



## Section 6



# Designing your home



**Designing your home is about more than how it looks. You need to think about how comfortable it will be, how it will affect your neighbours and its impact on the environment. You also need to consider how your family will live, grow and change over the years.**

If designed and built well, your new home could last for a very long time.

Its design and construction can also impact how much it costs to run your house. This includes the costs of energy and maintenance. Taking the time to get the design right may save you money in the long term.

We recommend you seek professional advice before starting any construction or landscaping. Design and construction professionals such as architects, builders and some trades need to be licensed to work in the ACT. You can search for licensed professionals on the Access Canberra website at [accesscanberra.act.gov.au](http://accesscanberra.act.gov.au) or phone 13 22 81.



Find tips for designing and building your home at [yourhome.gov.au](http://yourhome.gov.au).

## Design ideas for different block types

Different block types may need different designs.

When your land is ready, your builder (or you can hire your own building surveyor) will get a survey to understand the size and slope of your block. This will help determine the best location for the footprint of the house, the size, views, access to sunlight and the best spots for your outdoor areas.

### Orientation and siting

When designing your home, you should consider how your house will relate to your neighbours and the street. Take into account your own privacy, and the privacy of your neighbours.

You should also think about solar access, which is the amount of sunlight your home will get. Your living areas should receive enough sunlight to make them comfortable. You also need to make sure you don't create shadows for your neighbours.

The rules in the Single Dwelling Housing Development Code in the Territory Plan will help guide your home design.

## Building on sloping land

Building on a sloping block is a chance to design a home with great views and a unique, original floor plan. Sloping blocks often need a split-level design to ensure a cost-effective solution that goes with the natural slope of the land.

While some earthworks will be needed, you can reduce the visual, structural and drainage impact by designing the home to work with your block.

There are three types of sloping blocks:

- ▶ Up sloping blocks: these blocks slope up from the street to the rear boundary.
- ▶ Down sloping blocks: these blocks slope down from the street to the rear boundary.
- ▶ Side sloping blocks: these blocks slope from side to side rather than front to rear.

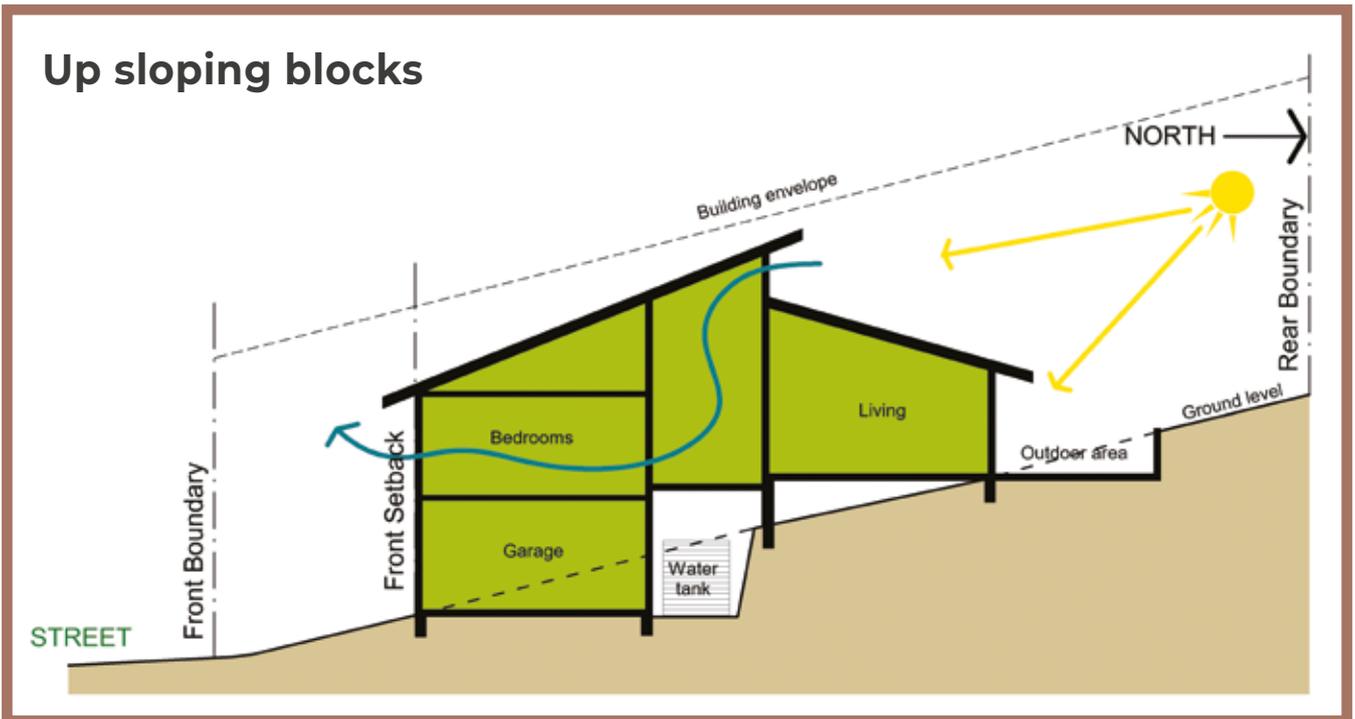
It is important to select a building designer, architect or builder who has worked with sloping land and can work within your budget. Remember; a large amount of earthworks will be expensive and may not be good for the environment.

Building on a sloping block requires important decisions about:

- ▶ building design and extra building works;
- ▶ cut and fill, retaining walls, as well as driveway design and drainage; and
- ▶ construction logistics such as scaffolding and timing.

### Considerations for up sloping blocks

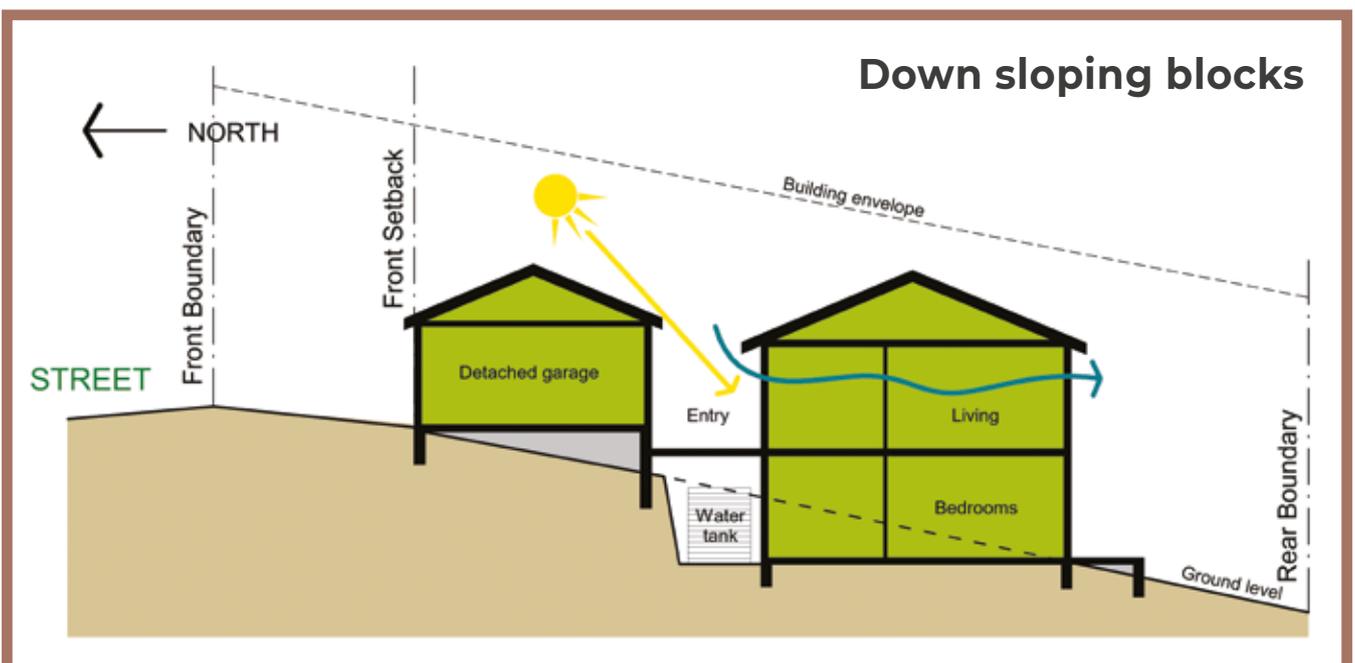
- ▶ Avoid cutting and filling your site from end-to-end to form a large flat platform (a practice known as benching). This will result in a high or multiple retaining walls right at your front boundary.
- ▶ Carport or garage doors and the driveway will visually dominate the front of your home. To reduce the impact, consider a projecting roofline or balcony above the carport or garage.
- ▶ These blocks generally need more cut to ensure the carport or garage is at the correct level. Make sure the carport or garage has appropriate drainage at the rear.



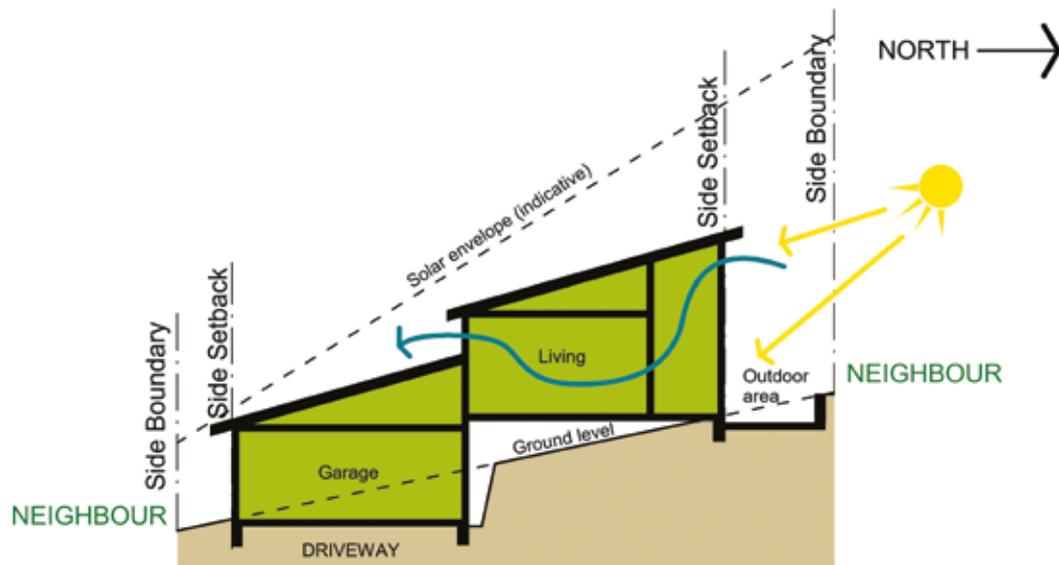
- ▶ Try to include level changes within the building rather than by changing your site.
- ▶ Consider using a suspended platform floor system instead of fill to split the house into different levels. You can use the empty space to install rainwater tanks.
- ▶ Consider using clerestory (highlight) windows to naturally light rooms and improve cross flow ventilation.
- ▶ Aim for a level transition from elevated living areas to the backyard.

### Considerations for down sloping blocks

- ▶ Consider using a suspended platform floor system instead of fill to split the house into different levels. You can use the empty space to install rainwater tanks.
- ▶ Driveway gradients and drainage need careful design.
- ▶ Consider using a detached carport or garage to allow for more sunlight for your house.



## Side sloping blocks



- ▶ Try to include level changes within the building rather than by changing your site.
- ▶ Consider using clerestory (highlight) windows to naturally light rooms and improve cross flow ventilation.
- ▶ Avoid 'going up an extra storey' at the rear. It will significantly increase the building height and impact your privacy (and that of your neighbours)
- ▶ Aim for a level transition off the street into the elevated living areas.

### Side sloping blocks

- ▶ Where possible split the house so the carport or garage is at a lower level. The location of the driveway crossing will be a determining factor.
- ▶ Design the entry for easy access from the street.
- ▶ Consider using clerestory (highlight) windows to naturally light rooms and improve cross flow ventilation.
- ▶ Try to include level changes within the building.

## Building on corner blocks

Corner blocks offer several benefits. Your house will be in a prominent location. You'll have fewer neighbours. Your backyard will also be easier to access.

But there are requirements to be aware of.

When building on a corner block, you need to understand the rules of the Single Dwelling Housing Development Code in the Territory Plan. Look out for the rules about 'secondary street frontage'. You might also want to use a designer, architect and/or builder who has experience with corner blocks. They will be able to help you design your home to make the most of the site. This is especially important if your corner block is also on a slope.

### Building with two street frontages

A corner block has two street frontages. The Suburban Land Agency will build a driveway crossing on one of the streets. This is where you should build your garage or carport, and it's where you should put your letterbox. This street will become your postal address.

If you want to move the driveway crossing, you'll need to get planning approval. You will also have to pay for any costs, such as moving underground electrical services.

Your home will be seen from two different streets, so think about how your home will look from both sides. You should also consider the shape of your roof and whether systems such as solar panels and water tanks can be seen from the street.

In the design stage, you should take into account your views to the outside, how much sunlight your home will get, and where your outdoor areas will be. You may even be able to have two separate outdoor areas as part of your design.

Your front garden will also be larger than most other blocks, so consider its appearance and how much work it will be to maintain.

It may help to have your architect or designer create a 3D image of your future home, like this one below. This can show you what your house will look like once it is built, and provides a clearer picture than a 2D image such as elevations.

### Setbacks and fencing

Corner blocks often have a large amount of land on the secondary street frontage. This is usually the side of your block which is longest, but make sure you check the Block Details Plan for your Suburban Land Agency community.

Setbacks refer to the distance between your home and the boundary. You may be able to build a courtyard wall closer to the street. This is a great chance to build a private open space, particularly if your secondary street frontage faces north and enjoys lovely sunlight.

## Other design features

The design of your home can affect your comfort levels, its energy efficiency, and how easily you'll be able to adapt in the future. As well as size, layout, the number of bedrooms and living areas, you should also think about the following design features.

### The front of your house

When you are designing the front of your house, think about how it will look from the street. After all, this is the first part of your home any visitors see, so it's important to make a good first impression.

You should also think about how visitors (and your family) will be able to get into your house. Make sure there is a clear pathway for people to follow. Consider accessibility when you are designing your home, so visitors with a pram or wheelchair can still get inside your house.

Make sure you include a letterbox that can be accessed by postal services, and that your street number is easy to read.





## Your driveway

Your driveway design can affect how easy it is to use your garage or carport.

The Suburban Land Agency will construct the first part of your driveway, from the street over the verge. You cannot change this part of the driveway. You will need to build the rest of your driveway so it connects to your carport or garage.

The slope of your driveway will depend on the floor level of your carport or garage. On a sloping block, you should aim for a height difference of approximately one metre from the verge crossing to the floor level of the carport or garage.

If you have a steeper slope, you will need a transition zone at the top and bottom so your vehicle can be easily used on the driveway. You will need to get this designed by a qualified builder, architect or engineer who understands the relevant Australian Standards.

If your house is lower than the street, and your driveway slopes downwards, you should include:

- ▶ drainage to ensure your carport or garage does not flood when it is raining; and
- ▶ enough space at the top of your carport or garage door for your vehicle to enter at an angle.

You should also think about:

- ▶ avoiding very smooth surfaces so your driveway is not slippery;
- ▶ choosing lighter coloured materials which will not absorb as much heat during summer;
- ▶ making sure your driveway allows you to move your bins to and from the street for collection;
- ▶ ensuring your driveway location does not stop you from accessing the side of your house; and
- ▶ using alternative materials such as permeable paving.

To find out more about driveway requirements contact Access Canberra at [accesscanberra.act.gov.au](http://accesscanberra.act.gov.au) or phone 13 22 81.



## Drainage

When you are designing and building your home and garden, you need to consider how water flows across the surface of your block. You must have enough drainage to prevent any flooding on rainy days.

You should also make sure you don't force the flow of stormwater onto any neighbouring blocks, laneways or open spaces. This could also cause flooding.

If unsure, seek professional building or landscaping advice.

inclusions such as your laundry and where you will dry your clothes.

Save on energy bills by including a clothesline. Your clothesline should be easily accessible from your laundry, be at the rear or side of your home and be in a spot with plenty of sunlight.

You also need enough space for your bins; your green bin, your recycling bin and your general rubbish bin. Consider how you will get to the bins from inside your home, and how easily you can wheel them to the street for collection.

Storage is another important part of your house. Think about storage in your bedrooms, kitchen, laundry and living areas. You should also think about bike storage. If you keep your bikes in a spot that's easy to access, you're more likely to use them!

## Future proofing your home

A well-designed and well-built home could last for a long time. But a lot can change over the years.

Ask about liveable or adaptable design when you are planning your house. This includes wider corridors and step free pathways to make it easier to manoeuvre prams or wheelchairs. It may also



## Practical inclusions: laundry, bins and bikes

They may not be the most exciting parts of your new home, but you also need to consider practical

include stronger walls in areas like your bathroom, so grab rails can be installed down the track. You should also consider the wiring and cabling in your home and how well it will serve you in years to come.

For example, you may want your future home to be a 'smart house'. This is where you control your lighting and other features through voice activation. As this requires extra wiring, it may be more affordable to do this at the beginning rather than adding it in at a later time.

Including the wiring in your carport or garage for electric vehicle charging will prepare your home for a future where electric vehicles are more common.

If you have solar panels installed, you should also consider setting it up for a battery storage system. A battery allows you to store the energy you generated during the day and then use it at night.



For more details on development applications and building approvals visit [act.gov.au/build-buy-renovate](http://act.gov.au/build-buy-renovate)

## Your home should be designed so it can be adapted for the future.

1

Is your home designed for a young family?

2

Will it grow with you as you get older?

3

And does it cater for those with a disability?



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