

# Architect interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

## What to expect

Architecture interviews usually combine a portfolio review with questions about design process, technical judgement and how you handle the practical realities of client, engineer and budget pressures. Expect the panel to spend real time on your portfolio, then move into questions that test how you think under constraints rather than just what you can draw.

- **Portfolio and process:** Questions asking you to walk through a specific project, explaining design decisions and how the concept evolved into documentation.
- **Technical and compliance:** Questions testing your working knowledge of the National Construction Code, Australian Standards and how compliance shapes design choices.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences managing client relationships, feedback and disagreements with consultants.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations, such as a budget or timeline conflict, used to gauge how you'd handle pressure on a live project.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about presenting and defending design proposals to clients and stakeholders who may push back.

Most architecture interviews open with a portfolio walkthrough where you present two or three projects in detail, followed by technical and scenario questions from the panel, and close with questions about your fit with the practice's typical project types and studio culture.

## 1. Walk me through a project in your portfolio from initial brief to completed documentation.

### Why they ask

The panel wants to see how you actually think through a design, not just the finished render.

### How to structure your answer

Walk through it chronologically: brief and constraints, concept development, key design decisions and trade-offs, then how it was resolved into construction documentation.

### Example answer

*"The brief was a compact inner-city site with a difficult northern light angle. I started with several massing studies to test how much natural light we could bring into the living spaces without overlooking the neighbouring property. Once the client and I settled on a split-level concept, I moved into Revit to develop the documentation, working closely with the structural engineer on a raked ceiling detail that let the light in as intended. The final drawings went through two rounds of council feedback before receiving development approval."*

## 2. How do you make sure your designs comply with the National Construction Code and relevant Australian Standards without compromising the design intent?

### Why they ask

Tests whether you treat compliance as an afterthought or build it into the design process from the start.

### How to structure your answer

Explain your process for checking compliance at each design stage, then give a concrete example of a code requirement that shaped a design decision.

### Example answer

*"I check code implications at concept stage rather than leaving them until documentation, particularly around fire separation, accessibility and structural loading under AS 1170. On one project, egress requirements meant reworking a stair location I'd originally placed for aesthetic reasons. I found an alternative position that kept the sightlines I wanted while meeting the required travel distances, so the design intent survived the compliance check."*

### **3. Tell me about a time you disagreed with a structural engineer or consultant over a design decision.**

#### **Why they ask**

Architects work in constant negotiation with engineers and builders, so the panel wants evidence you can hold a design position while still resolving conflict productively.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use STAR: describe the situation, your task, the action you took to resolve the disagreement, and the result for the project.

#### **Example answer**

*"On a renovation project, the structural engineer wanted a larger column than I'd allowed for in an open living area. I asked him to walk me through his loading calculations so I understood the constraint properly, then proposed shifting the column into a wall line rather than removing it, which kept the open feel the client wanted. We agreed on that revised position within a day and it didn't delay the documentation."*

### **4. A client wants a change late in the design process that would blow the budget or timeline. How do you handle it?**

#### **Why they ask**

Checks your judgement under pressure and how you balance client relationships against project constraints.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Talk through the immediate steps you'd take, who you'd involve, and how you'd land on a workable outcome, focusing on the reasoning rather than a scripted answer.

#### **Example answer**

*"I'd first work out exactly what the change would cost in time and budget so the conversation with the client is based on facts rather than a rough guess. Then I'd present a couple of options, for instance a scaled-back version of the change or a way to offset the cost elsewhere in the scope, so the client has a real choice rather than a flat no. On one project this approach let a client add a requested skylight by trimming a less critical joinery item, which kept the budget intact."*

### **5. How do you approach presenting a design proposal to a client who has strong opinions that differ from your recommendation?**

#### **Why they ask**

Client-facing skill is central to the role, and the panel wants to see you can defend a design without alienating the client.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Describe your presentation approach, how you listen to and address objections, and how you find common ground.

#### **Example answer**

*"I present the reasoning behind a design decision, not just the decision itself, so the client understands the trade-offs I weighed. When a client pushed back on an open-plan layout in favour of more enclosed rooms, I asked what specifically concerned them, which turned out to be noise from a home office. We resolved it by adding a sliding partition, which kept the open feel most of the time but*

*gave them the option to close it off.”*

## **6. What software do you use for design development versus construction documentation, and why?**

### **Why they ask**

Confirms practical fluency with the tools the practice actually uses day to day.

### **How to structure your answer**

Give a direct, practical answer matching tools to project stages, with a brief reason for each choice.

### **Example answer**

*“I use SketchUp for early massing and concept studies because it's fast for testing ideas with a client in the room, then move into Revit once the design is locked in, since the BIM model carries through to coordinated documentation with the structural and services consultants. AutoCAD still comes up for smaller detail drawings or when working with consultants who aren't on Revit.”*