

A person wearing a blue and white striped shirt is holding a black chalkboard with the word 'Open' written in white cursive. The background is a blurred interior space with wooden furniture.

STEP

6

FINDING A DESIGNER FOR YOUR SHOP

How do you find the best person to design your fitout?

Most retail fitouts won't need an architect (architects design buildings rather than interiors), but most will need an experienced retail interior designer.

Not only do interior designers understand interiors better than an architect would, they also understand many aspects of your shop that they would not.

An experienced retail interior designer will know how to consider the customer's journey through your shop, the requirements for staff and storage, the importance of an appealing shopfront, and so on.

The best retail designers will also understand what builders need to know to be able to price, will advise you on value engineering (more on that later!), and will be practical about your use of the space.

TOP TIPS FOR FINDING A DESIGNER

#1: COMMUNICATION & COMPATIBILITY ARE KEY

The most important criteria for your designer is to find someone who understands you, someone you feel comfortable talking to and who will tease out your ideas rather than come to you with a cookie-cutter approach.

#2: ONLY RETAIL WILL DO

Don't make the mistake of thinking you can use the guy who designed your sister's kitchen! This is a specialised field which requires experts who understand retail environments.

? GET HELP

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the details or need help with any aspect of setting up your shop, give us a call on 0424 113 116.

We can help you create a design brief and select a designer from only \$1,350 + GST.

THE DESIGN STAGES EXPLAINED – GUIDE

Before you find a designer and work out how to brief them on your vision, it's important you become familiar with the stages of design.

In order to help you visualise the design stages and the kinds of plans you'll be tasking a designer (and potentially engineers) to produce for you, we'll use an example hairdressing business.

INSTRUCTIONS



Read through the eleven stages of design below. There's a lot of back and forth getting a shop designed and approved, so the more you know about the process, the better you can plan for it.

These steps will help you understand how a design is communicated. Of course, you don't need to design the shop yourself (that's what your designer is for) but you need to know how to communicate with your designer to ensure you achieve the best possible fitout for your budget.

The 11 design stages:

1: Concept Plans

2: Reviewing your Concept Plans

3: Sending your plans to the landlord

4: Preliminary Plans

5: Reviewing your Preliminary Plans

6: Sending your plans to the landlord

7: Send your plans to the authorities

8: Send your plans to engineers

9: Ordering Direct Items

10: Coordinating the Final Plans

11: Reviewing the Final Plans

2: REVIEWING YOUR CONCEPT PLANS

First, don't be afraid to give clear feedback to your designer. If you don't like what they have produced, then it's important to let them know before they get too far down the track. Designers can be sensitive and creative, but you are their client!

If possible, be specific about what you don't like – is it a colour, an item of furniture, or something else?

This is also the time to let the designer know if you have had any new ideas, decided on any new pieces of equipment, or if you have any specific dimensions or services requirements for any of your equipment.

Make sure your designer has thought about compliance issues with building and council rules – ask them to confirm this, don't presume!

Finally, keep a list of all the things you have asked for so that you can check back against it when you get the next set of plans. It can be overwhelming to see your dreams on paper, and it's very easy to forget about little details.

3: SENDING YOUR PLANS TO THE LANDLORD

Make sure you are happy with the concept before sending it to the landlord. Your landlord will respond to what's on the page in front of them, not what's in your head yet to be discussed with your designer!

The landlord may come back and ask for some changes, which should only be one of two things:

- either your designer has missed something in the Design Guidelines
- or your shop has features that are very similar to another one nearby.

Some Retail Design Managers (RDMs) will try to push for a fashionable design feature – some new shopping centres feature a chandelier or green wall in every second shop. Only take on the RDM's advice if it suits you, and bear in mind that many of these suggestions may be "fashionable" and may date your shop very quickly.

RDMs sometimes tell tenants that they need to choose a different shade of blue only because the RDM didn't personally like the one proposed – do not fall for this! It's your shop, and while the RDM can enforce the Design Guidelines, they cannot dictate your design. Of course, if you love what the RDM comes up with, then get your designer to add it in! At the end of the day, it doesn't matter where the idea comes from as long as you get a great looking shop that meets your operational needs.

That said, make sure that you don't move on to the next design stage until you have the landlord feedback, otherwise you may end up having to re-do your plans down the track.

4: PRELIMINARY PLANS

The preliminary plans are more developed plans: they include more details about what will be built and they will help you start to visualise what the tenancy will actually look and feel like.

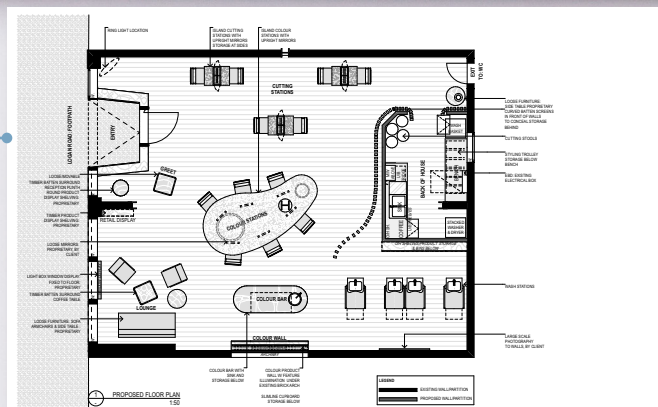
The important thing to note at this stage is that your Design Guidelines or Fitout Guide will often specify which plans are expected at this stage – so make sure your designer knows what they need to produce.

The set of example Preliminary Plans that were developed after the concept plans for our example hairdresser are shown on the page and the next.

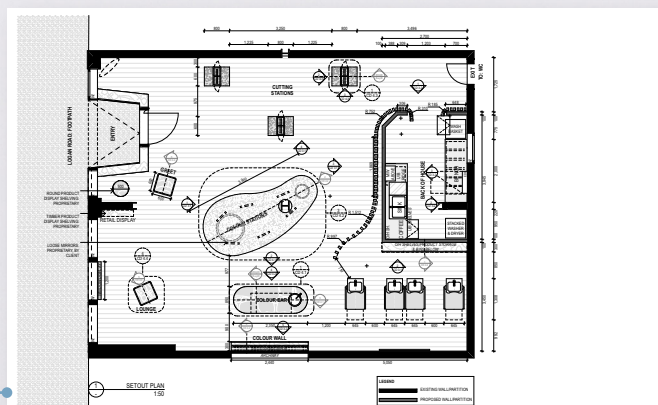
Here, we see the concept plans have been developed further. The layout has changed slightly, there are more details, such as a curved screen hiding the back of house and more rounded shapes throughout.

A setout plan shows the critical dimensions in your tenancy that will be used by the shopfitter to locate walls, services and fixtures. It will also help you understand how much space there will be between all your fixed items.

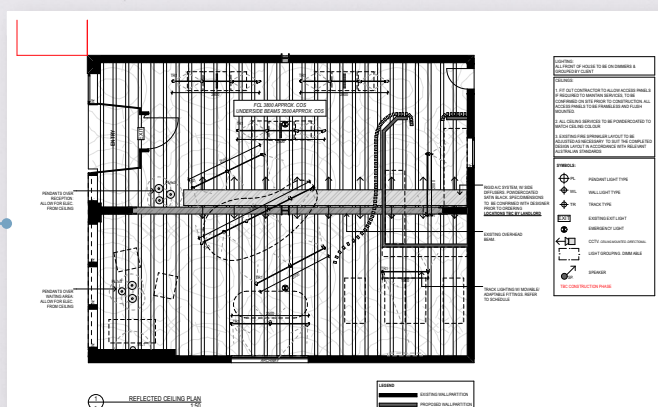
These plans also include an RCP (Reflected Ceiling Plan) showing lighting, ...



Updated floor plan



Setout plan



Reflected ceiling plan

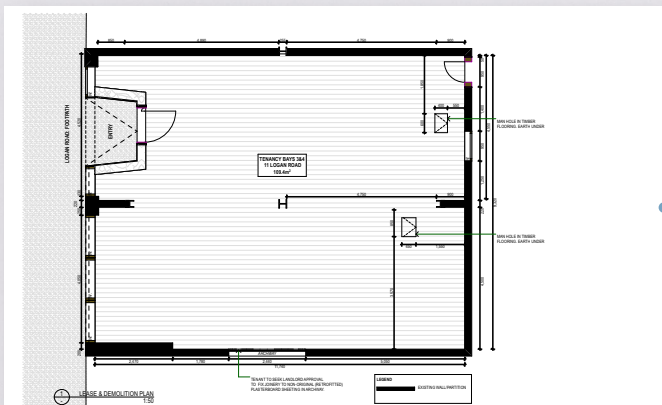
... as well as Elevations and Sections.
Head to section 8 for more details on each of these kinds of plans.

The plan below shows the existing tenancy as it is, including some dimensions,

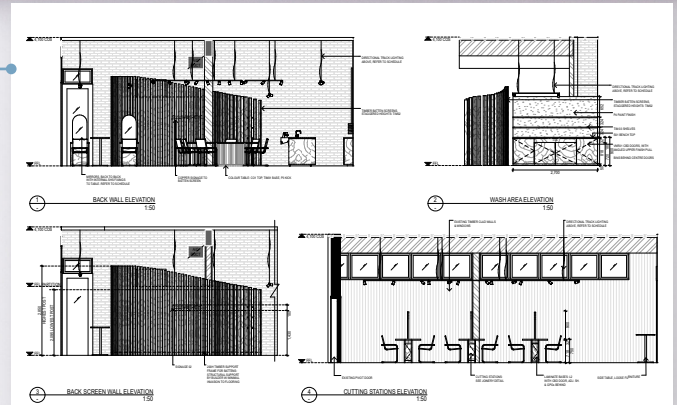
and a very basic render gives the tenant an idea of what the redesigned space will feel like. (You may not always get a render – check with your designer.)



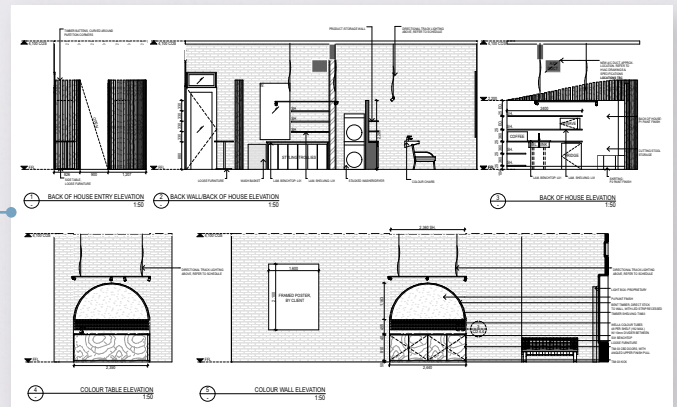
Internal perspective (render)



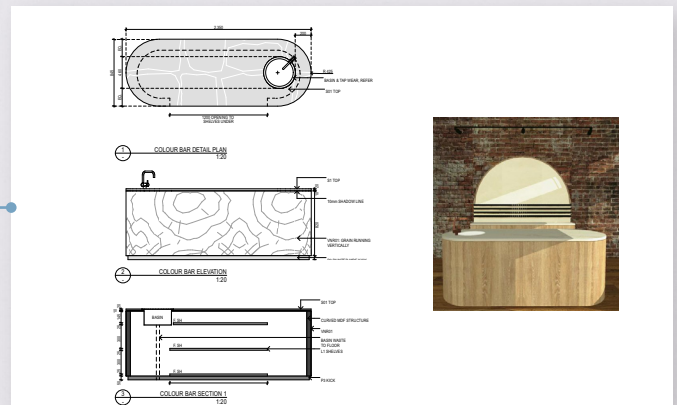
Lease and demolition plan



Interior elevations



Interior elevations



Detail and section

5: REVIEWING YOUR PRELIMINARY PLANS

Your Preliminary Plans should be very close to complete. From your point of view, it is important to check the following:

- **Has all of your equipment been included, even things that sit on benches?** This will determine the services design, so it is critical that they are shown.
- **Check back against your brief – has everything been included?** Make sure you communicate anything that needs to be added in now.
- **Don't presume that you can easily add things in later on.** You might be able to, but it also may cause some problems. For example, a café owner recently decided to change the size of his coffee machine during the fitout from a 2-group to 4-group machine. He didn't tell anyone else involved in the fitout. And this oversight meant the machine ended up not fitting and the power supply wasn't sufficient to run the machine... and he had to delay his opening to wait for delivery of a 2-group machine.

So, as you can see, it's important you ensure you've captured everything in the plans by this stage.

6: SENDING YOUR PLANS TO THE LANDLORD

Again, make sure you are happy with the preliminary plans before sending it – your landlord can only review what's on the page in front of them.

At this point, the landlord may be expecting very detailed drawings for joinery, junctions, finishes schedules, light fittings, and so on, but these should all be listed out for you in your Fitout Guide or other ancillary documents. However, if they have not asked for these documents, then they cannot insist you produce them.

Again, make sure you get the approval before finalising the next stage of your design – it will only waste time to proceed without approval. One week should be ample time for the RDM to respond to you with any questions and then finalise the approval.

7: SEND YOUR PLANS TO THE AUTHORITIES

There are a couple of groups that will need to approve your plans. For more details, see our helpful resources on page 104.

Certifier

Anything that you build has to comply with the national construction code and the certifier is the person that makes sure that it does. You'll need to send your plans to a certifier to sign off on, which shouldn't take more than a week.

Some certifiers are more pedantic than others – so it can pay to have one recommended to you. However, you are free to choose any certifier. But if it is a very complicated building like a mixed-use building, it can be worth using the base-build certifier as they are familiar with the building.

Or ask your designer or Setting Up Your Shop to recommend a friendly certifier to you.

Council

Council is another authority that might need to assess your plans. There are lots of different types of usage which trigger the need to send your plans to council – everything from footpath dining, hydraulics and health to gyms, salons and food businesses all require assessment by council. See our helpful resources section on page 104.

Make sure you send your preliminary plans to council early on. But don't bother sending your concept plans to council – they won't have enough information in them. Council will also need to see your hydraulic plans (that will be drafted by your engineer).

State Government

If you're a butcher or you're selling fish or eggs, you also need state government approval. This also applies if you are selling alcohol. There are different people you need to consider sending your plans to. See our helpful resources section on page 104.

8: SEND YOUR PLANS TO ENGINEERS

Note: You can send your plans to council at the same time as you send them out to engineers. It's important that an engineer see your plans before they're finalised because they may identify issues (such as a duct that isn't included or that gets in the way of another feature etc.) that your designer and council cannot.

Once your plans are at the preliminary stage, they are ready for the engineers to get involved. There's no point sending your concept plans to an engineer as the design is likely to develop considerably from the initial sketches, and your engineers will need a locked-in layout. They may want to view the CAD or DWG files from your designer – that will help them have the most accurate picture of your fitout.

Colours and finishes matter less to an engineer, but they will need to know of any features and bulkheads that might get in the way of a sprinkler or air-con diffuser. Make sure you send the full set of plans to them, not just your floor plans.

For a list of the types of engineers you might need, check out Section 2.3 (5), and also the explanations under "Engineer" in the Glossary on page 112. You may not need engineers at all if your design is simple and there are no complicated services, and sometimes you can have a contractor do a "design and construct" as part of your build contract. However, you should typically use a mechanical and hydraulic engineer if you have a food offer. If you are still confused, talk to your designer: they should be able to help you work out what you need.

Your landlord might want you to use their engineers, and if you insist on using your own, the landlord may still want their engineers to review your drawings anyway. This is usually at your cost. There is not a lot you can do about it if your tenancy services interact with the base building systems – for example if you are connected to the base-build sprinkler system or air-conditioning. It is important that the base building works well for everyone, and the systems can be complicated if your tenancy is at the bottom of a towering office block.

Once the engineers have developed their designs, there may be some things your designer needs to consider. For example, you may need a large section of ductwork running through what you hoped would be a high ceiling area. This is where your designer and engineer should work together to get the best outcome from a practical as well as aesthetic point of view.

9: ORDERING DIRECT ITEMS

There are a number of items you should be planning for at this stage.

Long lead time items

Some items for your fitout may come from very far away – like chairs from Italy, leather for your upholstery from Spain, cabinetry from China. These things can have a long lead time of 8, 12 or even 16 weeks! As noted in Section 3.2, make sure your designer knows when you want open and that you may only have time to buy things that are readily available off the shelf.

Ideally, your designer will find any feature items at the concept stage and be able to tell you when you would need to order them. I recommend waiting to place orders until you have a more developed set of plans than the concept set though, so ordering times can be tricky. You may not have enough time after the preliminary set to get delivery of the items you want. However, there are often replicas or similar items available, but they may be more expensive or not quite as beautiful.

If you are placing orders for long lead items, be aware that many suppliers will not start the actual order process until they have been paid a deposit. If your landlord needs to approve your plans, make sure you have them sign off on the things you are ordering, or you may have spent money in vain!

Other items

This may not be build/equipment items – could be uniforms, POS system, plates, cutlery, plants, menus – boards or printed, condiment holders etc.

Equipment

It's very important that you feed any information about gas, power, hydraulics, equipment size/weight etc. back to your engineers and designer so the info is included in the final plans.

Furniture

Think about whether you need to bring it in from outside at night or lock it up. Where will you store it? Is it too heavy for your staff to move each day?

Liquor Licence

Get the ball rolling as it can take 8 weeks from submission to the State body and may take several weeks before that to get all the correct documents and signatures from landlord/building owners.

10: COORDINATING THE FINAL PLANS

A full set of Final Plans should include:

- Reflected Ceiling Plan (RCP)
- Demolition plan (if required)
- Floorplan
- Sections
- Elevations
- Mechanical
- Fire
- Hydraulics Plan
- Signage
- Electrical Plan
- Finishes Schedule
- Equipment schedule
- Furniture schedule
- Joinery detail
- Sample board

See Step 7 for a full description of each of these items to be included in your final plans.

Please note: everything won't be included on one plan – this would make the plan very confusing, messy and difficult to read. But all the plans work together to detail all the aspects of your fitout.

It's important that you make sure the architectural plans have notes that the engineers' plans are referred to and check the architecturals against the engineers' plans to make sure they don't contradict each other. For example, while you wouldn't necessarily need mechanical, fire and hydraulics plans if you aren't a food business, these plans detail the services. And the point of getting them is to make sure that your services don't clash with any parts of your fitout. If you, for example, have a beautiful ceiling and you have a drop section with a feature light, it will ruin the aesthetics if you need a big aircon and sprinkler system in that same ceiling. And it's also important to ensure that your design features do not obscure any services.

11: REVIEWING THE FINAL PLANS

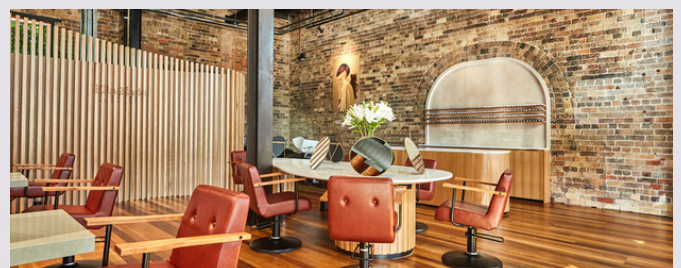
Final Plans are the set you send out for pricing to your shopfitter, so make sure they include ALL the items you want to see. Don't leave anything out, no matter how small, if you know you will want to include it later.

Once you get all the plans back, make sure you have a really good read of them – even the small print.

This is where you should review the notes you made way back when you were reviewing the concepts and make sure you got everything you wanted, or at least confirm that you understand why that element can't happen. As much as possible, check joinery drawings to ensure you have enough drawers, the electrical plans for power points, and all the little details you have noted since the beginning.

It can be helpful to think about "a day in the life" of your shop. Where will staff come in? Can they lift that roller door by themselves? Will everyone need a key? Where do they put their bags, and is there a little mirror in back of house so they can check their appearance? How will deliveries come in, and is there a computer with a chair for any emailing or admin work that needs to be done? Out on the shop floor, how will your employees make sure they can greet customers as they enter and keep an eye on them while they are shopping? Or if you serve food, what will your queueing system be – where will people stand while they wait for takeaway food? And so on, and so on, through transactions, cleaning, breaks, all the way through to how staff turn off the lights and lock up at night.

Reviewing the final plans will be time consuming, but it is very important to make sure you have everything on paper. Yes, you can add things in once the builders start, but then you get a bill for variations, and no-one wants that.



The completed fitout for the hairdressers used as the example for the plans throughout this step

HOW TO FIND A DESIGNER – GUIDE

Any designer worth their salt will be able to produce some very pretty pictures, but you need more than that. How do you find the right designer for you and your fitout?

INSTRUCTIONS



Don't rush this step. You'll need to find a designer who can create a robust set of plans that detail exactly what will be built, what the builder needs to include, and your expectations for the quality to be delivered.

If you are tendering your fitout plans to several shopfitters so you can secure the best price, then these details will be particularly important.

This guide should help you avoid some potentially unexpected pitfalls to help you connect with a designer that's a good match for you and your shop.

When looking for a designer, it's important for you to take your time as you follow the 5 steps outlined below.

So how do you find the right designer for you?

1: START WITH WORD OF MOUTH

The best way to find a designer is often through word of mouth or industry connections. There are many kinds of designers out there. Your landlord might recommend someone or you may need an expert in a particular field (e.g. kitchens).

Finding a reputable designer is vital to ensuring you receive the service and attention to detail required. Reputation and previous work are key.

With an experienced designer, you should be able to view their past work and learn about their process and timeframes so that you can understand how your project is likely to play out.

Unlike finding your insurance provider, Googling will often show you the designers who spend the most on SEO not the most reliable or relevant retail designers! I recommend looking in the following places:

» **ARCHITECTURE AU**
www.architectureau.com/awards/search/?award_type=Interior

While this site has domestic and commercial as well as retail projects, it runs the Retail Design awards. Check out the shortlists rather than the award winners – there can be 20 designers on the shortlist. Then pop over to the designers' websites and see if you like their style.



IFA
www.interiorfitoutassociation.com.au/member-directory
 &
www.interiorfitoutmagazine.com.au/read-the-latest-edition-here

The IFA covers the interior fitout from design through to build and is a good resource to find both your designer and your shopfitter. They also publish a quarterly magazine which you can look at online, which showcases some recent fitouts and names the designers and shopfitters for each.

» FIND A DESIGNER

www.design.org.au/find-a-designer

Interior designer do not have to register to practise, but many of the good ones do, and this is where to find them. Choose Interior Designer – Architecture from the drop down list, then the state you need. You do not want the decorator option – you need someone who can design the layout of the space, not just change finishes. You can enter a person's name or company name as well if you want to check if someone in particular has registered with the DIA.

2: MAKE SURE THEY KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY

Does your designer have experience in your particular industry? There's no point asking someone who has only ever designed shoe shops to work on your new medical centre. The right, experienced designer will be able to assist you with specialty features for your shop design, specific to your industry, as well as bringing lessons learned from other projects. You can check the gallery of past work on their website, have a quick chat over the phone, or request example photos or a list of locations for you to visit.

3: BE UP FRONT ABOUT YOUR BUDGET

Make sure you communicate your budget up front (and not just your budget for design fees but for the fitout as well!). Some designers are better than others at working to a tight budget and maximising wow while minimising cost. Hiring a designer who is used to big budgets and businesses might not be the right fit if you are a new business with a simple design and a tight budget.

4: MAKE SURE YOU'RE COMPATIBLE

This might not seem that important, but it is essential: choosing a designer that is compatible with you will help ease the design process. Some designers may be open to your ideas throughout the process and others may want minimal input, creating their own design according to your brief. You need to choose the designer that you can communicate well with and who is more likely to incorporate your input to the degree you would like.

5: COMMUNICATE YOUR TIMEFRAMES

It's important to let your designer know the time constraints for your project so they can commit to getting your plans to you on time.

We have touched on this in *Step 3*, but it will usually take:

- 2 weeks to get your Concept Plans,
- 3 weeks after you provide feedback for your Preliminary Plans, and
- another 2 weeks after providing feedback for your Final Plans (these terms are explained in the *glossary* and in *Step 6* of this guide).

But this timeframe can vary considerably! If your tenancy is large or complicated, it will take longer. Food tenancies often take a bit longer as well. You should also allow at least one week for the landlord to review each stage of the plans, and the designer will need to either incorporate that feedback or talk to the landlord on your behalf to argue your case.

It's critical to agree these timeframes with your designer in advance – they may be very busy and not able to jump straight onto your project, in which case you may need to find a different designer.