in your custom home, you realise it was all worth it. Going from a vision to a concept, a plan, and then reality is a feeling like none other. This is your brand-new home! We never get tired of helping our clients realise their dreams! We look forward to walking down this road with you, too.





## WHY WESTGATE

We are in the promise business, and our promise is to build you a custom home that is uniquely yours, on time, and on budget. We don't believe in "good enough" and will construct your custom home as if it were our own. We take each individual project personally. Our name and reputation are at stake, protected by our team of dedicated and experienced experts, who are never satisfied until you are. We guarantee we will always put you first, seeking to understand your needs and being understood by you. You will be heard, informed, involved, and supported from our first meeting to the day we hand you the keys. We will deliver a home and an experience that will exceed your expectations in every way. That is our promise.

Homes by Westgate is your luxury custom home builder.

