

8 Things You Need to Know Before You Build

Background.

Provincial clients Phil and Nicole Janett who have just recently moved into their newly built home in Mt Macedon. Three and a half years ago, with their family and lifestyle quickly outgrowing their small city house, Phil and Nicole decided that it was time for a tree change. They both had firm ideas about what they wanted for their family, including rolling lawns, trees for the kids to climb (complete with cubby house!), a veggie garden, and of course, leisurely weekends together. After deciding on the beautiful Macedon Ranges, Phil and Nicole sold their city property and began their search for either the house of their dreams or the land to build it on.

On Christmas Eve, after many hours of searching, Phil and Nicole finally found the property they were looking for: a clear 5 acre block on the outskirts of Woodend. Knowing their search was over they made a firm offer, which to their delight, was accepted. By February they had moved into a rental property in Woodend from where they oversaw the difficult, time consuming, but ultimately rewarding process of building the home of their dreams. As Provincial had been with Phil and Nicole every step of the way, we thought it was a great opportunity for a Q & A on building your own home. After all, at Provincial, we know that experience counts.

Q & A.

• What unexpected challenges did you experience building your own home?

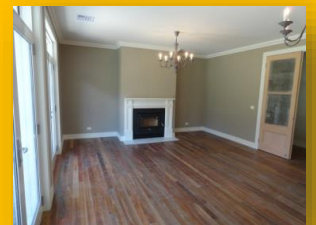
The property we bought came complete with several overlays relating to vegetation protection, wildlife management and fire protection. We found out very quickly that the irrelevant little weed growing in the centre of the property was not quite as irrelevant as we might have thought! However, the wildfire overlay was the most time consuming of the overlays and also the most costly. The required 30 odd page report basically tells you how and where you can build, which then increases the costs and limits your choices.

We wanted to live near our block so we could keep a close eye on the build and be present at the site as often as possible. However, finding a rental property in the area that ticked all the boxes, and would take our dog, was an unexpected difficulty. The only houses that would were very old and very cold, so firewood and electricity became very high costs!

The birth of our second son also made things more difficult, although we were expecting this. Planting the trees along our driveway whilst 8 months pregnant and attending builders meetings while breastfeeding and handling a toilet training toddler, are just a few memories forever etched in our brains.

• Why did you choose to build rather than buy an existing home?

We would have bought land with a house on it if we could have found something that fitted our needs. In the country many of the houses on bigger blocks are small and old and require a lot of work to renovate. We also wanted a house that would accommodate a family of 5 (plus a dog). And not just for when the kids were young, but for when they were teenagers and wanted their own space. Building gave us the blank canvas to do this.



• What were the top three challenges of building your own home?

1. Dealing with council!
2. Getting every detail into the contract. Even after spending about 2 years in the planning process with the builder, we still had a number of items we were surprised with. It takes a lot of effort to do so, but worth it if you can.
3. Managing your relationships with the contractors. Remember you are spending a lot of money and you obviously want to get the best results, but you also have to treat your contractors with respect and work with them through the various issues as they arise. You will be surprised how much they will go out of their way to achieve what you want if they feel you are being reasonable.

• How did Provincial help during the process?

Firstly, the ability for the team to get progress payments pushed along quickly and keep the communication at a high level. Secondly, to really help with simplifying the process and keeping us, and the bank, up to date each time our preapproval was about to lapse (it takes longer to get started than you think).

• What do you love about the home now it is complete?

It is exactly what we had hoped it would be when we were working through the planning process. It will certainly achieve the longevity we hoped for, as the family grows. We love that every time we walk around it that we find another way to enjoy its features and intricacies.

• What is your favourite feature of your new home?

That depends on who you ask, but the kitchen and theatre room are very popular with different individuals. But as a family, the relationship between the kitchen, dining room, living, study and children's' playroom actually works better than we had hoped for. The ability to interact between these many quite large spaces effortlessly, will allow for the family members to be doing their own thing if they want, but also be together at the same time. Something we probably couldn't have achieved if we had bought an established property.

• Did the home take longer to build than first planned?

From an inception point of view, three and half years is about two years longer than expected. But from an actual building perspective it was pretty much right on the eight month contracted build time. The extra two years had a lot to do with the council and changes to bushfire protection laws. Also the process of deciding what we wanted and getting as much of it into the contract as possible was time consuming.

• If you knew what you did now when you started, is there anything you would change?

I honestly don't think we would change much about the home. With this being our second build I will say our experience of working with a medium sized building company in the country was much more pleasant than dealing with one in the city. I would make sure we had a lot more toys, food and electronic devices in the car when on site to keep the kids entertained. It is extremely hard to take in details when you have one child knee deep in mud and the other heading toward the dam at full pelt!

• What top three tips would you give to anyone thinking of building their own home?

1. Speak to a number of builders and make sure you don't get caught up in the hype and marketing. The person you deal with at a display home is very unlikely to have anything else to do with the process once you sign up.
2. Always revisit your plans and schedules as you work through the planning process and try not to mix up what you see in your mind with what's on the plans.
3. Prepare yourself for a longer process than you expect, financially and mentally. If you are going to rent, make sure the house is warm and mould free!

