



CARTER GRANGE \ SEATTLE



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SPOILT FOR CHOICE

DEVELOPING OUR CITY \ BEVERLEY JOHANSON looks at the options for new-home building

The decision to build a house is not one that is made quickly or carelessly. It is expensive, exciting and at times overwhelming but, when all goes well, tremendously satisfying.

Everyone who thinks about building wants a smooth progression from concept to moving in. The key is finding the best process to bring this about.

At one end of the scale are the volume builders with set plans and known prices who dominate the new housing estates. At the other end are architect-designed houses where the client is less concerned about money and more interested in the individuality of the design.

MEET THE BUILDER

"Somewhere in between the two is Carter Grange," says one of the company's directors, Gerald Stutterd.

Although the Carter Grange name is a relative newcomer to Melbourne's new-home industry, the family company has extensive experience, with the directors tallying up more than 100 years in the industry, and a strong, focused direction. Stutterd attributes Carter Grange's success to the company's philosophy of building "affordable luxury" and offering quality, flexibility, transparent pricing, cost-effective building and a very high level of personal service.

The home begins to take shape at the design meeting and, from then on, the company offers highly personalised service throughout the build. The design appointment is more than just talking about rooms and fittings, says Stutterd. "At this stage, you discuss where the family is going – what stage of life you are at, and what is to come.

"EVERY JOURNEY, IS PERSONAL"

"You are plotting the evolution of the family in the design stage – how the house will adapt as the family grows. Maybe you want the main bedroom downstairs because that will make it easier for parents as they age. Maybe you want one bathroom for the boys in the family and one for the girls. It's a very interactive discussion," he says.

"You sit down with our designer or design team and talk about what you like and what you want to change. The designer then draws up the new plan and prices it for you. There is a one- or two-week turnaround to getting a base build quote and a design."

That's the floor plan. You then move on to the façade, says Stutterd.

"It is transparent pricing. There are no unknowns before building starts. We work with clients to stay within their budget. You go to contract with full working drawings – cabinetry, kitchen detailing, electrical appointments, etc."

The client pays separately for driveways, paths and fences, which can be done concurrently or when the build is finished.

If a pool is to be installed, the hole is dug and the concrete poured before the slab for the house is put down, a method that is not just convenient and cost-effective but allows for compatibility of engineering in the house and the pool.

"Allow about six months for construction," says Stutterd. The efficient build time is partly due to the use of Hebel PowerPanels for exterior walls. These panels are aerated, steel-reinforced concrete that is thermally and acoustically efficient and highly fire-resistant.

Carter Grange can assist with every part of the build from clearing an old house, if necessary, to working in conjunction with independent landscapers at the end.



"We hold the client's hand during the process," says Stutterd. "Every client, every journey, is personal. The home is going to hold the most important people in your life – your family."

MEET THE ARCHITECT

Gray Smith, who has had his own practice, Gray Smith Architecture, for 14 years, believes that an architect is the most qualified person to ensure that a client gets the design they want at the end of a stress-free build. "Building is very complex and the architect understands, and can manage, every step from sketch design to completion."

Victorian architects study for six years, spend two years with an architecture firm and then must pass rigorous exams set by the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. Only after acceptance by the ARBV can a practitioner be called an architect.

"After you have done all that, there is ongoing professional training," says Smith.

Building designers may or may not have completed an architecture course, but may offer similar services and do need to be licensed and insured for the state in which they operate.

Architects and building designers may not be able to quote a flat fee for the building. Their fee structure may be based on either an hourly rate with periodic payments, a flat fee based on a percentage of the build cost, or a conditional fixed rate that may include time limits, progress payments and limits on the number of design or other changes.

Smith says architects can create things within the design that the client may never have thought of. "We can create an environment beyond the client's expectations," he says.

At your service:
Gerald Stutterd from Carter Grange, and architect Gray Smith. (SUPPLIED \ KAREN STENNER)



“WE LOVE LIVING HERE”

Building a dream family home proved a breeze for this family, writes
LIZ McLACHLAN

When McKinnon couple Karin and David Kuehn saw custom home builder Carter Grange's first advertisement in 2011, its message of architectural design, luxury finishes and affordability made them pick up the phone.

“We were the 11th callers to Carter Grange after they first started. We rang straight away, went to see their display and loved it,” says Karin Kuehn.

“What impressed us immediately was the space, and that their finishes were of a higher quality. Their philosophy is to appeal to people like us – second or third home buyers looking for better quality, more architectural flair and excellent detailing.”

In the midst of starting and raising a four-child family, the Kuehns knew they wanted a large family home where family members could have their own space but be together, and where extended family could celebrate occasions. They already lived on the block where they wanted to rebuild and loved the location and the neighbourhood.

“Carter Grange was advertising a five-bedroom house and we wanted the equivalent of six bedrooms. We spoke to them and realised we could have what we wanted,” she says.

“We started with a Metropal design, then changed everything. You can never have enough storage and with four children we need it. We got our 49-square house with all the spaces and finishes we wanted within our budget.”

Kuehn, a practising accountant and academic, says she visited a couple of Carter Grange building sites and spoke to tradespeople before signing a contract.

“All the tradies I met take great pride in their work and it says a lot about the way Carter Grange runs its business. I asked them what they liked about working for Carter Grange and if they were paid on time. They were all very happy. The big difference between Carter Grange and other builders is that they understand they are building your baby, your dream, and how important it is to you.”

Kuehn says the process from start to finish with Carter Grange was a dream process disturbed only by circumstances outside its control – an 18-month negotiation with the council and energy supplier to replace a power pole.

Carter Grange began building in February last year and finished in early August with a build time of five months, one week.

“We moved out on December 14, 2012, so the house could be demolished and the site prepared for building, and we moved into our new house on August 28. We love living here; it's such an easy house to live in. The biggest surprise was how much we love our open-plan family living area. It's light, airy, fresh and welcoming.”



A fully fitted study opposite the kitchen is perfect for Elizabeth, 10, Alexandra, 8, and Stephanie, 6, to work on projects and stay in touch with their parents and younger brother, Michael, 2, in the

family zone.

The Kuehns' new house includes a ground-level, open-plan family living, dining and kitchen zone designed around an outdoor living area, study, butler's pantry, laundry, man cave with walk-in storage, powder room with shower, and double garage with storage and internal entry. The Kuehns chose to take out an internal wall dividing a formal living area to make it part of the family living space, and enclosed the under-stair space for storage.

Upstairs are the main bedroom with walk-in wardrobe and en suite, four children's bedrooms, a play space, a family bathroom, a powder room and walk-in storeroom. The Kuehns extended the upper level over the outdoor living area to create a children's living area, used stair landing space for a store room, and a hall wall void for an additional linen press.

Kuehn says Carter Grange's communication throughout planning and building built up a high level of trust.

“They always told us exactly what was happening and when. Nothing was a hassle for Carter Grange. There were modest charges for some of the changes, but nothing exorbitant or unexpected.”

“When I first saw the timber flooring going in I was worried it wasn't spotted gum and they checked it straight away and came back and reassured me. When I saw the vanity units were installed too low, our site supervisor immediately checked and arranged a fix.”

She says nearly all their finishes and specifications were from Carter Grange's standard range. Their upgrades included spotted gum timber flooring, carpet and the replacement of many of the awning windows with a double-glazed sash system to optimise ventilation.

“We also put in additional internal soundproof insulation to cut noise and further increase our energy efficiency. Thanks to the way Carter Grange builds, our gas bills are down to about 30 per cent of what they used to be.”

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No place like home:

Karin Kuehn and her children Stephanie, Michael, Alexandra and Elizabeth in their new house.
(SUPPLIED \ DARREN JAMES)



“A well-designed house can also reduce building costs and reduce ongoing costs by being very energy efficient.”

“Good design also increases the resale value of the property. People are more design savvy now and look for well-designed houses when they are buying.”

The extent to which an architect is involved in the build can vary depending on the client's requirements and budget, and ranges from concept sketches to full project management. “I have also been brought into projects at the building stage. Clients have realised that there are things they are not happy about and have asked me to fix them.”

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