



SPECIFICATIONS WITH CARE

Architects of the grey-haired type will recall when specifications were hand - written epistles describing in detail how the building was to be built, including often elaborate and detailed descriptions of how to put together all the internal cabinetry and fittings down to the dove-tails. This was then typed out on sheets of specification paper, carbon paper between for the six copies maximum. The finished copies were stapled into manila covers with the NZIA crest printed on the cover, which you bought to raise funds for the Institute. The specification accompanied the one or two sheets of imperial drawings of 1/8th or 1/4 inch to the foot drawings for, say, a house. One copy of the set for the Architect to retain on behalf of the client, the other five for tenders!

The specifications usually included a clause that went something like: “The Builder is to construct and complete the works in accordance with the plans and specifications, and to provide everything necessary to ensure a watertight building, and one that is fit for its purpose in every detail.”

As time progressed, working drawings have become more detailed, more complex, covering most or all details to ensure the architects design intent, and the requirements of the NZBC are fully described. This has led to less reliance on the builder and more on the Architect – and with ensuing litigation.

Eventually some considered that so much information was being generated on the drawings, that the specification need only cover General and Specific Contract matters, Performance Standards and Scope of Work prescriptions. Standard or “Master Specifications” grew from this, with the more universal use of the computer in the Architects Studio led to specification writing being flicked out of the printer. Herein is the Danger Trap!

Some Do's and Don't's:

- Don't assume your computer master specification covers everything for your project - it won't!
- Carefully review Special Contract requirements against each project if using a master spec system eg. Masterspec. Make sure irrelevant clauses are removed, conflicting references resolved and matters requiring amplification are included within the final specification copy

- Where the system flags the need for customising the clause to the project at least give the matter a considered thought.
- Decide what notes to include on the drawings, and what in specifications. Be careful of contradictions and ambiguities one to the other.
- Consider how variations in material finishes or components are to be handled post-tender and for Building Consent variations.
- Cull out extraneous material and references for each project.
- Carefully prepare performance specifications for Specialist Equipment, Materials and /or Installations.
- Take care in specifying Standard Proprietary Products.
- For preference, a “Scope of Work” should be written for each project, and each individual section. This provides the opportunity to outline the scope of the project in general terms, covering what the project comprises, and again, in the trade sections, it outlines the materials and extent of work expected to be performed by that trade. Care is required to avoid conflict or exclusion with related documents. In the absence of a Scope of Works description, the drawings need to be extensive and unambiguous if uncertainty is to be avoided.
- Preparation of a specification can serve as a useful check over the other documentation, just as the old way of writing specifications describing everything was a very good checking system on the drawings.
- Make your specification is “user friendly.”
- The specification should make clear the role of the Architect during the construction phase: is the commission for only obtaining a Building Consent, or you are undertaking construction observation and/or contract administration. Your specifications should clearly make “The Contractor responsible for” etc. Watch out for references back the “Architect.”
- Avoid describing the details you are not qualified for or will not be in a position to monitor.
- Do not rely on the “Standard Specification” being all things to all people!
- Check out Consultant’s Specifications, particularly matters in Preliminary and General clauses. Check also the appropriateness of Consultants Specification in relation to the size and scope of the project

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