



GRANT SMITH

EXTENSIONS

HOW TO ADD VALUE

Plan a successful scheme that makes the most of your time, effort and money, says [Rebecca Foster](#)

If you're keen to add value to your home, boosting its size by adding an extension is one of the best ways to go about achieving your goal. Whether you're eyeing up a contemporary kitchen-diner or a spacious master suite in the loft, there are several vital factors to think about if you want to create an inviting and practical space that integrates with the existing house. Many of your key decisions will be made during the design and planning phase of the project, before construction begins.

For a house extension to make financial sense, as a rule of thumb, the value it adds to the property should be greater than the total cost of the project. "Consider the ceiling price of houses in your area and how long you think you'll live there," says Ben Embrey, a senior associate at Base Architecture. "There's no point spending a significant amount of money on an addition that wouldn't be recouped if you sell in the future." If the property you're enlarging is your forever home, your priorities in terms of the overall build cost might be different. In this scenario, getting value-for-money may be more important to you than end value.

Where to start

One common pitfall is to focus too heavily on the extra space an extension will add to your home – bigger isn't necessarily better. Designing an addition that improves the functionality of the property and how you use it should be

the top priority. Plus, there's plenty of design tricks you can use to establish the feeling of space without erecting an enormous structure that eats up half your garden. "The most effective way to approach an extension is to consider the planning constraints and work backwards from there. We conduct a visibility test to understand the maximum volume we can add to the house," says Teodora Lancu, a designer at Scenario Architecture. "Once we consolidate the size of the extension, we deep dive into the owner's needs and how the addition is going to serve them."

Integrating the extension with the rest of the building ensures the space will function as a valuable addition to the property, rather than as an afterthought that's been tacked onto the back of your house with no consideration to how the interior spaces connect. "There's little point in adding extra space if it doesn't mesh with the rest of the property," says Ben. "It might be that you need to consider some internal remodelling to the existing building, such as moving the staircase, to ensure the extension works well."

Spend plenty of time at the design phase of your project establishing how you'd like to use the house on a day-to-day basis and what your goals for the new space are. If you're adding a single-storey rear extension, for instance, it can be helpful to take a holistic view of the entire ground floor. Knocking through one or two walls and rejigging the circulation spaces could unlock a completely new arrangement that maximises the space you already have.

Design details

If you've decided to take on an extension, it's probable that you've already amassed a wish list of architectural elements you'd like to incorporate. The first step to

Above: Though this extension by Daab Design hasn't added a huge amount of space to the property, removing a 1970s conservatory has allowed for a complete rejig of the lower ground floor. As well as establishing a more user-friendly layout, the build provided a golden opportunity to upgrade the thermal fabric

Right: Pike & Partners Architects crafted the design for this extension. To maximise garden views, the ground floor glazing was carefully planned to incorporate a series of sliding doors that provide a seamless connection to the outdoors



BARRY WILLIS



FRENCH TYPE

Designed and built by Plus Rooms, this addition maximises the full width of the plot. By making the most of the space available, the extension provides the owners of the house with much-needed room in the contemporary new kitchen-diner. Different types of glazing, including bifold doors, fixed windows and rooflights, have been incorporated to invite sunshine into the property



Above: NOTO Architects planned this extension to a semi-detached Victorian home. While the owners wanted the addition to appear visually distinct from the original period property, crafting a design that complemented the existing house was important, too. The careful choice of traditional materials and proportions facilitate this connection

successfully executing these desirable features is to engage the right designer. Discuss your plans with several professionals until you find the person who understands your vision for the transformation. A qualified architect (registered with the Architects Registration Board), an architectural technician or the in-house team at a specialist design and build company are all potential options.

Once you've selected the designer to take your scheme forward, work with them to decide how the architectural details will be built out to create the high quality result you're after. Discuss any specialist finishes and features with your contractor, too, to ensure that everyone is on the same page about what the end result should look like.

Design features that maximise natural light are a must for most people, in the form of fixed windows, glazed doors or rooflights and lanterns. While bathing the space in sunshine is desirable, it's vital to avoid over-glazing and overheating. Similarly to when you size up the extension, less can sometimes be more. "Our approach is to map out where the sun rises and sets in relation to the house,



identifying which interior areas are naturally well lit at each point in the day," says Teodora. "This guides our interior design, as we place each activity in the house to harness the natural daylight and functionality of the glazing." Remember, the southern facade of the house will receive the most sunlight, so design your extension with this in mind.

Invest in high quality goods

When it comes to selecting products and finishes, aim to install the best quality that your budget allows – even if it means prioritising a few standout details rather than



Left and below: The existing extension to this period property in Shrewsbury did not flow well with the rest of the house. Base Architecture masterminded a strategy for a new addition that would stand apart as a contemporary contrast. To maintain a coherent connection between old and new parts of the property, the 3m-high ceiling line was continued in the new kitchen-diner, which is flooded with natural light



including every item on your wish list. All your work at the design phase of the project could fall short if you skimp on materials that won't stand the test of time. "It's likely that your extension is a once in a lifetime investment, so it's worth building with excellent quality and ethically sourced materials that'll perform for years to come," says Teodora. When planning your budget, prioritise structural and external products that are more difficult to update later. "Internal features like joinery can always be upgraded, but once the materials have been built in, it's much more difficult to change your mind about them," says Teodora.

One feature worth investing in the best quality you can afford is glazing. "Glazed door systems are often at the heart of an extension, so they need to be chosen carefully," says Anais Blehaut, director at Daab Design. While it may be possible to track down cheaper sets of sliding doors, for instance, the lower cost is usually reflected in the quality of the system. To be sure you're satisfied with the product, visit your supplier's showroom to get a feel for how smoothly the system operates and how robust the hardware is.

To build value into your extension, it is also worth investing in the items you'll be using on a day-to-day basis. "Don't compromise on details that get a lot of use, such as door handles and taps," says Anais. "The finishes we touch every day are where you will feel the home. A cheap tap that doesn't last will detract from the quality of your new kitchen, even if you have expensive cabinets and joinery."

Make sustainable choices

Attaching an airtight extension to a house that leaks heat through the walls, floors and roof isn't a great strategy for improving the whole property's thermal performance. It makes good sense to upgrade the fabric of the existing house as part of the build. You may even be able to beat the U-values (a measure of heat loss, where lower numbers indicate superior thermal performance) laid out in Building Regulations. Not only will this save you money on energy bills, but it'll also boost your home's eco credentials. "The residential sector is moving towards greener building and living," says Anais. "A refurbishment and new extension



present a great opportunity to make a significant difference to the way you live, and your environmental impact."

In practical terms, this means only building what you need, plus retaining and reusing materials where possible. Upgrading insulation in the walls, floors and roof is a smart step. "Insulated plasterboard is a useful product to build in. It could be worth investigating the possibilities for insulating the existing building fabric with green materials, such as expanded cork or hemp lime render," says Anais. Anecdotally, properties with green features are more attractive to buyers and may even fetch a higher sale price - and that's only likely to continue as we move towards lower-carbon living.

Above: A ground floor wraparound extension by YARD Architects has allowed for the ill-conceived layout of this small Victorian terrace to be reconfigured

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