Recommended 10 stages for a successful pod-building project

BackyardPods

FLATPACK BUILDING KITS

DIY POD APPROVALS

There is no 'one best way' to approach a pod-building project from the start. The best approach for you is likely one of the first four stages. You might do all of the stages, or skip some of the earlier stages - it depends on how far your ideas have progressed before switching to a pod-based building concept, for example. Read through the typical recommended stages, described below, and decide what would work best as the starting point for your situation.

1 - Getting the idea for a pod building project

There are countless reasons why property owners get the idea of using a more cost-effective, pod-type building to create their granny flat, studio with ensuite, home office, gym, yoga room, music room, rumpus, holiday cabin, Airbnb, main house, tiny house, off-grid or community housing, etc, etc. They may know someone who has completed their pod building project or have seen flatpack building kits in a magazine, on the internet, or TV. They might start Googling for building solution providers in their area, looking at designs and prices, and gathering more information. They might get ideas from social platforms like Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram. They may find their way to flatpack steel habitable building kits and learn that being a DIY builder, becoming an owner-builder, or contracting a licensed builder directly and buying their building kit materials separately will save them hugely compared to getting a prefab or traditional turnkey building completed on their property.

2 - Design plans and 3D renders stage

Once you've got the idea for a pod-type building, you'll need to decide on your building size and design. You might stick to what you already know will be doable or get a little brave at this stage, choosing the ideal you would wish to build if it were affordable and permissible on your property for size and purpose. Even if you'd like to get closer to the boundary line than usual for your ideal proportions, it shouldn't restrict you too much in this early stage. For all you know, it mightn't be too much drama to get some of the rules relaxed and make a few modifications to allow for your ideal design, or you might need to stick within the guidelines. You won't know until

you get your preliminary project advice in the next stage if you need further help with the approval process and how much it will cost.

3 - Kit pricing and specification stage

From your design plans and 3D renders, you can self-generate a quote for your flatpack building kit components or ask one of the consultants to help if you're working on an exempt/DIY project. If you're getting help from an architect, ask them to check your list of items and specifications. Make sure that you've included everything for getting to the lock-up stage of construction and noted any additional initial items to purchase locally (eg: decking boards for a deck). When done, you'll know the total outlay required for your new building to be completed to the lock-up stage in material terms, with labour to be added. You can come back and alter your kit order specifications and get any updated pricing if approvals, changes of design, or other factors affect what you'll finally order. Once you've put your deposit on your flatpack building kit. and the steel fabrication on your custom order has commenced, there's no turning back on specifications.

4 - Preliminary project advice stage

A sensible way approach to any pod-building project is getting preliminary project advice (a 'prelim') from an expert in pod-project approvals. Many people get a prelim as the very first step. They want to be sure their project can go ahead approval-wise before getting too carried away by designs or wasting time getting quotes, which makes perfect sense. Other people are more certain they'll be allowed to go ahead with their plans, so they may progress with choosing a design or getting their own drawn up, pricing their building kit components, etc, before looking more closely into the compliance side. Not every project needs approval but even then, getting a prelim can be very useful to ensure your project complies with exemption rules.

5 - Architectural drawings and quoting stage

You will need to get your set of architectural drawings done for submission to any council or private certifier. You will also need your architectural drawings for builders, electricians, plumbers, etc, to quote on your job and understand how the approved building design will translate into the practical building works. Your architectural drawings can be based on an existing flatpack building design; an original design that's been drawn up for you; or one you've drawn yourself. The architect or draftsperson will need to access your registered site plan, and other data via portals and subscribed software, to draw and define the technicalities of your building project for satisfactory submission in the approval process. Please note that architectural drawings are subject to council approval (STCA). In themselves, architectural drawings carry no guarantee of approval, only of fitness for submission. Architectural drawings will be revised if needed (up to 3x) to get through the approval process, where approval depends on architectural drawings modification. Getting preliminary project

advice as the first step on your pod-building journey can save time and money. For most, it's easy to build what they want on their land but some people will need to adjust expectations.

6 - Application/submission/approval stage (if any)

If you've got time to spare, you might want to handle approvals yourself, so you might get your architectural drawings done, gather the rest of your documentation, and take it from there. Otherwise, you might need lots of help or just a little help handling your approvals. If you get preliminary project advice, you can find out what will be required for your building approval process, the options available, and an estimation of costs for documentation, fees, etc, and how long it will likely take to get approval. If your project is exempt, there is no concern with the approval process, you can go ahead and build.

7 - Kit ordering and site preparation stage

When approval is through or your development will be complying, you can proceed with your flatpack steel building kit order, and place the deposit for fabrication to commence, so you can get an ETA on delivery. You can get quotes from builders if you haven't selected a builder earlier (using your architectural drawings for reference). Noting that flatpack building kits are delivered to the kerbside, via the drop of a crane-truck, you'll need to untie and move the materials to the desired area on your property (or coordinate with your builder to get this done for you). While your flatpack kit is being fabricated, if not before, you must clear any trees, shrubs, disused sheds, and other obstructions from your construction zone. Remove any old slab if needed, do any excavation, and construct any retaining walls in preparation.

8 - Building to the lock-up stage

Builders can be drawn from the pods-related network or one of the many home improvement platforms available for quote-gathering. It’s helpful to have a pod-experienced builder but any suitable tradesperson should be able to erect the flatpack building kit according to the engineering documentation, video, and instructions. For approved/certified habitable projects, a licensed builder must be used to ensure proper insurance and warranty coverage for the building works (as with a normal house or home extension), or one of the homeowners will act as the owner-builder for the project. Exempt and approved non-habitable projects can be DIY-built or erected by a carpenter or handyperson with construction experience. You can really start saving $$$ once your flatpack steel habitable building kit is completed to the lock-up stage, meaning with roofing, flooring, windows, and external doors so that your basic building is lockable and weather-tight. Always, getting builders to quote “to lock-up” is the best way to compare ‘apples with apples’ for basic construction works.

9 - Internal fit-out and finishing stage

When it comes to the internal fittings and fit-out, you can take advantage of local specials (eg: floorboards or vinyl flooring on clearance sale, superseded ranges from bathroom and kitchen suppliers, etc), and keep an eye out for offers that include installation. Choose between plasterboard, plywood, and VJ paneling for internal walls, the latter two options being easy to DIY, if you're so inclined. Once you're at lock-up, you can unleash your budget or tighten the strings given all the options, standards, and price points available to you. Look at the finished examples in the Backyard Pods magazine for more inspiration. Compliance still matters for the internal fit-out with the waterproofing of wet areas, licensed trades being used, etc, etc.

10 - Occupancy and continued use

If your project is approved and habitable, you'll be looking forward to receiving your occupancy certificate to allow usage as intended, including renting as a granny flat if that's what your project means to you. And while all of the building materials are covered by various manufacturer's warranties, given the performance history of steel buildings upon the Australian landscape, you might easily expect your habitable steel building to last longer than your lifetime, eg: 100 years.

www.backyardpods.au

www.flatpackbuildingkits.au

www.diypodapprovals.au