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Special Report 1

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"The 10 secrets the ancient Greeks and Romans can teach you about building your dream home"

In so many ways the Ancients have shown us the way in life and this is also the case in Architecture and house design. My annual visit to Cyprus never fails to inspire with visits to ancient sites/archaeological digs (by invitation as the sites are on my doorstep or I have relatives at the dig) and my own personal exploration and investigation. This year my particular interest is the individual house and home. The many Ancient Greek and Roman examples I saw have led me to draw up a top ten tips essential things to consider to make your dream home project or build run as smoothly as possible. Vitruvius wrote the Ten books of Architecture so here are my top ten essential tips for your dream home.

Dream Home



Dream House Design Essex.

1. Think of the design process as more important than the build process. Design from the inside out and remember the dictum Form follows Function and not the other way round. I have seen several poor examples this year where the design started outside and based on a single elevation and not much else. Bedrooms are inadequate for double beds badly planned toilets doors conflicting with the pan. All because the appearance was regarded as more important than the design plan and layout. The Ancients had rule books or pattern books (like the 10 books of architecture) to help in the design.

2. Design, Design, Design. Limiting the materials employed in the build is a key to the Roman house plastered masonry walls - roof with clay tiles and that's it. Today we have several materials and finishes to choose from however this needs careful consideration limiting to three or four materials paying attention to how each material meets the other.



Spaces articulated around atrium. Roman Villa.

3. Review the budget all the time. Maintain the contract sum after extras and any variations. Ask for lump sum prices when making changes. Obtain at least three quotes. Five is preferable.



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Cyprus

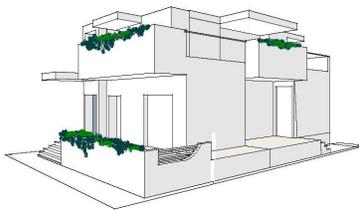
Mosaic KTICIC holding the foot measure of the Romans. Roman Villa

Remember to keep a level playing field i.e. all contractors to have the same information when tendering. A firm price offer is fixed and is contractual whereas an estimate will change probably increasing. As can be seen the ancients accounted for everything measuring, writing and recording



Symmetrical Elevation House North London .

4. A good tip is to install high spec fittings i.e. names like Roca or Jasper Morrison in kitchen and bathroom fittings. This can add a touch of glamour or luxury to your bathroom/kitchen. Remember to allow for this though in the original budget. The Romans themselves had highly decorated rooms to entertain their guests throwing lavish parties and flaunting their wealth or disposable income in the current age. Think about the floor finish using it to unite or to differentiate the spaces.



Massing and Volume House in Cyprus.

5. Sustainability and Energy efficiency should be paramount whether obtaining power from renewable or reducing demand from low energy lighting and efficient appliances. A figure 16% to 25% saving on your electricity bill can be achieved. The government have introduced Feed In Tariffs to encourage renewable energy. Here the grid pays to use your power. Orientation is also a means to provide passive energy efficiency using the sun and natural landscape. Calculations can be employed to prove energy efficiency savings. The Romans had slave power of course. Hypocaust or under floor heating was used extensively by the Romans. Today under floor heating can help achieve a high level grade in sustainable housing codes. Masonry walls reticular walls all add to the mass and in turn baked in the Mediterranean sunshine and stored heat to be distributed later in the home. (As an aside : Ancient Greek temples the roofs were filled with earth to form the pitch as timber roof design/roof trusses had not been invented. The clay tile was laid directly on the earth!)

6. Collaboration with the building team at all times will ensure the results are as anticipated. Believe me the relationship with your builder is very important. Having one point of reference with regard to comments and queries is paramount rather than chasing sub contractors and suppliers. The relationship with local



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authorities and planning departments needs to nurtured over time. Again there are rules that a successful application will follow.

7. Allow plenty of time for the project lead in times and supply of bespoke fixtures and fittings should be programmed in. The design process should be programmed in the project timetable. The Roman construction program or timetable sometimes ran into years. Including all inception design.

8. Do not forget about creating a smart home - lighting automation energy conservation and Home Cinema. The Ancient House at Eustolis in Cyprus had its own amphitheatre probably the earliest example of a House with its Home Cinema in Europe.

9. If the project is part refurbishment is there opportunity to recycle or reuse components or materials. The Romans reused materials at every opportunity. Large monuments from one conquered country would end up in a rural retreat or villa in Rome. The carbon footprint would be minimized by sourcing materials from local structures or buildings.

10. A minor issue but the grounds/landscaping/planting is never designed with the build rather as an after thought. The left over site is usually just planted with obligatory fig tree, olive tree and lemon tree. Although these are beautiful in themselves giving their fruit for consumption and culinary purpose. The garden or *hortus* were a key part of a Roman Villa often combining the design from one to the other.



Garden / Landscaping.