

Preliminary brief

How to prepare the design of your house in Madeira

IN THIS ARTICLE

- Who will live in the house, and how
- The plot comes first
- Areas and priorities
- A realistic budget
- Timeline and stages

DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

Preliminary brief

Before the first drawing, the brief defines what the house must be. A good brief saves months of revisions and avoids budget surprises.



IN THIS ARTICLE

- 1. Who will live in the house, and how
- 2. The plot comes first
- 3. Areas and priorities
- 4. A realistic budget
- 5. Timeline and stages
- Quick checklist for the first meeting

The preliminary brief is the document in which the client describes what they expect from the house. It looks like paperwork, but this is where much of the final cost is decided. A poorly briefed design gets revised again and again, and every revision costs time and fees.

1. Who will live in the house, and how

Start with people, not rooms. How many live there full time? Are there frequent guests, remote work, reduced mobility, pets? The answers decide whether a bedroom on the entrance floor, an office with its own access or a bigger garage makes sense.

2. The plot comes first

In Madeira, plots are rarely flat. Before thinking about floor areas, gather:

- An up-to-date topographic survey, with levels and existing walls.
- The land registry certificate and tax record, to confirm areas and boundaries.
- The municipal master plan (PDM) rules: building ratios, maximum heights, setbacks and any constraints and restrictions (watercourses and water public domain, regional roads, Madeira Natural Park or Natura 2000 sites).
- Access and utilities: water, sewage, electricity and whether a concrete truck can actually reach the site.

3. Areas and priorities

List the rooms with approximate areas and sort them into three groups: essential, desirable and if the budget allows. This ranking lets the architect suggest cuts without ruining the house.

4. A realistic budget

Give a total figure covering construction, architecture and engineering design, municipal fees, site supervision and a 10 to 15% contingency. With construction costs rising by more than 7% a year, update this figure at the start of each stage.

5. Timeline and stages

A typical path runs from concept design to architectural design, engineering designs, a permit or prior notice (depending on the location and the plan in force) and construction drawings. Legal review deadlines exist, but in practice, with opinions from other bodies, allow several months. Set target dates, but accept that permitting is rarely quick.

Quick checklist for the first meeting

A clear brief does not limit the architect's creativity: it gives them the right frame to solve the right problem.

QUICK CHECKLIST

- Survey and plot documents
- Room list by priority
- Overall budget with contingency
- Examples of houses you like (and dislike)
- Desired start and completion dates

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