HOME LIFTS

Home Lift Now or Later? What Retrofitting Can Add to the Cost

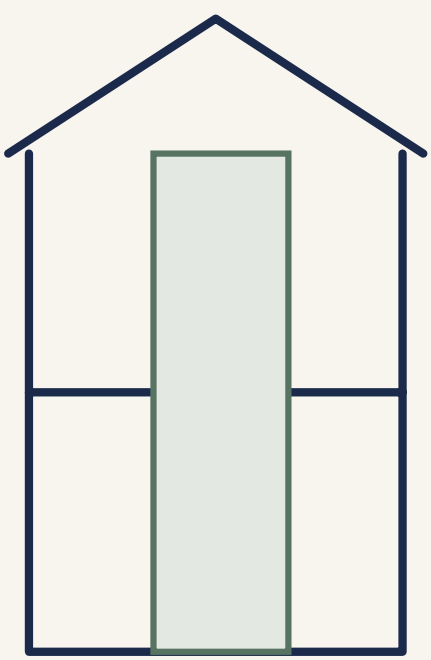
By DirectHome Editorial Updated 16 September 2026 9 min read Explore our home lifts service ↗

If a home lift is part of your long-term plans, decide what to prepare while the house is already being built or renovated. Installing now, reserving suitable space and retrofitting later involve different costs and disruption. An empty corner alone is not enough preparation: the future lift also needs suitable structural support, access and services.

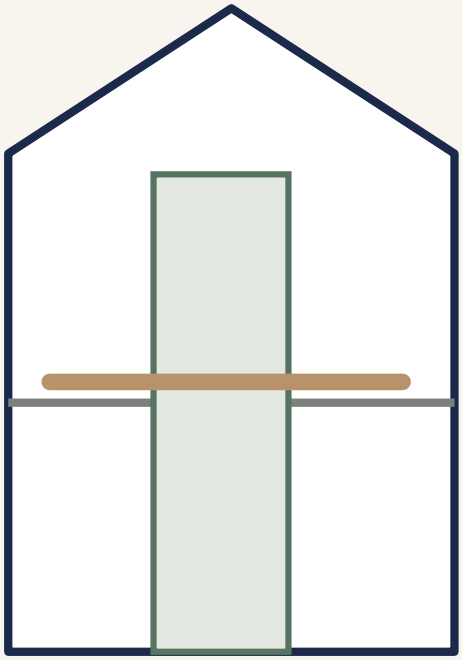
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Building around a lift or adding it later



Planned into build

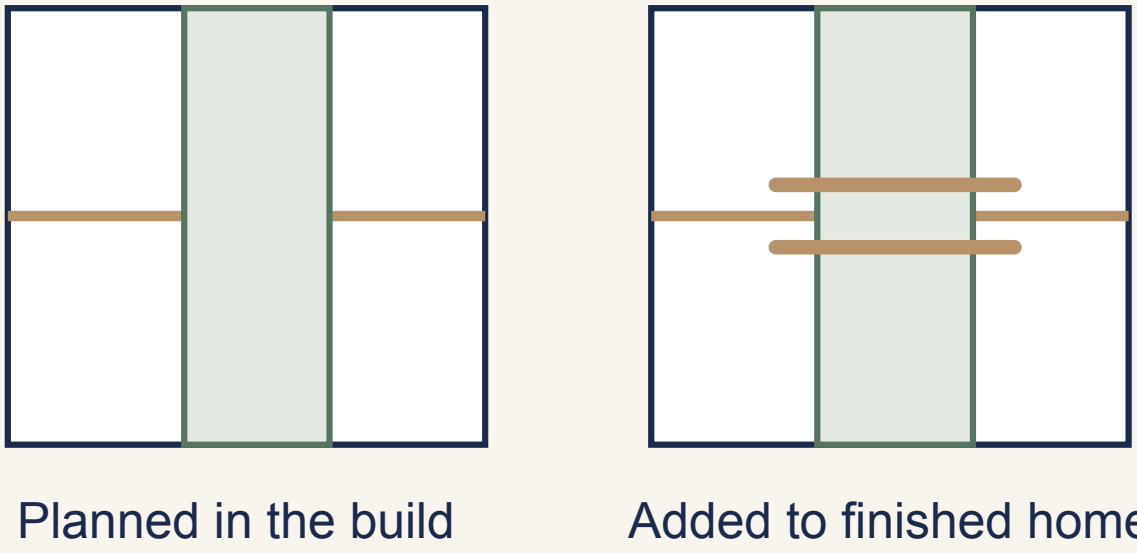


Added to a home

Not to scale

A new build can coordinate the lift space with construction; a retrofit introduces it into an existing house. The actual interventions determine the difference.

The Decision This Article Is Actually About



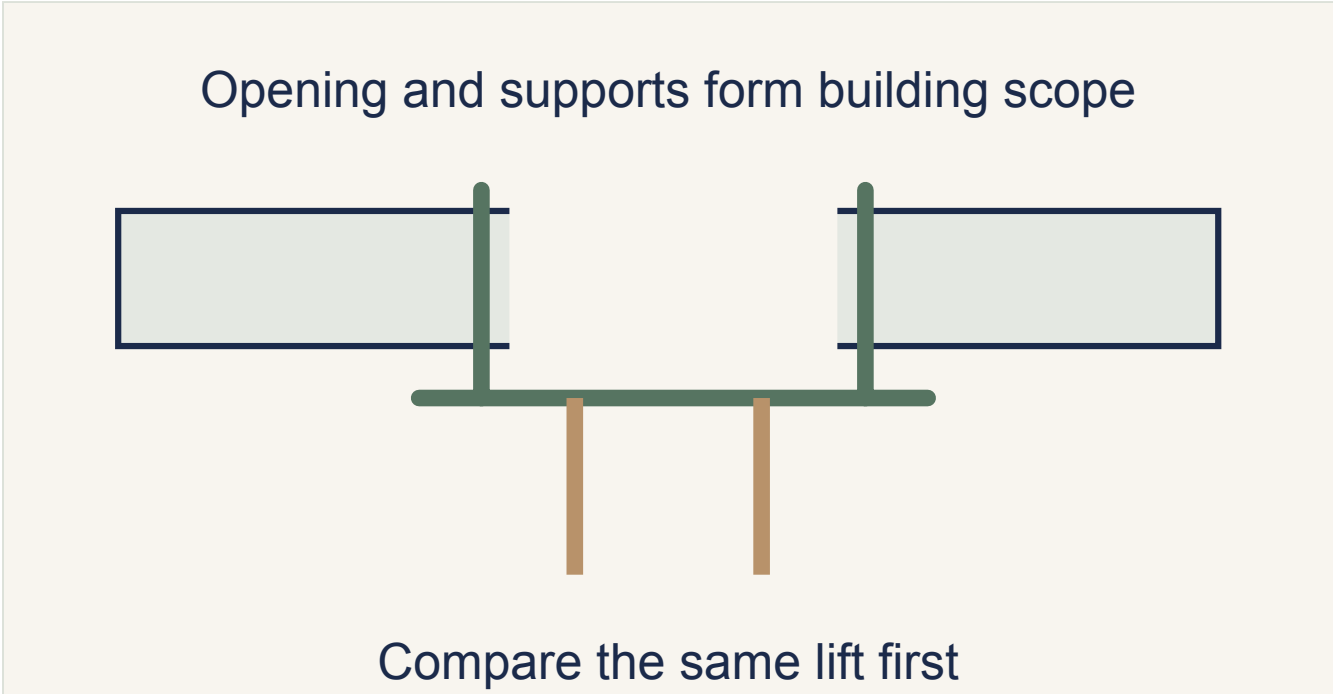
A new build can coordinate the lift within its original structure; a retrofit must address existing floors and finishes.

Planning a home lift during a new build lets the lift and building design develop together. Retrofitting later means fitting the equipment into a completed house, where access, structural alterations and reinstatement can add work. The useful comparison is the complete building-and-lift scope for each route, including what a future provision would actually leave ready.

The equipment quotation is only part of the comparison. Floor openings, structural supports, the shaft or enclosure, electrical provision and reinstatement also need to be accounted for. Ask which of these are included in a new-build contract and what would need to be reopened or added during a later retrofit.

The useful decision is what to build now, what to reserve and what a future installation would still require. A reserved space is valuable only if it matches a plausible lift layout and remains usable. Compare those alternatives with your architect or builder before calling an empty corner 'lift-ready'.

Where The Cost Actually Diverges



The building opening and its supports are a separate scope from the selected lift equipment.

Start by matching the lift specifications: number of stops, capacity, cabin, doors, drive system and finishes. A quotation for a different model or specification cannot isolate the cost of new-build versus retrofit work. Ask for the equipment price, installation, taxes and exclusions to be shown clearly before comparing the building works.

Singapore installers advertise a home lift, supplied and installed, from about S$30,000 to S$80,000 on their own websites (checked October 2026). These are advertised starting prices, not quotes for your house. Use that range to check what each quote charges for the lift itself, not the quote's total, and ask whether that price already covers the shaft and the building work around it.

During a new build, the designer can incorporate floor openings, supports, enclosure and any pit into the building scheme. That can avoid cutting the completed structure later. The work still has a cost, however, and belongs in the main building contract or an identified separate scope; it is not free because concrete is already being poured elsewhere.

In a retrofit, building preparation becomes a separate part of the project. Depending on the house and lift, it may include floor openings, supports, a shaft or enclosure, and work around the lowest landing. Have the structural requirements assessed before accepting an equipment-only price as the project budget.

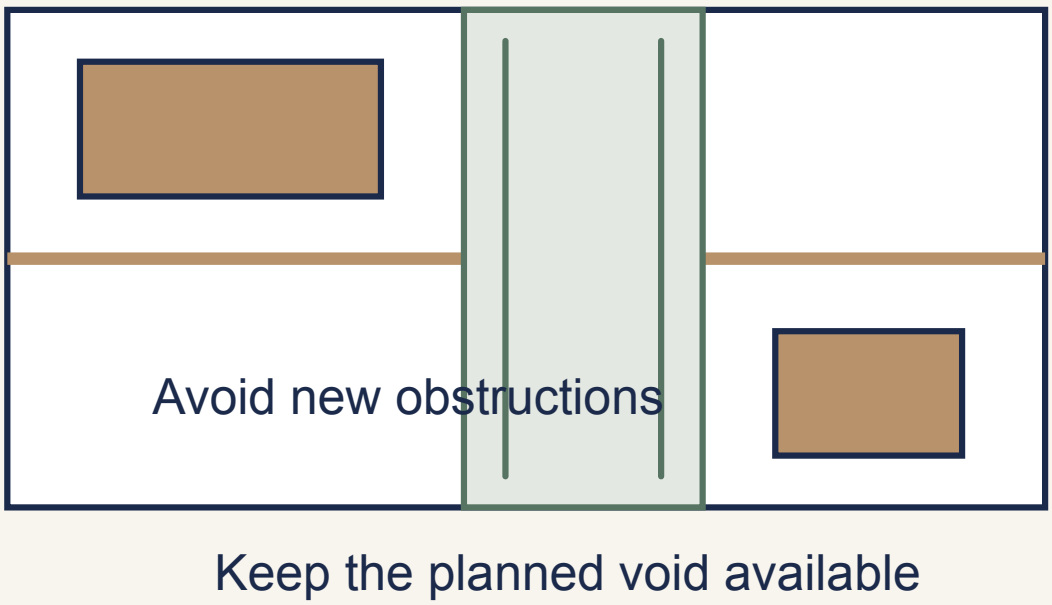
> Compare the equipment price with the building work and other items in the installation budget. home lift installation costs →

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What 'Future-Proofing' A Void Really Buys You



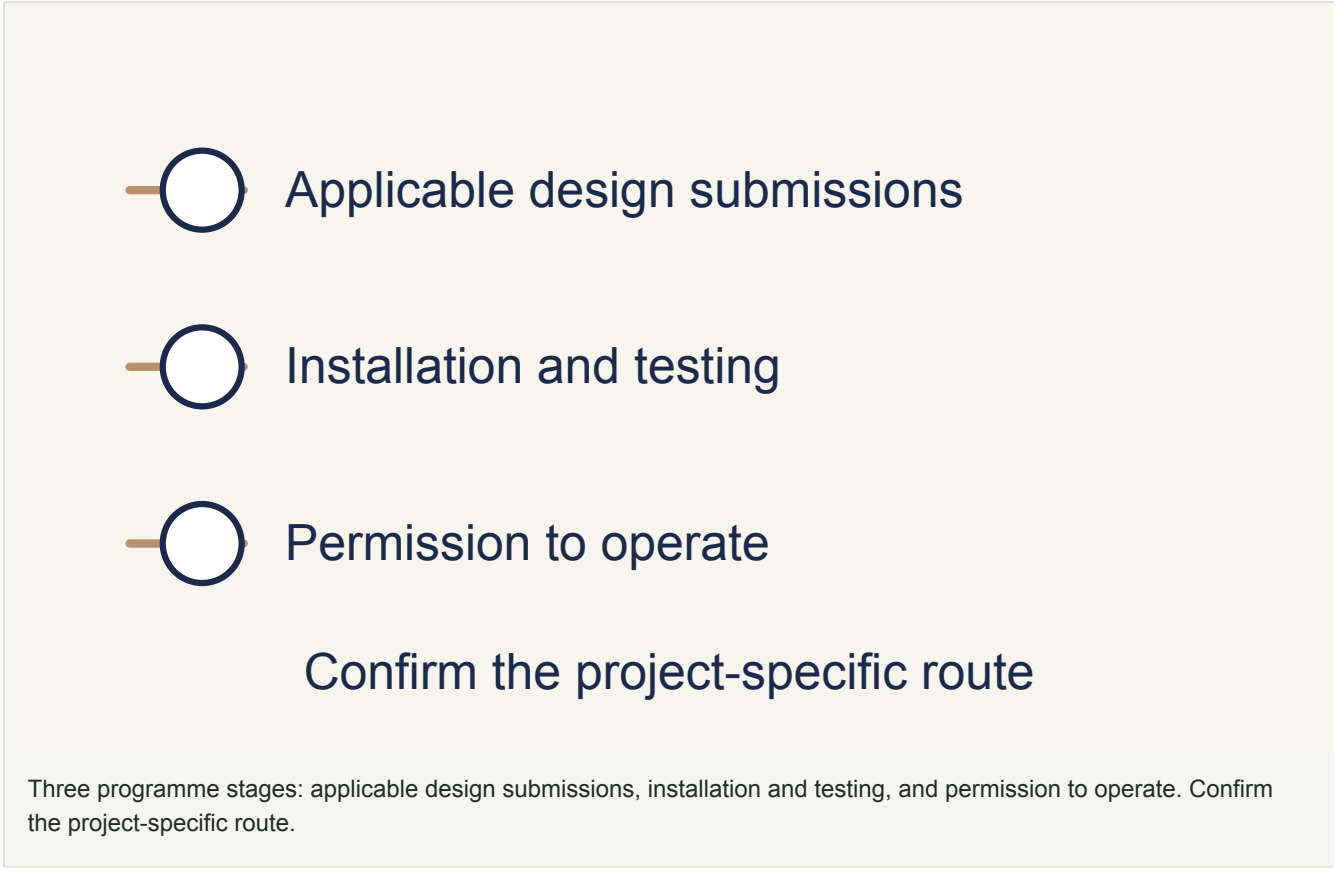
A future lift provision is useful only if the intended space remains available and is documented.

A future lift provision reserves a compatible route through the floors and plans how later openings, supports and landings would be formed. It needs a realistic equipment envelope, including doors, headroom and any pit or ramp. A vertically aligned space alone does not establish that a cabin can simply be dropped into it later.

Protect that provision in the drawings and handover records. A later wardrobe, duct or bathroom could otherwise occupy the space or block the approach. If floors temporarily cover the future opening, their eventual removal needs to be designed rather than assumed to be a straightforward cut through a slab.

The later project still needs suitable equipment, a review of the retained provision, any required submissions, installation and finishing. Models and requirements can change while the space remains unused. Future provision can reduce particular building works, but should not be sold as eliminating every retrofit cost.

Permits and Timeline: Coordinate the Actual Work



Three programme stages: applicable design submissions, installation and testing, and permission to operate. Confirm the project-specific route.

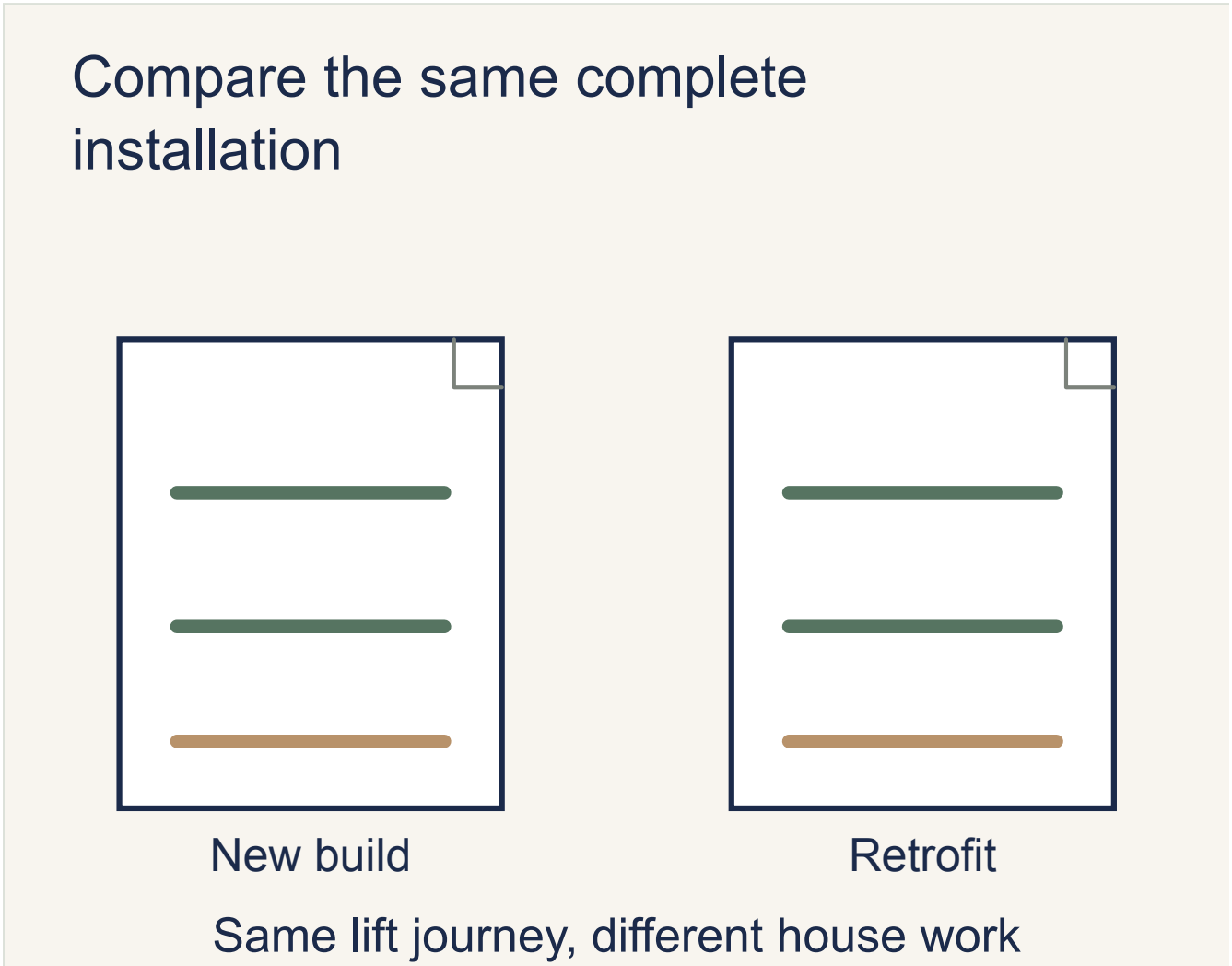
Both routes need the project team to identify the applicable building and lift approvals. Confirm who prepares the drawings, coordinates the lift supplier and handles submission queries. Keep professional fees, application charges and any subsequent design changes clear in the quotation, with the approval stages shown in the programme.

In a new build, lift and building design can be coordinated within the main programme. A retrofit needs the same agreement between the selected equipment and the existing structure, potentially with additional investigation where drawings are incomplete. Do not apply a fixed BCA processing or rework period to either route; obtain a programme for the actual submissions and preparation.

After installation, regulated lifts require a valid Permit to Operate before use and annual inspection and testing under BCA's current framework. The inspection is a process; the PTO is the permit. Confirm who coordinates testing, documentation and the PTO application, and which fees and services the quotation includes.

The government's own fee for a Permit to Operate application is S$20 per lift under the Building Control (Fixed Installations) Regulations 2025, in force since 1 October 2025, and each permit lasts 12 months.

A Like-For-Like Way To Compare The Two Quotes



Match the same lift journey and identify which house work is already included in each contract. Different building scopes should remain visible beside the equipment.

Compare the complete scope for each route: equipment, enclosure, structural work, electrical provision, professional submissions, testing and reinstatement. Identify what is included in the main build and what would be paid later. Ask for the final tax-inclusive total where tax applies so an equipment-only figure does not masquerade as the project cost.

For a new build, check which lift-related works are already in the main building contract. For a retrofit, ask for protection of occupied rooms, structural preparation, electrical work and reinstatement to be priced explicitly. Neither route makes these tasks disappear; the difference is how they are coordinated

and which contractor is responsible for them.

If one proposal is higher, identify the work that explains the difference. Protection of occupied rooms, difficult delivery access or replacement finishes can matter as much as the lift itself. A difference in equipment specification or excluded work should be resolved before treating the two totals as a measure of the retrofit premium.

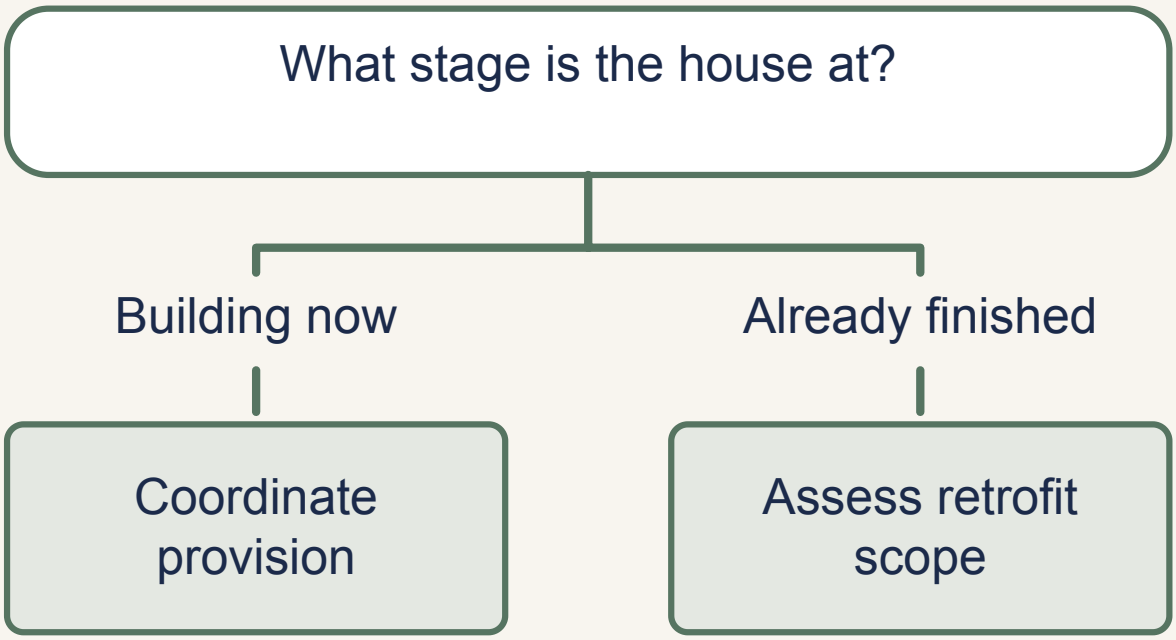
Compare quotes for the same lift, cabin, capacity, doors and finishes. Keep the price date and tax basis consistent, and separate financing and ongoing care from the installation cost.

Scope	Install during a new build	Retrofit later
Same equipment and installation package	Price the selected lift and installation.	Price the same lift and installation.
Opening, enclosure and structural supports	Identify work included in your main build.	Price the work needed in your existing house.
Protection and access arrangements for occupied rooms	Check access and protection in your building scope.	Price protection and access for your occupied rooms.
Electrical provision	Check what your main contract includes.	Price the electrical work your lift needs.
Lift-related finishes / reinstatement	Identify lift-related finishes in your main build.	Price the finishes that need restoring.
Professional work, testing and private application support	Confirm the included work and fees.	Confirm the same scope and any exclusions.

If your retrofit quote is higher, check how much of the difference comes from opening and support work, protecting rooms and restoring finishes. If the survey removes a task, remove its quoted cost from the comparison too.

Add any applicable official fees and tax on the same basis. If you pay for future lift provision now, include that cost with the later installation, without counting preparation already paid through your main contract twice. Keep future price changes and the maintenance costs of having a working lift sooner separate from that comparison.

How To Make The Call Without Over-Engineering It



The project stage determines whether to coordinate future provision or assess alterations to an occupied house.

If future lift use is realistic during a rebuild, compare installing now with a properly designed future provision. The first gives the household a working lift and immediate maintenance obligations; the second retains flexibility but leaves an eventual installation project. Decide with the likely access need and use of floor space in view.

For an already finished home, a retrofit can be assessed without assuming that every wall or slab will need major alteration. Start with the actual route and lift model, then have the necessary supports, openings and services identified. That produces a meaningful building scope to price alongside the equipment.

Bring the plans, existing lift provision and proposed quotations to a home lift discussion with DirectHome. The next step is to establish what each proposal includes and which parts require design assessment. Photographs and an equipment brochure alone cannot establish the structural work or final cost.

Frequently asked questions

Decision	Key distinction
Install now	Coordinate the lift with the main build

Decision	Key distinction
Prepare now, install later	Count provision now and remaining work later
Retrofit a finished home	Price openings, protection and reinstatement

Is it cheaper to install a home lift during construction than to retrofit one later?

It can be, because a new build lets you plan the lift's opening, supports and wiring with the structure instead of cutting into a finished house later. That planned work still costs money, so price both routes for the same lift and all the building work each one needs, including protecting your rooms and redoing finishes in a retrofit. If you pay now to leave room for a lift, add that to the cost of putting the lift in later.

What is a lift-ready void and is it worth paying for during a new build?

It is a documented provision for a plausible future lift route, including space, doors, supports and how any later openings would be formed. It can avoid some future alterations, but its value depends on the actual design and keeping the space available. Equipment, approvals, installation and finishing remain to be considered later.

Do new-build and retrofit home lifts need the same BCA approvals in Singapore?

A new build and a retrofit need their own project-specific submission plan. Confirm the applicable building and fixed-installation work with the responsible professionals. Before a regulated lift is used, it needs a valid PTO; annual inspection and testing are separate ongoing duties. Ask for each professional, contractor, test and permit item to be identified in the quotation.

How do I tell if a home lift quote is all-in or hiding the structural cost?

Request equipment, building preparation, electrical provision, professional submissions, testing and reinstatement as clear inclusions or exclusions. For a new build, identify which items are in the main contract already. Compare equivalent equipment and tax-inclusive totals where applicable; there is no universal structural allowance that proves a quote is complete.

We are doing a full rebuild but might not afford the lift now. What should we do?

Ask the architect to compare a documented future provision with installing the lift now. Reserve the approach routes and clearances as well as floor space, and identify what a later installation would still need. The decision should reflect the household's likely access needs and the cost of keeping that space available.

More on home lifts

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