

A brief guide to building your dream house in Barbados

by



Now that you've purchased a plot of land in Barbados and you want to build the house of your dreams on it, you should be aware of the process entailed.

Here's a succinct guide to advise you on the necessary steps you need to take in order to achieve your in the most efficient way.

✓ Starting out on the right foot: the land survey.

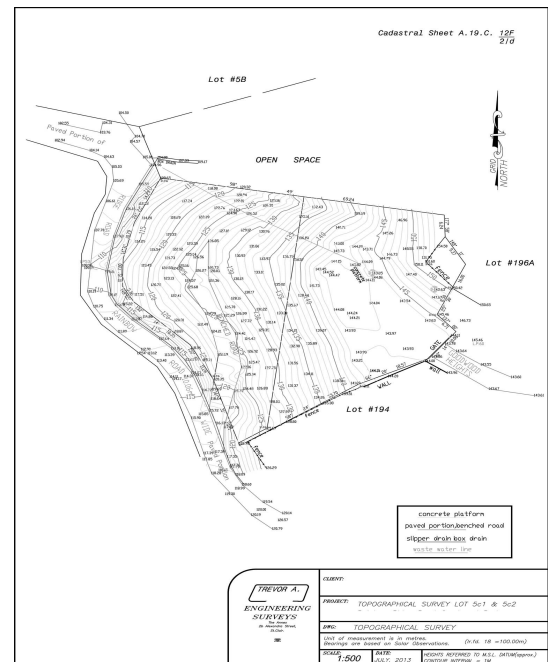
This is the first step in the process.

When you purchase the land, a survey is an integral part of the documentation; usually it's a print of the cadastral document, often quite dated and lacking proper topographical indicators.

All large trees should be surveyed since you would need permission to cut them .

Nowadays, all professionals working in construction use digital files. Therefore, getting an updated digital land survey that includes the lot topography is important to speed up the whole process from the start.

In any case, a certified survey is needed to complete the planning permission application; a proper, updated digital one won't cost you much more and will start you off on the right foot.



In addition, in cases where the development involves beachfront land, a current surveyor's plot is required from the Town and Country Development Planning Office (TCDPO). To be considered, the survey must be dated no earlier than two (2) years prior to the submission of the development. This is because it's key to establish the High Water Mark, an ideal line that changes over time.

✓ Feasibility: total height, setbacks and building area.

In Barbados, residences are allowed a maximum of two (2) stories.

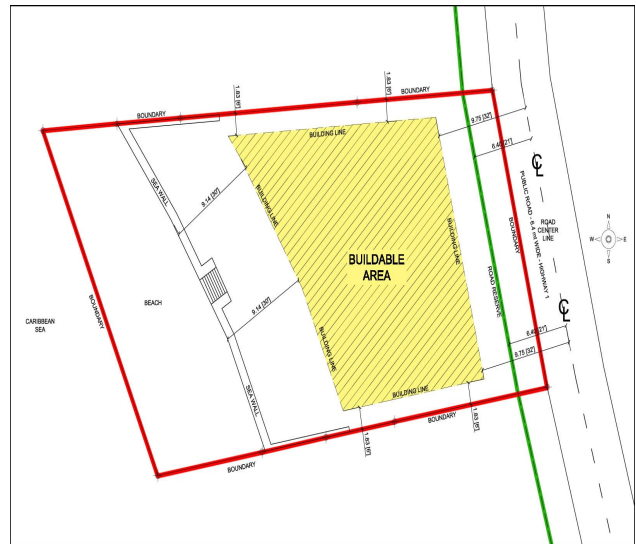
To give you a reference point, we would say that the total height of the dwelling, from the ground to the peak of the highest roof, should be around 28ft (8.5m).

However this may vary depending on the location, topography of the land and the setback from side and rear boundaries among other things.

A development for housing purposes should be sited no closer than 6ft (1.83m) from any side or rear boundary and at least 12ft (3.65m) from any other house on the same land.

The front (roadside) setback varies depending on the class of the road.

On beach front sites, no structure should be sited closer than 100ft (30.00m) from the High Water Mark.



All the above setbacks define the Building Line, the area where you can actually build.

Please be aware there's a Plot Coverage limit to account for: for residential purposes, you can only build on up to 40% of this area.

There are also some Restrictive Policies for specific areas of the island:

- Water Zone Protection Policy
- Harrison's Cave Zone of Special Environmental Control
- Airport Restriction Zone
- Integrated Rural Development Project.

Your real estate agent and/or your Architect will advise you if your land is inside one of them.

✓ The design process: the Architect.

The next step is to choose the Architect to design your house.



Most architects work for a percentage or lump sum fees.
For the entire design process, percentage fees are usually between 7-8% of the building cost.
You can choose the fee structure most convenient for you.

Design process and fees are typically broke down into phases or stages:

1. Concept Design
2. Design Development
3. TCDPO Application
4. Construction Documentation
5. Tender Stage
6. Site Services

It's very important to take your time and go through the drawings thoroughly, especially during Concept Design when your dream house is taking shape.
Changes, adjustments and fine tuning will be done in the Design Development phase for your final approval.

Ideally the design should be “frozen” when the planning application is placed.
After this stage, only minor changes (such as to internal walls) are allowed from TCDPO; any changes to external walls, floor area or location on the lot would require an addendum to your application.
This will surely slow down the TCDPO decision process.
Please also keep in mind that changes after the DD stage usually have a negative impact on the project time frame and, most importantly, on your budget.

While TCDPO process your application, your Architect will proceed with the Construction Documentation phase, coordinating with all the other consultants such as MEP and Structural Engineer, Interior Designer, Quantity Surveyor and Project Manager.

When a full set of drawings and documentation is issued for your approval, you'll be ready to start the Tender Stage: the Quantity Surveyor will coordinate with the Architect and prepare the Tender Documents to enable you to obtain competitive tenders or otherwise award a contract for carrying out the Works.

After planning permission has been granted, you'll be ready to start construction. Site Services will be provided to monitor the quality control of the Works being undertaken by the selected contractor under the technical oversight of the Architect.

✓ **Town & Country Development Planning Office (TCDPO)**

Section 21 of the Town and Country Planning Act stipulates that the Chief Town Planner should endeavor to give a decision within two (2) months of the date of the application.

If a decision is not made within this time, the applicant may request the Chief Town Planner to refer the application to the Minister responsible for Town Planning matters who will make the decision.

Unfortunately two months is usually an unrealistic time frame for your application to be processed. It usually takes around six (6) months (or more) for the permission to be granted.

For beach front sites, the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CMZU) will be involved in the application process for its technical recommendations and wait times will definitely get longer.

Please also note that the approval of submissions by regulatory agencies cannot be guaranteed by the consultant (architect or other).



✓ Construction: the Main Contractor

After the Tender and Bid phase, you'll be able to select your Main Contractor to carry on the Works.

The selection of the right contractor is critical to the success of the construction of your dream home: you do not want it to grow into a nightmare.

You need to carry out checks on the proposed contractor to ensure that they have the right experience and proven track record successfully building projects of a similar size and nature.

Unfortunately there are a lot of contractors who say they can build but cannot do so to the required quality and standard.



The first step would be to seek advice from the Real Estate agency and Architect, as these professionals will have had dealings and previous experience that would help the client make a decision. It is important to note that it is not always the best option to go with the builder that has the lowest bid price; nowadays, track record and experience is far more important.

Choosing one Main Contractor is the best way to proceed, especially if you're not based in Barbados or are not very familiar with the construction process; it's the most hassle free choice.

The Main Contractor will manage all the sub-contractors and suppliers and you'll have only one reference person to deal with and to be held responsible for how the Works are proceeding.

If, instead, you're familiar with the construction process, you may choose to handle and manage the various sub-contractors by yourself or using your own Project Manager, which is fine if you have the local contacts. However if you don't have local contacts, it is challenging to bring in staff and get work permits.

Builders can provide a cost per square foot or a full list quote based on the Tender Documentation.

The cost per square foot usually comes with a list of materials and finishes and provisional sums for some items (the kitchen for instance); cost per square foot is often associated with a turnkey service, providing a full construction service including the house, the driveway, the pool, the landscape, etc... Depending on the time frame for the project, if the contractor is brought in at an early stage, they can offer options in value engineering that can deliver real savings in time and money.

Once the contract price is fixed, the next important aspect to tie down is the construction period.

A typical high end residence can be completed in a 12 month period, but this will depend on a number of factors, not least of which is when the client needs access to their home, the project size and any particular challenges associated with the site.

The terms of payment are also important. Cash flow is a contractor's life blood so it is up to the client to determine whether the payment will be made on a regular monthly cycle or at certain stages when

specific criteria are met. Either way, these terms need to be agreed on early to avoid any confusion and conflict and to make the whole process run as quickly and smoothly as possible.

It is worth checking with the contractors to find out what procedures they have in place in order to procure the quality of materials and equipment to ensure the correct final build quality.

Does the company have an in-house QA / QC system that ensures compliance?

Which suppliers do they typically use on similar types of projects?

Ask these sorts of questions early and you'll quickly be able to judge the quality of your Main Contractor.

Another important consideration is whether the project will be duty free or duty paid.

Certain projects are able to get the benefit of being duty free and get the necessary concessions from the Government.

The cost savings brought in by this, should not be overlooked as most finishing materials are manufactured overseas and so attract duties when brought into Barbados.

✓ **Enjoy your new home in Barbados!**

We really hope this Guide has given you a good overall understanding of the full process to build your villa in Barbados and, perhaps, a few good tips.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any queries you may have.

See you soon in Barbados!!!