

Here's how to start the process

Whether you're a retired person wanting to build an investment home, a fly-in, fly-out worker interested in building a small development, or simply would like to build your own home but don't know where to start, a new series of free workshops might be able to help.

The workshops are the brainchild of local builder Bellagio Homes, which has launched a separate organisation called Strategic West Developments to run the workshops.

The first is planned for late April or May and will be a general new homes workshop, focusing on all aspects of the home-building process from planning, finance and pre-start to construction and the handover stage.

After this, the plan is for the workshops to focus specifically on the needs of different groups of people who might be interested in building but are not familiar with the processes involved.

These will include workshops for young people looking to get into a new home, retired people interested in building an investment property and workers in the resource industry looking to build a new home or a small development while juggling a fly-in, fly-out schedule.

Gemma Nisbet

All the workshops will be free to attend. Pre-registration will be available online from next month at bellagio.net.au.



Geoff and Jenny Burgess' new Vestra-built home in Maylands.

Secret of success is to plan construction carefully

LEN FINDLAY

Tony Princi, the principal of Vestra Personal Builders, offers wise advice to anyone planning on having a custom-built home: choose your architect or designer carefully, choose your builder carefully, know what you want — and know how much you can spend.

Mr Princi's company can design and construct but most of his work comes after clients have the plans in place. About 75 per cent of his work comes from tendering for homes already planned.

"Architects and designers normally will recommend three or four builders to a client, knowing what that client needs," he said.

"Say you are on a limited budget — and there is nothing wrong with that — the chances are that we are not the builders for you. We concentrate on very high specifications and the budget should allow for alternatives and changes."

One of Vestra's latest builds is a perfect example.

Geoff and Jenny Burgess had the plans drawn up for two homes, side by side in Maylands. Vestra then got planning permission, made suggestions about changes and, when everyone was happy, the homes were built. Now the Burgesses live in one and the other is rented.

"We are glad we went this way in every respect," Mr Burgess said. "When our job was put to tender, Vestra was not the cheapest but came highly recommended and now we are glad we went with this company."

Mr Burgess had a home built by a project builder nine years ago and there were cracks "all over the place".

"These homes have not had one crack because Mr Princi took the time to have everything completely dry and made sure he got things right."

"One of the best things was not so much in what he did but what he stopped us from doing. 'Don't go for black in the kitchen', he said and all the

things he advised us on worked."

Mr Princi himself would also turn up to check on subcontractors.

"You know how these guys start so early," Mr Burgess said. "Well, Tony would be there and once he told the paving guys to pull up some of their work, saying it could be better. At the rear of one of the homes he had them take up all the pavers."

Mr Burgess decided that he would landscape the rear but Mr Princi's father, Dominic, who acts as site foreman, was on hand to give him advice.

Tony Princi's wife, Audrey, who concentrates on sales and administration, said: "I am always surprised how the general public know very little about the tendering process."

"Most people assume that only the very wealthy can afford to have a house designed and then get different builders to price it, but this is a myth. We price homes from about \$500,000 all the time."

Going to display homes was not the only way to proceed, even if your budget was not huge, she said.

One mistake that some clients made — and which can be avoided — was to underestimate additional costs.

"Finetune your budget," Mr Princi said. "There's no use in only having \$1 million if the total cost is \$1.5 million. That way you have to start over."

Also, clients should look to the future. A growing family might need bigger rooms — and that means more money most of the time.

"Another thing that needs attention is making sure that the land is suitable for the building. It is no use if you get to the drawing stage and find it is red clay and you have to start again."

All good advice from a builder who does only 10-15 homes a year, allowing him to live up to the company name, Vestra Personal Builders.

And a final word from Mr Burgess: "I would absolutely use them again."

Contact details: Vestra Personal Builders, 6278 2005

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