



From Barn to Home

Benefits of using an architect's service

by Mrs Lesley Chrystal

General Information

We purchased our house in France in 2003 and have spent the past six years on the renovation of the main house using some French artisans and our own labour. Although I am very happy with the work I do now realise the mistakes we made and the difficulties in keeping on top of some artisans.

Having a very limited knowledge of the French language especially in relation to technical knowledge, it was at times interesting and things did get lost in translation.

Therefore when a decision was made to renovate a barn into a dwelling for my father, I insisted that the work needed to be undertaken by an architect, after all it was a grand design.

The ground floor area alone was 150 square meters.

As I wanted the architect to deal with the planning application and manage the work on site I needed to find a person who I could work closely with and who would guide me through the process but not be fixed in their own ideas. I am pleased to say that Monsieur Jean-Yves Brioux met that requirement.

Finances

At the initial meetings we had a basic idea of the requirements of the design, and with Jean-Yves these ideas were developed and the plans were produced. We discussed budgets and the design was able to be achieved with good quality products within that range.

At first I was concerned about the additional cost this service adds to a build, but in my opinion, it was worth every penny or should I say centime.

Planning Consent

The plans were completed and deposited at the Mairie (town hall).

To our amazement, they were returned in two weeks fully approved.

The Mayor delivered them personally stating they were the most professional plans they had seen.

Jean-Yves also assisted in the connection of the services required such as water and electricity.

Artisans

All the work in drawing up specifications and obtaining three quotations from the many different artisans was undertaken by Jean-Yves.

I understood why I had problems before; these were specific down to the number of plugs, the price range of tiles, etc.

My French / English dictionary never had so much use.

Jean-Yves has a good understanding of English and was able to translate most aspects for me.

Once the estimates were received, they were checked by Jean-Yves and a meeting arranged to discuss them and to decide who we would employ.

Although recommendations were made it was our decision who should undertake the work. Once this decision was made then contracts were drawn up with clear timescales and penalty clauses. I do not think I have ever signed so many papers, the usual three copies of each, but during the build I learnt to understand the necessity for these, they were our main reference documents.

The build commences

There were weekly meetings on site; this included all the relevant artisans as well as Jean-Yves and us. It enabled us to identify where there may need to be some minor changes; these were achievable and usually without any additional cost as Jean-Yves negotiated the change with the artisan.

I just had to speak with him, not get involved with one of the seven enterprises on site. Also if there was slippage on one area then it was up to Jean-Yves to find a way through. Do not forget one artisan's slippage impacts on another.

On a project this size I do believe you need mentally to prepare for some slippage and we did encounter some due to bad weather and difficulties with one artisan. The stress however was for the architect.

There were obviously few concerns during this period, but I can honestly say on completion these are all forgotten. This build took less than one year.

Communication

From the first meeting Jean-Yves insisted this needed to be an open honest relationship and it has remained so throughout. In the main we have communicated in a mixture of French and English.

I especially found that the e-mail system worked for me, it gives you a record of any changes you negotiate and his written English is of a reasonable standard.

The weekly meetings were recorded and we were sent a copy each week, although in French for the artisans and actions or decisions for us were in English as well.

The big questions

- Would I utilise the services of an architect again ? : Yes.
- Would I recommend the services of an architect to others ? : Yes.
- Did I consider it to be an increased cost factor ? :

Obviously to a extent but when balanced against the work involved in designing the project, preparing planning documents, drawing up specifications, ensuring artisans work timely and keeping in budget, I consider it good value.

- **Would I recommend Jean-Yves Brioux ? : Yes.**

We did have some interesting discussions and at times we probably both felt frustrated with each other, as in any sound honest business relationship. I valued his contribution and the work speaks for itself.

It has the wow factors as demonstrated each time someone visits.

My father regularly states that he never envisaged seeing his days out in such a house !

He truly has his Grand Design.

If you are considering employing the services of Monsieur Jean-Yves Brioux and would like to speak to someone English who has utilised his services, please arrange through him to contact me.

Mrs Lesley Chrystal