

ISSUES HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Use an architect, and help the homeless

Pay £35 to Shelter and you could soon have your building dilemmas solved, says

Nick Lloyd Jones

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Architect in the House (AIH) - a scheme organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and designed to raise money for the homeless charity Shelter while offering affordable architectural advice to home-owners.

RIBA president Jack Pringle comments, "The AIH scheme is about introducing people to architects to demonstrate how good design can improve our lives and homes. Since it started thousands of people have benefited from this easy, no-strings introduction to a local architect and more than £500,000 has been raised for Shelter."

Those availing themselves of the service must make a minimum donation of £35 to Shelter. In return, they are assigned an hour-long consultation with an RIBA-affiliated architect.

One of these is Richard Dudzicki - head of RDA Architects - based in Dulwich, south London. The firm specialises in residential work and Richard has been involved with the AIH project for the past five years.

He has nothing but praise for the scheme. "It's a good idea because it delivers architectural design into homes that wouldn't otherwise use it. Most people just call the builders in and let them get on with it. With architects, you get a tailored service and a whole package. They bring structural knowledge to the job, professional expertise as well as help with a lot of niggling issues such as planning applications and supervision of the actual building work."

The scheme has also proved beneficial for Richard's core business. "It has thrown up a number of interesting projects over the years," he says.

Although most people he visits choose to settle for the preliminary consultation rather than following up



with a commission, he says about one in 10 of his AIH clients have eventually decided to use his services.

One was Linda Beale, who lives in Genoa Road near Crystal Palace. Four years ago Linda wanted a kitchen extension to her Victorian ground-floor one-bedroom flat.

She had heard of the AIH scheme through friends' recommendations. Richard

visited and made preliminary sketches for her. She checked out some examples of his work on his website and decided she liked his light, airy and modernist style.

Richard proposed demolishing a lean-to and knocking out the back wall

of her existing kitchen to make a much bigger open-plan living-room-cum-dining-room area, thereby transforming the existing sitting room into an additional bedroom.

He helped organise the builders and, within five months and at a cost of roughly £40,000, Linda had an architect-designed light-filled kitchen extension with a frosted skylight and floor-

to-ceiling glass sliding doors at the side as well as a second bedroom for her flat. "It's transformed the place," she says, "and it's totally paid off in terms of adding value to the property."

Another local AIH client who chose to enlist Richard's services was Ian Shoemsmith, in nearby East Dulwich Road. He had a first-floor flat in a Victorian semi connected to its neighbour by a bridged passageway added on in the 1970s with stairs above it leading to an upper-level flat.

It was a dark space into which a poky bathroom and kitchen had been crammed. Ian and his girlfriend had done some basic DIY but were dreading taking on major building work.

"Richard was great and full of ideas about what to do with the space," says Ian. "He did some scale drawings on the spot and we were convinced by his plans within 30 minutes."

The couple ended up paying about £4,000 to Richard for architectural fees and a further £20,000 for the building works but they were just as delighted with the end results as Linda had been. "Before Richard started, that area of the flat had been a complete mess and a waste of space. We were amazed at what he eventually managed to do with it," says Ian.

"We appreciated the project management side of it with Richard attending to everything. He listened to what we wanted, then measured up and guided us through the budgeting and finally dealt with the builders and used all his trade contacts. The space was transformed and the value added to our home more than covered the cost of the works."

Good news all round, then. Good for the homeless, good for homeowners keen to make the most of their property's potential and good for architects.

Tempted? Then register for this year's AIH from 1 May on the website listed below. AIH is part of Architecture Week - an annual architectural celebration - which runs between 16 and 25 June when consultations with architects participating in the AIH scheme are assigned.

www.architecture.com

RIBA factfile

■ Those interested in RIBA's 'Architect in the House' scheme can call the information line on 0844 445 7638.

■ Alternatively, to register for a one-hour consultation with a RIBA-affiliated local architect for a minimum contribution of £35, log on from May 1 at either

www.architectureweek.org.uk or www.architecture.com.

■ Applicants will be assigned an architect at the end of June with consultations until the end of September.

■ RDA Architects can be contacted on 020 8299 2222.

