

# ARCHITECTURE

Developed by:



**BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT  
CAREER  
STREAMS**

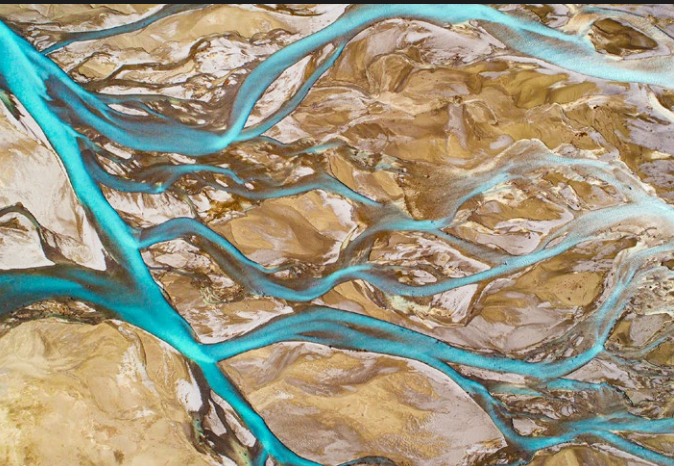
Ngā ara rerekē o te ao  
hanga taiao

He ara whiria  
A braided river



## CHOOSING THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU

Inspired by Aotearoa New Zealand's many braided rivers, this helpful guide has been created for anyone entering or changing careers in the construction industry. Like a river, your chosen career stream may twist and turn throughout your career, but all streams can lead to rewarding and impactful roles – enabling you to make a tangible impact on New Zealand's built environments.



# ARCHITECTURE

This guide gives you an overview of the opportunities and expectations within architecture careers – including typical career pathways, key skills required, what the role looks like day-to-day, and how to get started.

**Most people think of architecture roles as creating the design for a building project, but roles can also include:**

- Concept design and client brief development during project initiation
- Design development and documentation coordination through design phases
- Regulatory compliance and building consent applications
- Construction administration and quality assurance during delivery
- Post-occupancy evaluation and building performance assessment
- Ongoing consultation for refurbishment and upgrade projects

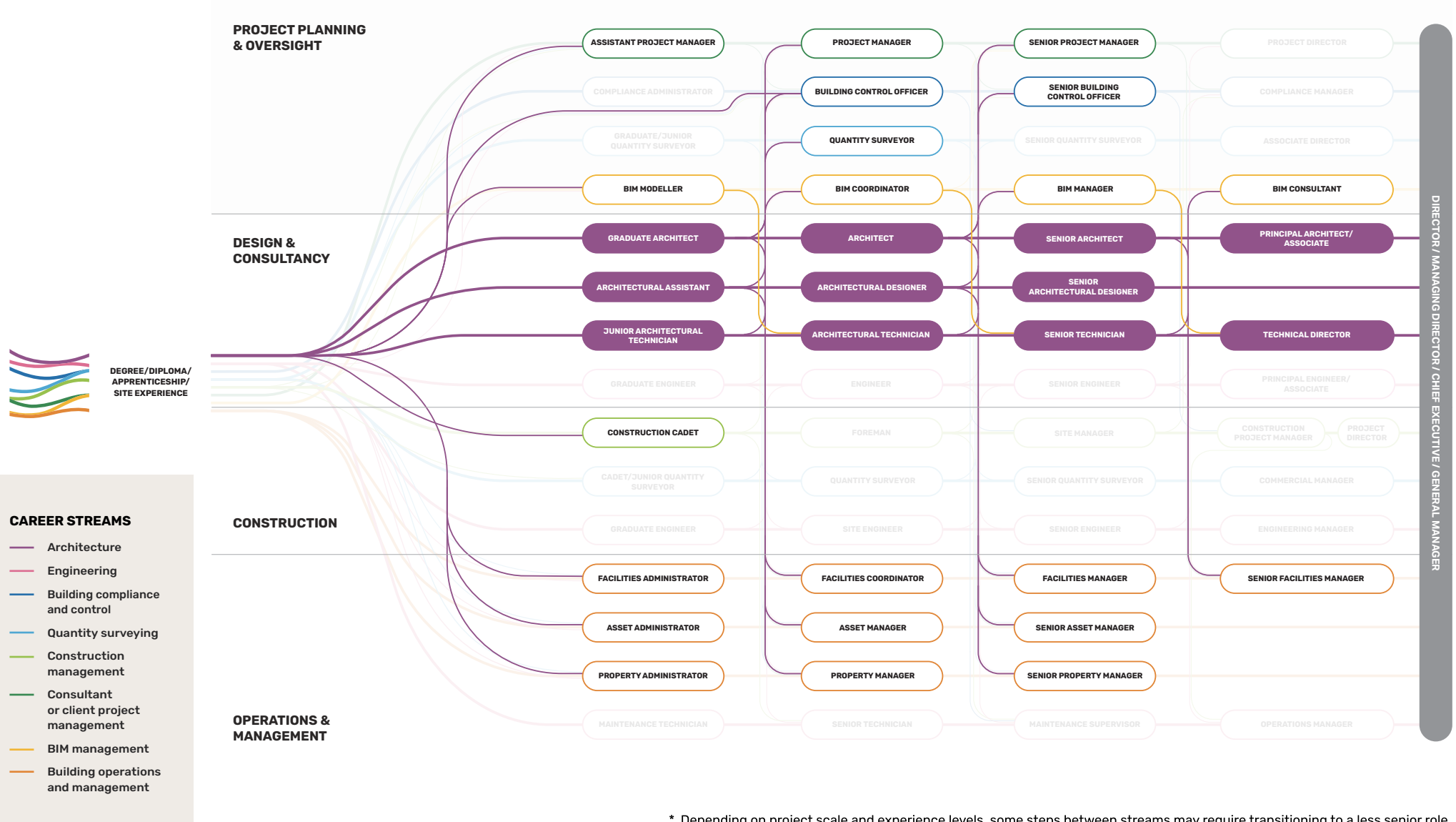
**Design/consultant architects** lead building design from concept to completion. They combine creative design thinking with technical expertise and regulatory knowledge, pursuing professional registration to take full responsibility for projects.

**Architectural technicians** specialise in translating design concepts into detailed technical documentation using CAD and Building Information Modelling (BIM) technologies. They focus on technical precision and construction coordination rather than design leadership.

**Architectural designers** focus on design development and client consultation, with many choosing to build careers without pursuing formal registration.



## ARCHITECTURE CAREER STREAM



\* Depending on project scale and experience levels, some steps between streams may require transitioning to a less senior role.

## KEY PARTS OF THE ROLE

- **Creative problem-solving under constraints** – Architecture requires balancing aesthetic vision with technical feasibility, regulatory compliance, budget limitations, and client requirements. You'll need to develop innovative solutions while navigating competing demands and stakeholder expectations.
- **Extensive documentation requirements** – A major part of the architect's role, particularly during early career stages, is producing comprehensive construction drawings, specifications, and technical details that guide building delivery.
- **Integration of design vision with technical delivery** – Unlike purely creative or technical roles, architecture requires an integrated view of aesthetic quality, construction methodology, environmental performance, and user experience throughout the design process.
- **Continuous adaptation to digital transformation** – The profession is rapidly evolving with Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital collaboration platforms, and emerging design technologies. You'll need to stay current with software advances, as well as developing design and documentation skills.
- **Complex stakeholder coordination throughout a project** – You'll be facilitating relationships between clients, engineers, planners, contractors, and regulatory authorities with different priorities and technical languages. Clear visual, verbal and written communication is essential for project success.
- **High professional responsibility with lasting impact** – Design decisions influence public safety, environmental performance, and community wellbeing for decades. Roles often include responsibility for building code compliance, structural integrity, and accessibility requirements with potential legal implications.

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS

After you've gained experience in architecture, other roles that become possible include:

- **Practice ownership and partnership** – Establishing an independent practice or buying into a partnership in an existing firm
- **Specialist sector expertise** – Developing deep knowledge in specific areas such as healthcare, education, heritage, or sustainability
- **Property development and investment** – Applying design expertise and regulatory knowledge to development feasibility, investment analysis, and project coordination
- **BIM and digital specialisation** – Leading Building Information Modelling implementation, digital design innovation, and technology integration as a consultant or within your current practice
- **Building control and compliance** – Applying architectural knowledge to regulatory assessment, consent processing, and code compliance evaluation
- **Project management** – Transitioning to client or consultant project management using design coordination and stakeholder management experience
- **Education and training** – Teaching roles in tertiary education, corporate training, or professional development programmes

## SALARY BANDS\*

|                             | Graduate architect              | Architect                | Senior architect             | Principal architect          | Director level         |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Minimum time in role</b> | 2-4 years                       | 4-6 years                | 5-8 years (destination role) | 6-8 years (destination role) | (destination role)     |
| <b>Salary range</b>         | \$60,000 - \$75,000             | \$90,000 - \$110,000     | \$110,000 - \$135,000        | \$130,000 - \$170,000        | \$160,000 - \$200,000  |
|                             | Junior architectural technician | Architectural technician | Senior technician            | BIM manager                  | Technical director     |
| <b>Minimum time in role</b> | 2-3 years                       | 3-5 years                | 5-8 years (destination role) | 4-7 years (destination role) | (destination role)     |
| <b>Salary range</b>         | \$50,000 - \$60,000             | \$70,000 - \$80,000      | \$85,000 - \$115,000         | \$110,000 - \$160,000        | \$120,000 - \$160,000+ |

\*Salaries and time in roles is indicative only and can vary significantly based on experience, performance, firm size and structure, regional location, specialisation, and market conditions.



## ROLE OVERVIEW

### KEY DAILY ACTIVITIES

#### Design/consultant architects

- **Design development and conceptual thinking** – Creating building concepts that respond to client briefs, site conditions, and user requirements through sketching, digital modelling, and design iteration
- **Client consultation and stakeholder engagement** – Presenting design concepts, managing expectations, and facilitating decision-making processes with property owners, developers, and end users
- **Regulatory compliance and consent processes** – Ensuring designs meet building codes, planning requirements, and accessibility standards through documentation and liaison with authorities
- **Construction administration and quality assurance** – Monitoring building progress, responding to contractor queries, and conducting site inspections during construction phases

#### Architectural technicians

- **Technical documentation production** – Creating detailed construction drawings, specifications, and building details using CAD and BIM software for contractor instruction
- **BIM model development and coordination** – Building comprehensive 3D models, managing information exchange between disciplines, and ensuring model accuracy throughout project phases
- **Building code compliance and detail resolution** – Checking drawings against building standards, resolving technical coordination challenges, and responding to council queries during consent processes

- **Construction support and RFI responses** – Providing technical clarification to contractors during construction and updating documentation based on site conditions

#### Architectural designers

- **Design development for smaller projects** – Developing design concepts and producing presentation materials for residential, small commercial, and renovation projects within budget and regulatory constraints
- **Independent client consultation and project coordination** – Managing client relationships and project delivery for smaller scale projects, facilitating design decisions, and coordinating with contractors and consultants
- **Documentation and BIM workflows** – Producing construction documentation and working within BIM processes for projects within their scope and expertise
- **Complete project delivery for appropriate scale work** – Managing the entire design process from concept to construction for projects that don't require registered architect oversight

### WHERE YOU COULD WORK

**Multi-disciplinary firms** – Integrated design services combining architecture with engineering, quantity surveying, and project management

**Architecture or architectural design practices** – Specialist firms focused on design and advisory services

**Directly with a client organisation** – Government agencies, healthcare providers, property developers, or other companies with ongoing design needs

### WHO YOU'LL WORK WITH

Engineers, quantity surveyors, contractors, subcontractors, project managers, building control officers, regulatory bodies, clients, and end users.

### TYPICAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS

- Primarily studio-based work with hybrid arrangements becoming increasingly available
- Construction phase involvement requires regular site visits and inspections
- Project deadline pressures create intensive periods requiring extended hours
- Collaborative environment with frequent team meetings and design reviews
- Creative work requires balance between focused design time and stakeholder interaction
- International project opportunities may be available for senior practitioners

## WHAT TO EXPECT

### REWARDS AND SATISFACTION

- Creative satisfaction from transforming ideas into built environments
- Variety across project types, scales, and building uses
- Intellectual challenge of solving complex design and technical problems
- Collaboration with diverse professionals and skilled tradespeople
- Potential for international work and travel opportunities

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Project-driven work cycles with intensive design development phases and construction milestones
- Design deadlines and client schedules require periods of concentrated effort
- Generally more predictable hours than contractor roles, though tender preparation and design deadlines create pressure points
- Creative work benefits from flexible thinking time, with increasing hybrid work options for design development

## GETTING STARTED

Architecture requires formal qualifications with professional registration pathways for career progression. Entering the industry requires academic design education combined with practical construction industry knowledge, supported by mentorship within established practices.

### IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- **Gain relevant qualifications** – Master of Architecture (MArch) provides the standard pathway. Bachelor of Architectural Studies (BAS), Bachelor of Building Science (BBSc) or Diploma in Architectural Technology for architectural designer roles or technician specialisation
- **Develop construction industry knowledge** – Gain an understanding of design processes, building systems, construction methods, and materials through site visits, trade experience, or related industry roles
- **Develop digital design and documentation skills** – Proficiency in CAD software (typically Revit or ArchiCAD), Building Information Modelling, and visualisation tools are essential for contemporary practice
- **Build professional networks** – Connect with architecture and design consultancies and professional associations

### HOW TO GET INTO AN ARCHITECTURE ROLE

- Graduate programmes with established architectural practices offering structured mentorship and professional development
- Cadetship opportunities combining workplace learning with the completion of formal qualification
- Cross-over from related disciplines such as engineering, building science, or construction management, with additional architectural study
- International pathways through qualification assessment and potential additional study or examination requirements

### ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- **Design development and creative thinking** – Conceptual design ability and spatial reasoning for creating solutions
- **Technical documentation and BIM proficiency** – Computer skills including 2D drafting, 3D modelling, and Building Information Modelling for construction documentation. BIM skills are essential across all roles, from basic model navigation for designers to advanced coordination and management for senior technicians. Modern practices expect fluency with collaborative BIM workflows and cloud-based project platforms
- **Regulatory knowledge and compliance** – Understanding of building codes, planning legislation, and accessibility requirements for consent approval processes
- **Communication and visual presentation** – The ability to communicate design concepts to technical and non-technical audiences through drawings, models, and verbal presentation
- **Construction technology and materials** – Knowledge of building systems, construction methods, and material properties for design feasibility and detailing
- **Project coordination and stakeholder management** – Skills for managing multi-disciplinary teams and facilitating complex decision-making processes

## CAREER STORIES



**Alex Heperi** – Senior Associate,  
Designgroup Stapleton Elliot

**“When I started, I didn’t realise how much architecture informs communities. I didn’t realise, whether it’s master planning or landscape or interiors or architecture itself, how important it is and how much it really does impact how people live.”**

**Alex Heperi’s architectural journey began in a household where creativity met craftsmanship – her father was a builder who later became an engineer, while her mother restored furniture and joinery. This early exposure led her towards graphics at high school, where she discovered her talents lay in visual communication. Starting at Victoria University of Wellington with interior architecture, Alex’s path took some unexpected turns. By third year, she realised “mainstream architecture would be a bit more me”, shifting towards construction papers and architectural electives.**

Several seemingly unrelated experiences also helped her gain valuable knowledge that fed into her work as an architect. An 18-month missionary stint in Brazil taught her time management and project scoping skills. More importantly, it gave her a strong grounding in working with other people, and important skill for an architect. “Architecture is all about collaboration and communication,” she says. “I probably spend more time talking to people than I do drawing or designing”.

A scholarship to study anthropology and social work in Hawaii further broadened Alex’s understanding of how built environments impact communities. This holistic perspective led to her pursuing qualifications in Māori Visual Arts alongside her full-time role

at DGSE. Alex’s passion for incorporating Māori knowledge into architecture wasn’t part of any predetermined career path, but has evolved as she has progressed in her career.

From detailing support on the Napier Airport project to leading complex government projects for Health New Zealand and the Ministry of Justice, Alex has grown into a senior associate role, specialising in cultural design and Māori architecture. Working within DGSE, she co-founded the Indigenous Design Rōpu, fundamentally changing how the firm engages with tangata whenua and designs culturally responsive architecture.

Her diverse interests haven’t been career detours, but have been essential ingredients in her practice. Alex’s experience shows that architectural careers don’t have to follow a traditional route. Her advice to others emphasises the importance of seizing opportunities: “Don’t limit yourself to what’s already out there... it’s not such a linear path in terms of career progression. People take all sorts of ways to get where they go,

## CAREER STORIES



**Karl Frost** – Senior Architectural Technician,  
Studio Pacific Architecture

**“Being comfortable with computers is a key thing - most younger people now don’t fear them as they’re part and parcel of their lives, but they don’t necessarily enjoy them - we’ve got a number of people that still struggle with some of the basic concepts because it’s something they never really got comfortable with.”**

**Karl Frost’s career journey illustrates how choosing an alternative path in architecture can lead to a fulfilling and valuable professional life. When an uncle who was a draughtsperson first sparked his interest in architecture and drawing, Karl enrolled at Victoria University to study architecture. However, after completing his intermediate year and being accepted into the school, he made a pivotal decision that would define his career.**

Rather than continuing with the full architecture programme, Karl chose the Bachelor of Building Science with Honours, focusing on technical aspects that matched his interests and abilities. As he reflects, “This decision was driven by my recognition that the design component was not something I was going to enjoy or excel at, but I still really wanted to continue being involved with building.”

Karl gained experience at Jasmax, primarily working on Te Papa (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) as an architectural technician supporting the design team, followed by a stint in the site office as the project went into construction. He then spent time as a ‘CAD monkey’ in London before joining Studio Pacific Architecture – a choice he describes as “the most important moment in my career.” What attracted him at the time was the opportunity to work with emerging software that operated in 3D, creating a building model rather than 2D drawings.

Karl describes himself as a “specialised generalist”. “I’ve never focused on specific areas like facades, but I’m very good at looking at the building as a whole,” he explains. His role includes BIM management, model coordination with consultants, template development, and maintaining office standards across projects. This technical focus has proved invaluable as the industry has embraced digital collaboration and BIM processes.

The architectural technician path offers unique advantages that Karl’s career demonstrates, including deep technical knowledge, essential coordination skills, and the satisfaction of seeing buildings come together as complete systems. His attention to detail and computer skills have made him indispensable in an increasingly digital industry, particularly in managing the complex model exchanges between different consultants’ software systems.

“The most valuable skills in my career progression have been computer skills generally, but not just using computers – I also have strong attention to detail,” Karl notes. Importantly, Karl emphasises that being a technician doesn’t mean being excluded from design discussions. His advice to others considering this path is to master the detail but stay aware of the big picture. “Don’t let yourself be pigeonholed into being just the technical person who should stick to technical work. Take a holistic approach – everything is connected.”

## EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

### TYPES OF PRACTICES

#### Large architectural practices and multi-disciplinary consultancies

- Access to major projects with complex technical challenges and potential for international opportunities
- Specialist technical resources and structured professional development programmes
- Defined role specialisation with focused responsibilities and expert mentorship
- Advanced digital technologies and established BIM workflows

#### Small architectural practices

- Broad project exposure across all design phases and building types
- Direct client relationships and involvement in business development activities
- Faster design decision-making and flexible service delivery approaches
- Greater individual responsibility but potentially limited specialist technical support

#### Client organisations

- Specialist sector knowledge within specific building types or organisational requirements
- Ongoing professional relationships with consistent project teams and stakeholder groups
- Understanding of end-user needs and operational building performance requirements
- Potential limitations in project variety and external professional development opportunities

### PROJECT SCALE

#### Large projects

- Complex coordination requirements, specialist technical input, standardised delivery processes, and extended project timelines

#### Small projects

- Broader individual responsibility, direct client contact, faster decision-making, and varied technical challenges requiring creative problem-solving

### REGIONAL VARIATIONS

#### Main centres

- Higher concentration of major practices
- Access to specialist technical resources and advanced digital design technologies
- Professional development through industry events, conferences, and networking opportunities
- Greater earning potential but higher living costs and competitive employment market

#### Regions

- Closer community connections
- Broader project scope, potentially combining architecture with planning and development advisory
- Stronger client relationships within smaller professional networks and repeat project opportunities
- Potentially limited advancement opportunities without relocating to major centres or establishing independent practice

**“Depending on where you want to get to, you need to think about who you want to be employed by. I was employed by smallish firms, so I had the opportunity to go on site and run site meetings as a drafts person because everyone had to help. Whereas if I’d gone to a bigger firm, I could have been drawing up toilets for 20 years!”**

– Julie-Anne Ross, Architectural Designer, design arc Limited



## NEXT STEPS AND RESOURCES

### BUILDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

#### Industry connections

- Participate in New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) and Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ) events for design excellence recognition, professional development, and peer networking
- Attend architecture conferences, design exhibitions, and building industry events for contemporary practice exposure
- Build relationships with engineers, contractors, and specialist consultants across different project types and technical disciplines
- Engage with community design advocacy and urban planning processes for broader professional involvement

#### Upskilling and continuing education

- Building Information Modelling (BIM) training and digital design technology
- Regulatory and building code updates including accessibility, environmental performance, and safety requirements
- Construction technology and material innovation
- Sustainability and environmental design
- Cultural competency and inclusive design principles
- Project management and business development skills

#### Industry resources

- Te Kāhui Whaihangā New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA)  
[nzia.co.nz](http://nzia.co.nz)
- Architectural Designers New Zealand (ADNZ)  
[adnz.org.nz](http://adnz.org.nz)
- Building Institute Aotearoa  
[buildinginstitute.nz](http://buildinginstitute.nz)

### MAKING YOUR DECISION

A career in architecture, whether as an architect, architectural designer or architectural technician, offers creativity, intellectual challenge, and the opportunity to have a lasting positive impact through building design. All three pathways reward problem-solving skills, attention to detail, strong communication abilities, and an ongoing commitment to learning about construction technology and digital design tools.

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*This guide draws from research including in-depth interviews with construction professionals across New Zealand, industry surveys, and analysis of career progression patterns. For the complete research report and additional career pathway information, visit [buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27](http://buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27)*



### IS THIS THE RIGHT CAREER STREAM FOR YOU?

A career in **architecture** is more than just a job. It's a pathway to professional growth, community contribution, and long-term job satisfaction. Whichever career stream you choose, you'll be playing an important role in protecting communities, contributing to high-quality construction, and making a tangible and lasting difference to New Zealand's built environment.



### GET THE GUIDE

**Use the QR code to download the full Built Environment Career Streams guide and explore the many rewarding pathways in the construction sector.**

Or head to the website using this link:  
**[buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27](http://buildinginstitute.nz/resource/file/27)**