

HEAD GARDENER TOM BROWN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS P.23

The Daily Telegraph



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How to add value to your home – and what not to do

Is it worth digging out the basement, and do you really need a dressing room, asks Jessica Doyle

The home-improvement boom of the past two years is by no means over: new research from Direct Line suggests that 19 per cent of British homeowners plan to renovate their properties over the next two years, at an average cost of £32,000.

The question is, if you have money to spend, how can you make it go further by

adding value, as well as style, to your home?

Caroline Milns, of the interior design and architecture firm Zulufish (zulufish.co.uk), has noted a shift in the way people see their homes in recent years, and a shift in what can add real value to an interior.

"Expectations have changed in terms of how we live," she says, "so homes need to

work harder. In the past, an upstairs utility room or an en-suite bathroom might have been the easy routes to adding value to your property, but today we are seeing that people want more from their homes.

"They want flexibility – the ability to zone and reuse spaces in different ways – and, above all, an interior has to feel good, too.

▲ Interior designer Caroline Milns at home in London

Rather than just adding on an extra room or installing a skylight, it has got to be really balanced."

So, what improvements will add value to your home, and what might not be worth the investment? Here's what the experts say...

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EXTENDING OUT is the popular choice and will expand and enhance the living space, but as it may only add a few more square metres to the floor plan, it may not translate into a significant increase in value

EXTRA LIVING SPACE will always add value but only if it is functional and performs a purpose, such as a family room or work space

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INCREASE FLOOR SPACE WITH AN EXTENSION – BUT WHICH WAY?

"Most of our clients want to add square footage by extending," says Caroline Milns, "and there's a golden rule: going out is the cheapest, going up is the most cost-effective, and digging down is the most expensive."

A side-return extension is the popular choice for a typical Victorian terrace house and will expand and enhance the living space, but as it might only add a few more square metres to the floor plan, rather than an extra room, it may not immediately translate into a significant increase in the value of the property.

The website Design For Me (design-for-me.com), which matches clients with architects and designers, estimates the current average cost of an extension to be anywhere between £2,000 and £2,800 per square metre, which would put a simple 4m x 5m extension at £56,000, plus architects' fees and VAT. As a ground-floor extension normally involves a new kitchen, the cost of that would also need to be factored in, potentially taking the cost of the extension over £100,000, a figure that might not be reflected in the new value of the house.

For this reason, some property experts recommend undertaking a side extension to enhance your own experience of living in the house, rather than for immediate resale value. "Extra living space will always add value but only if it's functional and performs a purpose," says James Davies, a partner at the Buying Solution, Knight Frank's buying arm.

"A few added feet to make a kitchen feel more spacious within a side return won't increase a sales price as such – if it can be used as a work space



Caroline Milns in the living room of her London home

or creates a play zone for children that's where the added value occurs. Build costs are high, and lead times at the moment are extremely long – it's vital to weigh up the pros and cons."

In comparison, a loft extension that adds an extra bedroom should immediately result in an increase to the value of your home – according to Nationwide, up to 20 per cent if it includes a good-sized double bedroom and en-suite bathroom.

The cost of a loft extension (and the amount of value it can add) will depend on the extent of the work involved, which in turn depends on what will be permitted (loft extensions in conservation areas, for example, are limited in their scope). The website MyJobQuote.co.uk estimates that the cost can range from around £15,000–£20,000

for a simple conversion with the addition of skylights, to around £70,000 for a full mansard extension that will transform the shape of the roof, and thus the space within.

As Milns points out: "A loft extension can add instant value to a property when it ticks all the right boxes; for example, ensure you opt for dormer windows that extend the roof line and create additional volume in the space, rather than just roof lights which will add light but, due to the pitch of a roof, may not add much valuable space."

"To appear in the square footage dimensions on most estate agent floor plans, the height of the area must be over 1.5m, so the addition of dormer windows ensures the space is really optimised both in terms of practicality and value."

A basement is the most expensive route to increasing the size of your home (averaging at £100,000 according to MyJobQuote, a figure that could run much higher depending on the spec required and whether a new kitchen will be located there).

"We look at the property prices in the area," says Milns, "and we advise clients that it's only worth adding a basement if the property is above around £800/sq ft. If they want to spend the money – because it's a big outlay – it's the ideal space for adding in rooms that don't need much light, such as a wine cellar, a home gym, a home office or a TV snug."

UP THE BATHROOM COUNT

If you want to improve your home without the cost and upheaval of an extension, Milns recommends working with the space you have. "When you're looking to complete projects that add instant value, consider those that don't require planning permission or architectural works, but rather adapt and reimagine the space you have to offer more," she says.



A HOME OFFICE has quickly become another modern essential, as many of us continue to work from home

One way to do that is to create an extra bathroom, which could add up to 5 per cent to a home's value.

Estate agents agree that these days a four-bedroom house needs to have at least two bathrooms (one of which should have a bathtub), and an en-suite bathroom off the main bedroom is now seen as an essential by many househunters.

The average cost of a new bathroom is estimated at around £5,000 by Checkatrade, and it doesn't necessarily require an addition to the footprint of your home. A downstairs loo – another essential for the modern home – can be created in the space under the stairs, for example, at a cost of around £3,000.

For a new en-suite bathroom upstairs, the minimum floorspace needed is 0.8m x 1.8m – just enough to squeeze in a shower, basin and loo – which can be carved out from a good-sized main bedroom, or borrowed from a neighbouring spare bedroom.

To maximise a small space, consider a wet room, rather than a shower with a screen door, and a sliding pocket door into the en-suite instead of a door that opens out into the bedroom.

CREATE A HOME OFFICE

A good home office has quickly become another modern essential, as many of us continue to work from home some of the time, or expect to in future.

Recent research by the window company Safestyle (safestyle-windows.co.uk) showed that 39 per cent of British home buyers considered a home workspace to be an essential element of their "forever home".

"Office space is still very much a hot

topic," says James Davies. "Whether it's a separate building or a room in the house, it has to be well lit with natural light, and have enough space for extensive shelving and perhaps a small sofa or armchair, as well as the desk."

Caroline Milns agrees that "adding a home office without reducing your bedroom or bathroom count is a fantastic way to add instant value. The space requirement is small, so you can create a valuable addition without impacting on the floor space in your bedroom or bathroom too much."

Creating a useable, functional office without building an entire extra room requires some creative thinking, but can be done in some cases without too much disruption. Where there is a large main bedroom, for instance, Milns suggests integrating an en-suite bathroom into the bedroom, so that an existing bathroom can be converted into an office.

"A luxurious spa-like space with real wow factor can be created within a large bedroom that incorporates a shower room, loo and dressing area, and ensures your 'bathroom count' remains the same," she says.

Another option she suggests is making use of a half landing: "a great spot for creating a small home office at a relatively low cost. Often, where a loft has been converted, there will be a fairly generous landing area in the eaves of the house." Adding a glazed partition wall will help to shut off the space from the rest of the house, while also ensuring that the staircase doesn't become too dark.

In a recent project, she utilised a landing area on the top floor of a house to create a home office for a client. "We put in a Crittall wall and door to close off the office, while allowing light through, and we added reflective window treat-



A LOFT EXTENSION, if it adds an extra bedroom, should immediately raise the value of your home



Shower power: these days a four-bedroom house should have at least two bathrooms

CALLING ALL SELF-BUILDERS, RENOVATORS, REMODELLERS, CONVERTERS AND EXTENDERS

The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards 2022 are open and we want to hear all about your completed projects and the challenges you've overcome. This is your chance to showcase your hard work.

Our awards scheme has been championing Britain's most inspiring home projects for almost 30 years, and encouraging others on their own-build journey.

With more than 10 categories, the awards put the effort and dedication of homeowners in the spotlight to celebrate the hard work and ambition it takes to complete such a project.

As well as looking for great home design, we want to hear about all special landmark moments and the wonderful design-and-build team behind each unique home.

Houses of all shapes and sizes are welcome – from petite self-builds to grand barn conversions – and we include homes finished to a range of budgets, styles and designs.

One of the shortlisted projects will be chosen as our Home of the Year 2022 and the homeowners will win £1,000 of John Lewis vouchers.

The awards take just a couple of minutes to enter

and are free to enter.

We can't wait to see your photos and hear all about your projects. Good luck!

HOW TO ENTER YOUR PROJECT

To enter online, complete the entry form at www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/awards.

► If by post, send the form to: Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA.

The closing date for entering the awards is June 3, 2022.

► The project must be finished (or at least very nearly) in order to qualify for the competition and entries (both online and by post) will need to have attached:

- Floorplans ("before" and "after" where relevant)
- At least two "before" photographs where relevant
- 10 interior images (living

room, kitchen etc) ► At least one photograph of the exterior.

Shortlisted projects may be visited in person by our awards panel and will be featured both in the newspaper and online, so you must be prepared for you and your home to be photographed. ► Some winners will also be featured in *The Daily Telegraph*.

LANDSCAPING THE GARDEN may improve the aesthetic appeal of an outside space but is unlikely to add much value

ments on the skylight to counter the glare and heat from the sun," she says. "We also put in a wine fridge so that he can have a drink at the end of the day. He now has a really nice, bijou home office from what was previously dead space, and didn't have to lose a bedroom to fit it in."

DESIGN A DRESSING ROOM

Whereas in previous years, installing built-in wardrobes could be seen as a no-no that might limit how prospective future buyers might be able to use a room, these days a dressing room is appearing ever higher on the wish lists of househunters.

Safestyle's research suggested that 42 per cent of respondents would consider a walk-in wardrobe a deciding factor in whether they would buy a property, and Mark O'Callaghan of high-end design firm Echlin (echlin.com), which usually includes dressing spaces in its projects, believes that this is due to changes in lifestyle. "The average woman buys four times more clothes than she did 30 years ago, according to research by Cambridge University, and we don't need stats to know that men are keeping pace," he notes.

The Buying Solution's James Davies says that "a good dressing area or walk-in wardrobe can add a premium of 5 per cent in the best instances".

"A number of our clients feel that a walk-in wardrobe or dressing area is a non-negotiable," he continues. "Many use them as a 'sanctuary' – a room to get ready in, rather than a room to escape to. A lot of the attraction of these spaces is how they've been designed and fitted."

"Having a dressing room with some freestanding wardrobes plunked in is practical but not very appealing. Having a properly fitted storage space with maybe a central island full of drawers would be a big selling point. It also needs to be well lit, with both natural and well-considered artificial light."

In some cases, he and Milns agree



A NEW KITCHEN can add 5.5 per cent value although that will naturally depend on how much you plan to spend on cabinetry and appliances



▲ Storage is key, as seen in Caroline Milns's kitchen
▲ Room to relax: at least one of your bedrooms should have a bathroom

that it can be worth losing a bedroom to fit in a good-sized dressing room. "Previously, losing a bedroom to a walk-in wardrobe or a dressing room was a major faux pas," says Davies, "but these days, having a space off the master and an added storage area can be extremely attractive for prospective buyers."

The key is to commit to it and plan it properly. "What people don't like to see is a very squeezed fourth or fifth bedroom because a chunk of the space has been taken for a poorly fitted walk-in wardrobe," he adds.

"If you have enough bedrooms, and the value of your property is high enough to start with, it can be worth losing a bedroom and devoting a whole floor to create a big master suite," says Milns. "Storage is an important part of every client's brief now."

RENOVATE THE KITCHEN – OR NOT?

The kitchen poses something of a dilemma: there's no doubt that shabby, dated cabinets might put a prospective buyer off a house, and might result in them factoring the cost of a new one into their offer; but is it worth the expense of installing new cabinets and appliances if you plan to sell?

According to research by Magnet (magnet.co.uk), Google searches for "kitchen home improvement" jumped by 4,545 per cent in the past 12 months, suggesting that this key room remains a top priority. "As the kitchen is the focal point for many households, it's important to ensure that, where possible, it's not devaluing your property," Daniel Copley of property website Zoopla told Magnet. "Features such as poor lighting, broken cupboards and cluttered surfaces all have the potential to make your home harder to sell."

Separate research by property advice platform Stipendium (stipendium.io), based on the latest house prices, suggests that a new kitchen can add 5.5 per cent to the value of your home, although the net value it will add will naturally depend on how much you plan to spend on cabinetry and appliances.

"Wow factor in the kitchen can sometimes add 5 to 10 per cent to the property value in my opinion," says Christian Dickson of Foxtons. However, he advises against adding that wow factor in the form of bold colours and patterned tiles, although they might be fashionable.

"If you add a kitchen with strong colours, it's less likely to appeal to the majority, so you could decrease the market of people that are likely to offer on your house, and a smaller pool of candidates can lead to a slower sale and lower price," he says.

"Sticking to popular colour schemes should avoid the situation where applicants say, 'Sorry, but I don't like the kitchen and I wouldn't be willing to put in a new one, so I won't be offering,' or where a buyer says, 'I'll pay less because I have to change the kitchen.'"

If you are planning to replace a kitchen, a cost-effective way to add value is to knock down a wall to create an open-plan kitchen-diner.

Despite a returning demand for separate snugs and workspaces within the home post-pandemic, experts agree that an open-plan family kitchen and dining space remains a must-have for most, and could add 10 per cent to a home's value, without the need for an extension.



A UTILITY ROOM?

Thanks to the increased appreciation of home organisation over the past few years, the desirability of a separate utility room has soared, with Pinterest seeing big spikes in searches – so much so that it has identified the "luxury laundry room" as a key trend for 2022.

A good utility room can add 5 per cent to the value of a home according to agents – perhaps more in the case of a country house – but as with dressing rooms, only if it is a well-planned, well-designed space, as opposed to a poky laundry cupboard shoehorned in under the stairs.

Milns, who often works on period properties, suggests that the "middle room" – the often dark, awkward space between a kitchen/family room at the back and the living room at the front – can be a good place to add a utility, with some creative thinking.

"We often reconfigure and carve out an area for utilities and boot rooms into that central space, which becomes the room where all the cogs turn," she says. "They're not always hugely glamorous spaces, but they're really needed; they tick off the storage, the washing, and it



▲ "Luxury laundry": a utility room can add 5 per cent to the value of a home

▲ A good-quality garden room can add 1.5 times its value to your home's value

means that people don't have to have the washing machine or drying rack in their main living area, so you don't need to have quite so much joinery."

ADD AN OUTDOOR ROOM

A well-built garden room that can be used as an office, gym or extra sitting room is a good way to add floor space to your home without needing planning

permission – provided it falls within certain limits (ie that it is less than 2.5m in height, takes up no more than 50 per cent of the land around the house, and is no closer to a road than the house itself). Properties in conservation areas and listed buildings will have additional restrictions.

Expect to pay from around £15,000 for a good-quality garden room – which should then add 1.5 times its cost to the value of your home.

Similarly, converting a garage into living space can add 10-15 per cent in value, according to David Westgate of property consultants Andrews (andrewsonline.co.uk) – food for thought for garage owners, 70 per cent of whom reportedly don't use theirs to house a car.

Westgate also points out that it's another good way to add a useable living space "without having to spend time and money on laying foundations, and constructing walls and a roof". Converting a garage that is integral to the house should fall under permitted development, and could cost as little as £7,500 according to Checkatrade. If the garage is separate from the house, planning permission for a change of use might be needed.

MAKE SOME TWEAKMENTS

Decorating your house is the cheapest way to make a significant change, but can a coat of paint really add value? Stipendium's research suggests that an all-over redecoration, with an average cost of just under £3,000, could add 3.1 per cent to your home's value.

The style you choose could affect this, however: a modern, neutral palette is the safer choice than a statement patterned wallpaper or decorative paint feature.

Similarly, landscaping the garden might improve the aesthetic appeal of an outside space, but is unlikely to add much value: the same research saw an average spend of £3,750 resulting in a return of £125.

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