

ARCHITECT VS ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER EXPLAINED

A complete guide to choosing the right design professional for your project



Figure 1 (Cover) — Illustrative design process from concept sketch to construction drawings.

NINE-PART PUBLICATION EDITION

Principles · Titles · Qualifications · Scope · Process · Contracts · Regulations · Pitfalls · Checklist
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About this guide

This guide explains the difference between architects and architectural designers for clients planning a self-build, extension or renovation. It is intended for anyone choosing a design professional who needs to understand qualifications, protected titles, typical scope of service, fees and how each route is regulated. Project-specific advice from a registered professional always takes precedence over general guidance.

SCOPE Choosing between an architect and an architectural designer depends on project complexity, budget, planning sensitivity and the level of service required. Figures are explanatory and must not be scaled.

Part 1 – Introduction: What Do These Titles Mean?

Two different routes to the same design outcome

"Architect" is a legally protected title in the UK; "architectural designer," "architectural technologist" and "building designer" are professional descriptions used by a range of practitioners with varying qualifications, none of which are protected in the same way. Both routes can deliver a complete self-build or extension design, but they differ in training, regulation, typical scope and cost — and the right choice depends on the project, not a fixed rule.



Figure 1 – Illustrative design process from concept to construction drawings.

1.1 Principal roles

Role	Typical description
Architect	ARB-registered professional, protected title, typically RIBA-trained
Chartered architectural technologist	CIAT-registered, protected title, technical design and detailing specialism
Architectural designer	Unregistered descriptive title, varying qualifications and experience
Package / design-and-build company	Combines design with a fixed build specification

1.2 Benefits and limitations

- Only a person on the ARB Register may describe themselves as an "architect" in business.
- Non-protected titles can still represent highly capable, experienced professionals — the title alone does not determine competence.
- Complex, sensitive or planning-heavy sites often benefit from an architect's training in design development and negotiation.
- Straightforward extensions can often be delivered efficiently by a qualified architectural designer or technologist at lower cost.