

“Dr Retro House Calls” - pre-renovation, design and building advisory service (an in-home service offered by Secret Design Studio)

What will I get out of a “Dr Retro House Call”?

Secret Design Studio’s “Dr Retro House Call” service was originally started to address the needs of people looking to renovate mid-century and post-war homes in a sympathetic manner. From client feedback I soon realized that this service had a much wider application for anybody in the pre-renovation stages of building. This is especially true for people living in homes built in the 1980’s which have their own set of challenges. Today the service is available for anybody who is planning a renovation and who is seeking professional, independent and experienced advice for their home.



Your renovation journey

Most people start the renovation journey and plan to do as much themselves as they don’t appreciate what professional advice can bring to their project. They don’t know what they need to know until they need to know, and then they learn that they don’t know anything about it!

Usually once a building contract is signed then it is too late to cost-effectively make changes. Many builders love variations allowed in a building contract as it gives them an opportunity to increase the time and charge a premium margin on any changes. It is important to have built up your knowledge and understanding of what you are actually getting before your documentation and drawings are signed off.

Most people will only do a couple of renovations in their lives, and it can be hard for people outside the building industry to read and understand plans, as well as the design, thought and creative process that should go behind them. The design process, the permit process, spatial awareness, sustainability, selecting the right builder, material selections, room flow and internal/external relationships are all part of the renovation journey and areas where most people have little experience.



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Where can I get help for my renovation?

When starting your renovation journey some people get advice from as many different sources as possible. This can be useful if carefully balanced, and with an understanding and perspective of the limitations of where this advice is coming from. This can be tricky with the advice from well-meaning family and friends who may have had limited renovation experience beforehand. It can be expensive in the long term if sourcing advice from those friendly, helpful sales people who offer a combined design/build service. It can be distracting and confusing if the advice is taken from well-meaning strangers in some of the online forums such as Houzz, or on Facebook, especially as they don't know the full picture and factors that may influence a fully informed decision.



With visiting hundreds of pre-renovation households since 2010 Dr Retro has seen everything, including lots of poorly considered, poorly designed, and poorly built renovations from past decades. Most of these were conceived, designed and built as a result of poor advice, or plunging into a renovation without proper consideration of all of the factors.



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Your builder’s advice.

There are lots of lovely, helpful and well-meaning builders out there who are only too happy to give free opinions on your renovation. Naturally their advice is often from their perspective which is often what is the easiest (and cheapest) way to build. To be a good builder you need to be a good project manager and understand how a building goes together. Builders have no formal training in design, aesthetics, architectural history or sustainability – only what they have learnt from previous projects. Too often they will want to build what was loved by a previous client, however it doesn’t mean that it will be right for your home or family.



Your real estate agent’s advice.

While resale is important most people renovating are planning to live in their home for the long term, so it should work for you, and not some imaginary purchaser in the future. Unless you are flipping your house onto the market in the short term then the advice that your real estate agent provides may well be out of date by the time you decide to sell. The risks of overcapitalizing are higher with properties held for the short-term, rather than the longer term. Our demographics are changing with smaller households, more multi-generational households and more home-based businesses becoming much more common today.

Your interior designer’s advice.

A good interior designer will work closely with you so that your home reflects your individuality, and not just follow the latest interior design fashion which changes from year to year. However, a great renovation is more than the superficiality of surfaces, but an understanding of the existing building, its structure, its orientation, spatial planning, lighting and the relationships internally and externally. Renovations cost big money so should be designed to work well into the future and not just work well for your interior designer’s fleeting Instagram feed.



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How do I prepare for a “Dr Retro House Call”?

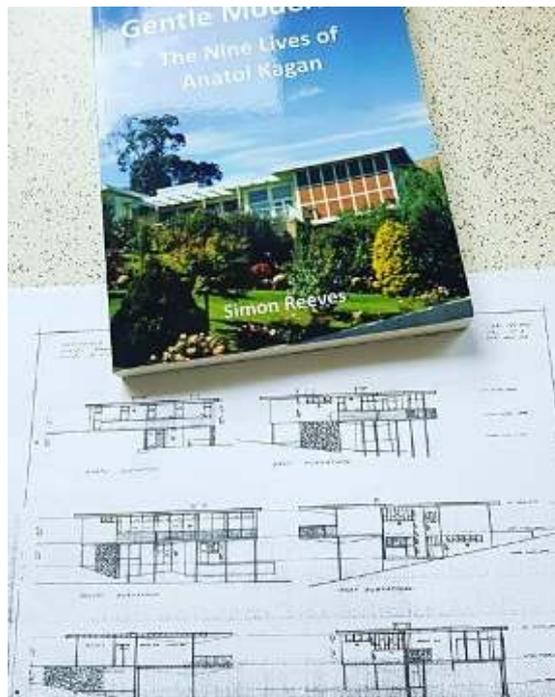
Top ten questions: I ask each client to put together a list of the ten biggest and most pressing questions before the appointment. Most couples find this exercise very valuable as it is often the first time that they have sat down together to work out what is important for them with their proposed renovation. Each Dr Retro House Call is designed for each client, so the advice is specific for your home and your situation. Common questions range from “Should I knock down and rebuild?”, to “Should I extend upwards or outwards?”, to “How do I make my home more thermally comfortable in summer and winter?”, to “Should I render my home?” and even “What grey should I paint the exterior to get a Hampton’s style look?”.

Prior to each appointment I spend up to an hour researching the answers to these questions. Sometimes this involves researching real estate websites, referring to previous jobs, or accessing information from Secret Design Studio’s extensive library of books, periodicals, online library, material sample library and paint colour library depending on each client’s individual needs.



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A floorplan: Most houses that have been purchased in the past ten years have a basic floorplan from an old real estate listing that I download prior to the appointment. I would recommend that most clients go to their local council to try and obtain plans from council archives a week or so before the appointment. This information will tell a lot about the original architect or builder as well as the original layout of the home. Once the original architect and builder are known it is much easier to complete research about similar homes prior to the appointment. Most councils will charge around \$100 for this archival retrieval service, but there will be no guarantees from council that the plans still exist.



An Open Mind: Sometimes clients have pre-conceived ideas of how they would like to build and use the Dr Retro service as a reality check. Often client’s pre-conceived ideas exceed their budget so sometimes it is a matter of finding a more cost-effective solution that meets their needs but perhaps not in the way that they imagined. Often there is a better option to their preconceptions, so it is important to have an open mind to alternatives that you may not have considered.

A messy house: Don’t tidy your house prior to a Dr Retro House Call! The state of your house tells me a lot about your current lifestyle and the shortcomings of your current home. Virtually every house, whether it be a 2-bedroom apartment for a 50 square mansion has a room of unloved items so don’t be embarrassed.

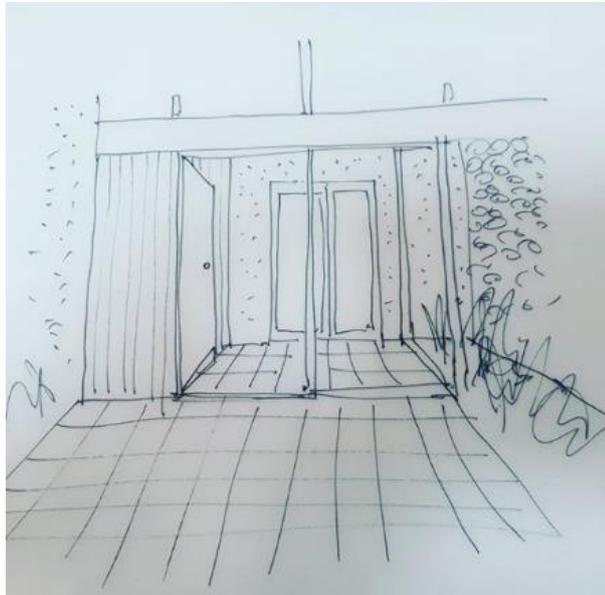
A laptop: Quite often I will refer to a supplier or company during a consultation. It is good to be able to bring up their website during a consultation and have it in your browser’s history for future reference.



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What is not included in a “Dr Retro House Call”?

- 1) **Design Review** -Some clients book in a “Dr Retro House Call” for a design review of plans and documentation that have been completed by others. To fully understand the design and documentation of a set of drawings (sometimes more than 30, A3 sized pages) takes much more than the allocated time. While I am happy to do this I would propose to spend more time before the appointment reviewing the documents and marking them up. The time to complete this depends on the size and quality of the work. The appointment time would be spent explaining the marked-up plans.
- 2) **Resolved Design** - While I am happy to include talking about general design options during an appointment, I do not provide a fully resolved and drawn up design during an appointment. I sometimes will hand sketch to illustrate a principle (sometimes in three dimensions). Well considered and well-developed design solutions take time to get right which is beyond the scope of a short appointment. Design services are available after the appointment and would be subject to a second quote and your approval.



- 3) **Pre-purchase inspections limitations** - I cannot advise on market pricing as there are too many local variables. Most clients who are looking to buy in an area will have kept an eye on the market and have a better idea. I cannot advise you to buy a home (or not), but I can present information about its maintenance and renovation potential to assist you making a fully informed decision about purchasing.
- 4) **Pest inspection** – While pre-purchase inspections are available, they do not cover pest inspections as access to sub-floor and ceiling spaces is restricted and dangerous. If I happen to see any sign of pest activity (termites, vermin etc) I will let you know, but I do not inspect the areas where pests are generally to be found. There are pest inspectors who will access these difficult to reach areas and complete thorough inspections.



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- 5) **Final paint colour selections.** Secret Design Studio uses Dulux for paint selections as they have the best range of support materials for professionals, including a range of 4600 paint colours. At your local hardware store they only make available about 10% of this range as colour sample chips. The remaining 90% of their colours can be accessed via professional design services so I bring along all 4600 colours to an appointment when paint selections are on the agenda. As colour selection is such a personal choice, and your perception of colours change depending on the time of day and the lighting conditions I never finalise a paint colour to a single choice during an appointment. Instead I prefer to get my paint supplier to post you a small number of suitable A4 sized paint samples so that you can live with them for a few days to decide which works best for all times of the day by all stakeholders.



What will I get out of a “Dr Retro House Call”?

Generally speaking those clients that put some thoughts together prior to the appointment with their top ten issues do get more out of an appointment than those that don't. I usually draw relevant resources together prior to each appointment when I know a bit about what the client needs. Secret Design Studio has metres of bookshelves for books, periodicals, and material samples and there is no practical way to bring it all along to every appointment.

The biggest benefit for most clients is that it is a big, positive step that they can take towards their renovation with confidence that they are going in the right direction. On your renovation journey



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there are thousands of big and little decisions to be made, with many decisions impacting on other areas.

Many people suffer from decision fatigue when it comes to starting a renovation as there are so many options. Some people start to procrastinate or get sidelined with the small decisions before the big decisions are made. For instance, some start selecting their bathroom tiles and tapware before they even have a floorplan designed, as these are the easier decisions. They don't know what they need to know until they need to know, and then learn that they don't know anything about it!

Most appointments cover a design overview, priorities, budgets, order of construction, order of selections, and how to source a good builder. Every client gets the benefit of at least one new design idea that they hadn't considered due to their lack of experience with designing renovations. In addition if there are specific questions about a detail, or material or even colour then this will be covered as well.



Is a “Dr Retro House Call” right for me?

Yes, nobody in the building business can know everything, and even after visiting and designing hundreds of houses I still learn something new from every home I visit. I do occasionally get a response “We have decided not to proceed with the appointment as my husband is a chippy/sparky/plumber and works on building sites”. I can't explain that they don't know what they need to know, so I wish them the best of luck and let them know to contact me when they get out of their depth.

Please feel free to check out the verified reviews on Houzz from previous “Dr Retro House Call” clients:

https://www.houzz.com.au/browseReviews/secret_design_studio



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Fees

Professional fees depend on the scope of advice needed, time required for preparation and your location. Renovating is an expensive business, and even more so if the conception of the design is not right from the start. Mistakes get more expensive to rectify as your project progresses.

Most appointments in your home last about two hours. The minimum charge includes

1. up to one hour of research prior to the appointment,
2. return travel time from Secret Design Studio to your home,
3. two hours appointment time in your home,
4. often a follow-up email with any additional information that was not on hand during the appointment.

Extending the two-hour appointment time up to three hours is possible on most days if required by the client and is charged at a pro-rate rate rounded to the nearest 15 minute block. This is sometimes necessary if the house is particularly large, or it has been designed by a well-known architect, or there are toddlers underfoot demanding constant attention, or you have more than 10 questions (33 pages has been the longest so far!), or if you wish to combine your questions with paint colour selections in the same appointment.

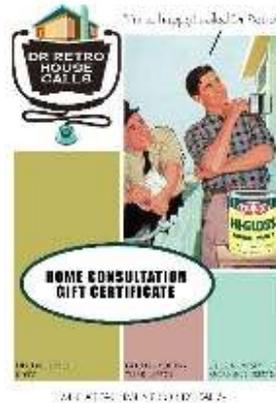


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Do you know somebody who would like a “Dr Retro House Call”?



While the professional fees for a Dr Retro House Call are variable depending on location and time it is possible to purchase a Dr Retro Gift Certificate which can be used as part payment towards consulting services. These are \$200 each and come as an A4 sized, gloss colour certificate which is posted to you to gift to the lucky recipient. If you would like to order one please contact me directly with your address details and I will issue an invoice for the value of the gift certificate. Once payment has been received your selected gift certificate is posted to you – there are three certificates to choose from. Allow at least a week prior to the occasion for postage.



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Booking in a “Dr Retro House Call” visit to your home

I strongly prefer to meet with both partners at the same time as we cover a lot of information during the appointment. Quite often one partner will be on a different page to the other, and having both available at the same time means that we can rationally discuss any issues with the pros and cons.

I encourage all clients to have a laptop connected to the internet available, and to make notes. Some clients even do an audio recording of the consultation for future reference.



Appointments are generally offered at 10am or 2pm with about two weeks notice required (although weekend appointments book up with a longer lead time). Many clients find it convenient to arrange appointment times via email especially if juggling two people’s diaries.

Once an appointment date and time has been decided a quote is emailed to you. The cost is variable depending on the estimated length of each appointment and on the location. Interstate, regional and outer suburban areas cost slightly more to allow for the additional travel time to your home. I do my best to combine interstate and regional appointments on the same day to minimise costs. Please do a search on Instagram for #drretrohousecalls to see areas visited.

Once the quote has been emailed to a client they have seven days to accept it online, and only when they have accepted the quote is the appointment booked. Quotes that are not accepted are not reserved. If another client wants your unreserved appointment time you will be contacted before they are issued with a quote for the same appointment time.

Here is the link to provide your contact details to arrange an appointment time and quote:

<https://secretdesignstudio.com/enquire-now/>

For regional and interstate areas please subscribe to our newsletter where upcoming trip dates are published:

<https://secretdesignstudio.com/newsletter/>

