



AGATHĒ 
BUILDERS

A HEALTHY HOME GUIDE FOR FAMILIES PLANNING TO BUILD OR RENOVATE

A HOME THAT FEELS RIGHT

A guide to building a healthier, more comfortable home. Including how to read a builder's quote, and how to resolve the unknowns in the price before you sign anything.

HEALTHY HOMES · HONEST WORK · BUILT TO LAST

WELCOME

YOU CAN FEEL WHEN A HOME ISN'T QUITE RIGHT

Maybe it's the temperature that never stays consistent. The air that feels heavy. Or the subtle sense that something just feels off.

Most people assume that's normal. It's not.

How your home feels isn't determined by the finishes you see. It's determined by what's happening behind the walls, and by the decisions made long before anyone picks up a tool.

At AGATHĒ Builders, we build homes designed for long-term comfort and health, not just appearance. This guide will show you what actually matters, so you can make decisions with clarity, not guesswork.

It also walks you through the part most guides leave out: how to read a builder's quote, and how a proper cost plan resolves the unknowns in the price before you commit to it.



MITCH CHAN

FOUNDER, AGATHĒ BUILDERS

WHO WE ARE

AGATHĒ Builders designs and constructs homes across the North Shore, Northern Beaches, Hills District, Central Coast and Newcastle that prioritise comfort, health and long-term durability, with an approach grounded in Passivhaus principles and building science. Because a well-built home doesn't just look good. It supports the people living inside it, every day.

CERTIFIED PASSIVHAUS TRADESPERSON · MASTER BUILDERS ASSOCIATION · SUSTAINABLE BUILDERS ALLIANCE · NSW BUILDER'S LICENCE NO. 463967C

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01

WHY SOME HOMES FEEL BETTER THAN OTHERS

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SEE

Have you ever walked into a home and instantly felt at ease? Not because of how it looked, but because of how it felt. The temperature is consistent. The air feels fresh. The space feels calm.

That doesn't happen by chance.

Most Australian homes are built to minimum standards, and minimum standards are written to be adequate, not comfortable. They set a floor, not a goal. A home can meet every requirement and still swing between too hot and too cold, still feel stuffy in some rooms and draughty in others.

COMFORT ISN'T ACCIDENTAL. IT'S THE RESULT OF MANAGING AIR, TEMPERATURE AND MOISTURE DELIBERATELY.

A well-designed home manages those three things carefully, so it feels consistent, calm and comfortable year-round. Not because of luck, or an oversized air conditioner working hard in the background, but because the building itself was designed to behave that way.

02

THE BIGGEST MYTH IN HOME BUILDING

HOMES DON'T NEED TO "BREATHE"

You've probably heard that homes need to breathe. It's one of the most persistent ideas in building, and it's not actually how buildings work.

A well-built home should be airtight, not leaky. What matters is controlled ventilation: fresh, filtered air moving through the home deliberately, rather than draughts doing the job by accident through gaps in the structure.

AIRTIGHT DOESN'T MEAN STUFFY. IT MEANS THE FRESH AIR COMES IN ON PURPOSE, NOT THROUGH THE GAPS.

When air, heat and moisture are controlled properly, you create a home that feels stable, dry and healthy. The air is fresher, not staler, because ventilation is designed rather than left to chance.

WHAT "PASSIVHAUS" ACTUALLY MEANS

Passivhaus is an international building standard for comfort, air quality and very low energy use. It's achieved through insulation, airtightness, high-performance windows and continuous filtered fresh air, and it's verified by measurement: an airtightness result is tested on site, not promised in a brochure.

03

WHAT'S BEHIND THE WALLS MATTERS MOST

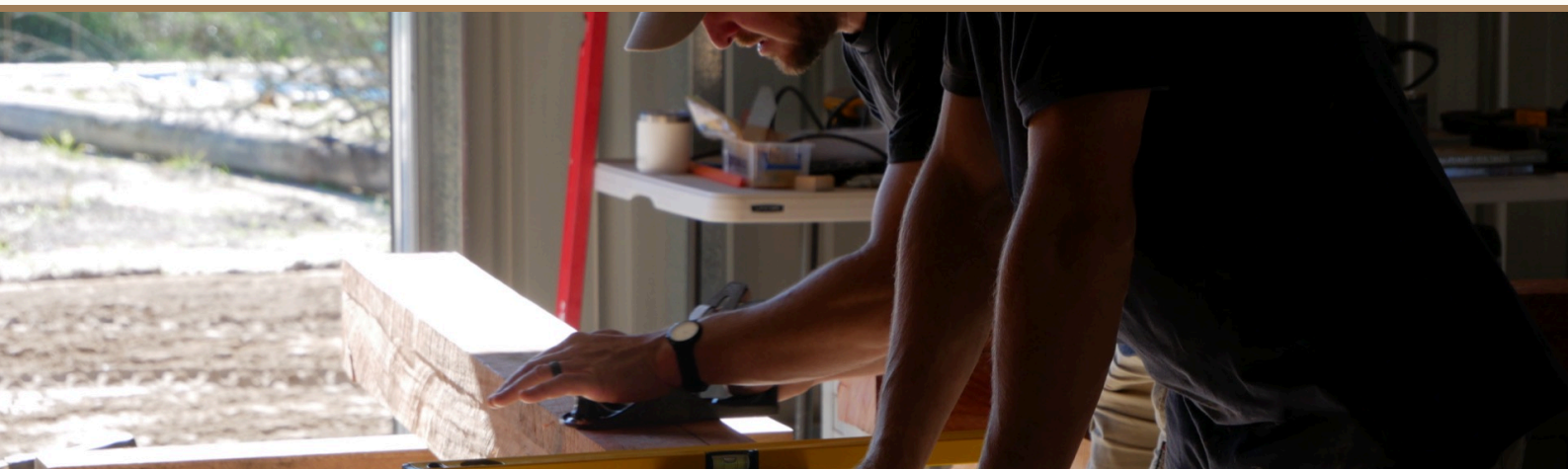
THE HIDDEN LAYER OF YOUR HOME

The biggest risks in a home aren't always visible. They're built into the structure itself.

Moisture trapped where it shouldn't be. Insulation gaps that allow temperature swings. Air leakage carrying humidity and pollutants into the frame. These are the things that lead to mould, discomfort and long-term damage, and they often go unnoticed for years, because everything looks fine on the surface.

We focus on these details first, because they determine how your home feels to live in long after handover, and how well it protects the people inside it.

A HOME EITHER NOURISHES THE PEOPLE IN IT, OR IT QUIETLY WORKS AGAINST THEM. THE DIFFERENCE IS DECIDED BEHIND THE WALLS.



04

WHY "GOOD ENOUGH" DOESN'T FEEL GOOD

THE COST OF DOING IT TWICE

Most homes meet the minimum requirements. But minimum doesn't mean optimal, and it doesn't mean healthy.

What's often left out of a standard build:

- Proper moisture control
- Continuous insulation, without gaps and weak points
- Thoughtful, controlled ventilation
- Well-sealed, thermally efficient windows

The result? Homes that look good, but don't feel right to live in. These aren't finishing touches. They're structural decisions, and retrofitting them later means opening up walls that were only just closed.

A home should feel consistently comfortable in January and in July. Quiet and calm. Dry and well-regulated. A place that restores your family rather than drains it: clean air for growing lungs, rooms that stay stable through a heatwave, a structure you trust because you know what went into it.

That comes from intentional design. Not guesswork, not shortcuts. And it's decided before construction begins, which is why it belongs in the plan, and in the budget, from day one.

MINIMUM STANDARDS DON'T CREATE COMFORT. THEY CREATE COMPROMISE.

05

SIGNS YOUR HOME IS UNDER STRESS

WHAT MOISTURE IS ALREADY TELLING YOU

You don't need instruments to spot a home struggling with moisture and air. The signs are ordinary, and easy to dismiss as "just what houses do":

- Condensation on the inside of windows in the morning
- A musty smell in wardrobes, cupboards or rooms that stay closed
- Mould that comes back to bathroom ceilings or window reveals after cleaning
- Rooms that never quite warm up in winter, or cool down in summer
- A home that feels stuffy soon after the windows are closed
- Allergies or congestion that ease when you're away from the house

None of these means your home is failing. They mean moisture, heat and air aren't being managed. And if you're planning a renovation, they're worth investigating first, before new work locks the causes behind fresh plasterboard.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING ANY BUILDER ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THE BUILD

- Will the home be airtightness tested, and what result are you aiming for?
- How does fresh air get in? What's the ventilation design, room by room?
- How is moisture managed inside the walls and roof, not just in the wet areas?
- Which materials, sealants and finishes will affect our indoor air, and what are the healthier options?
- How will you show us these systems actually work at handover?

06

CLARITY BEFORE CONSTRUCTION

WHY PLANNING CHANGES EVERYTHING

The most important part of any build happens before construction starts. It's where the decisions are made that affect budget, comfort and long-term durability, and where those three things are either brought into alignment or quietly allowed to drift apart.

Without clear planning, your budget becomes a guess, and your outcomes become uncertain. Design decisions get made without knowing what they cost. Costs get committed without knowing what they buy.

That's why we guide our clients through a structured pre-construction process, bringing builder, designer and cost planning together early, before the contract is signed.

The next two sections cover the part of that planning most guides skip entirely: the money. How to actually read a builder's quote, and how to resolve the unknowns inside it before you commit.



07

HOW TO READ A BUILDER'S QUOTE

THE SEVEN TERMS THAT MATTER

Two quotes for the same project can be tens of thousands of dollars apart, and both can be "correct". The difference is rarely the workmanship. It's what each builder has assumed, allowed for, or left out.

A building quote isn't one number. It's a stack of commitments, allowances and assumptions. Once you can tell them apart, you can compare quotes properly and see exactly where the risk sits.

FIXED SCOPE ITEM	Work that is fully defined and priced. The builder carries the responsibility of delivering it for that figure.
BUILDER ALLOWANCE	An estimate for work that can't be fully defined yet. If the real scope differs, the price adjusts.
PRIME COST ITEM PC	An allowance for a product you haven't selected yet, such as tiles, tapware or appliances. If your final selection costs more than the allowance, you pay the difference.
PROVISIONAL SUM PS	An allowance for work whose extent isn't known yet, such as excavation or works dependent on ground conditions. Adjusted once the real extent is confirmed.
EXCLUDED	Not in the price at all. If it's needed, it will be paid for separately or added as a variation.
FIT-OFF ONLY	The builder installs the item; supplying it is someone else's job, usually yours. Common for light fittings or appliances you've bought directly.
OWNER-SUPPLIED	You're providing this item yourself. Its cost, lead time and quality sit with you.

THE QUESTION TO ASK OF ANY QUOTE: HOW MUCH OF THIS PRICE IS ACTUALLY FIXED, AND HOW MUCH IS ALLOWANCES THAT CAN MOVE?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR BEFORE YOU SIGN

1 ADD UP THE ALLOWANCES

Total the PC items, Provisional Sums and allowances, then compare that figure to the whole price. The bigger the proportion, the softer the number you're signing.

2 TEST THE ALLOWANCES AGAINST YOUR TASTE

An allowance is only useful if it reflects what you'll actually choose. If you're picturing stone benchtops and the allowance suits laminate, that gap lands on you mid-project, when it's hardest to change course.

3 READ THE EXCLUSIONS AS CAREFULLY AS THE INCLUSIONS

The exclusions list tells you what you'll still be paying for, just not through this contract. Understand what each one would involve before you compare prices.

4 CHECK THE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUR SITE

In renovations especially, existing conditions are the most common source of cost movement: what's found when the walls open, the state of the structure, services in unexpected places. Look for what the quote assumes about them.

5 ASK HOW CHANGES ARE HANDLED

Something will change on almost every project. Understand how variations are priced, documented and approved before you need one, not after.

6 COMPARE CERTAINTY, NOT JUST HEADLINE PRICE

A lower number often just contains more unknowns. The real comparison between two quotes isn't the price. It's how much certainty each price contains.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING ANY BUILDER

- Which items in this price are fixed, and which are allowances?
- What are the PC and PS amounts based on, and do they match the finish level we've discussed?
- What's excluded, and what would those items typically involve?
- What have you assumed about the site and the existing structure?
- How are variations priced and approved?

08

HOW A COST PLAN RESOLVES THE UNKNOWNNS

BEFORE YOU SIGN, NOT AFTER

Everything in the previous section has the same root cause: quotes are usually priced before the information exists. Allowances, provisional sums and assumptions are all placeholders for decisions that haven't been made and details that haven't been investigated yet.

A cost plan is a working document that prices the design as it develops, so the design and the budget move together instead of meeting for the first time at contract. Done properly, it:

- Tests the design against your budget early, while the design can still move
- Investigates the site unknowns, so structure, services and conditions are priced on evidence rather than assumption
- Brings builder, designer and engineers together while their decisions can still be coordinated
- Turns allowances into selections, so PC items become confirmed products at known prices
- Sequences your decisions, so nothing important is chosen under pressure mid-build

The result isn't a promise that nothing will change. Building always carries some unknowns. It's a price where most of the guesswork has been replaced by information, with far fewer decisions waiting to ambush you once the walls are open. This is how we work: our structured pre-construction process brings design, budget, buildability and programme into alignment before the contract is signed.

WHAT YOU SHOULD BE HOLDING AT THE END

A design that has been tested against your budget, in writing. A schedule of your selections at confirmed prices, not allowances. A short register of anything still provisional, and why. And the assumptions in writing, so nothing important is left unspoken.

BEFORE YOU SIGN: A QUICK CHECKLIST

Ten things worth being able to tick off before you commit to a building contract. If some of these aren't true yet, that's not a reason to panic. It's a sign the project needs more pre-construction work before the price can be relied on.

-
- ☐ I know which parts of the price are fixed and which are allowances.
 - ☐ The PC and PS allowances reflect the finishes I actually want, not a baseline I'd never choose.
 - ☐ I've read the exclusions and understand what each one means for me.
 - ☐ The quote states its assumptions about the site and the existing structure.
 - ☐ I understand how variations will be priced, documented and approved.
 - ☐ The design has been tested against my budget, not just my brief.
 - ☐ The big unknowns have been investigated, not just allowed for.
 - ☐ My selections are far enough along that the allowances can be firmed up.
 - ☐ I'm comparing quotes on certainty, not just on the headline number.
 - ☐ I feel guided through the process, not pressured through it.
-

This guide is general information for homeowners planning to build or renovate in NSW. It isn't advice on a specific project, quote or contract.



THE NEXT PRACTICAL STEP

READY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR HOME REALLY NEEDS?

If something in this guide has made you think differently about your home, or about a quote sitting on your kitchen bench, that's a good place to start.

A healthy home consultation is a structured walk-through of how your home actually performs. Not a sales visit. In it:

- We assess the building as a system: air quality and ventilation, moisture and mould, thermal comfort, and the materials that affect your indoor air
- You come away with a clear, prioritised picture of what's going on and what good construction would do about it
- And when you tell us what you're noticing, we'll tell you straight whether a consult is even the right next step for you

"I highly recommend the team at AGATHÉ. They were patient, flexible and very thorough in their planning."

JULIE · PRE-CONSTRUCTION CLIENT

START A CONVERSATION

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