

Complete Guide to Renovating a House

PART THREE: THE DESIGN PROCESS

The house is yours, but what are you going to do with it now — how will you get a design and where do you start?

Natasha Brinsmead takes you through the process

WHERE TO START WITH DESIGN

When you are finally able to stand back and look at the house you have dreamed of being yours for so long and breathe a sigh of relief that the buying process is all over, the realisation of what you have taken on can often hit home. “Where do we start?” is a question that many renovators ask at the beginning of a project.

The very best thing to do is to take a long, hard look at the house and its grounds, and work out which are its best bits, the features that drew you to the house in the first place (such as its views, large garden, characterful beams or original fireplaces and windows), and which are the worst. The worst things may be problems such as damp or a leaking roof, but some of the problems may remain hidden from you until work on the house commences and you should prepare yourself for this. Once you have your list you can begin to get an idea of how your design might make the most of your favourite areas of the house and also work out the costs and work involved righting the wrongs you have listed.

The design should take into account the era that the house was built in, and any alterations to the exterior, or extensions, should be



made to work with the existing building. For example, if you have bought a 1960s house with an exterior you were less than keen on, but views to die for, a contemporary render-clad design with an upside-down layout, featuring huge picture windows may be forming in your mind. Likewise, if you bought the property for its charming cottage character, but are less enamoured with its small, dark rooms, repairing original windows and beams will be high on your list, as will be a more open plan, light-filled interior.

quick tip

It pays to spend a few months in the house before coming up with a design. You'll see how the sun comes in to the various rooms, what works as it is and what doesn't.

A SCHEDULE

A well thought-out schedule of works is absolutely vital to the success and smooth running of any renovation project. Without one the whole process can become chaotic, with tradespeople overlapping and many jobs that could have been carried out at the same time to save on costs being done separately.

A schedule basically lists what work needs to be done to the house to get it complete, and in what order. Everything should be included, right down to the tiniest detail. Rather than having just one schedule for the entire project, it is often helpful (and less daunting) to break a project down in phases, such as ‘kitchen extension’, ‘moving bathroom upstairs’ and so on, and have a schedule for each.

If it is possible to keep certain aspects of the building work from disrupting your day-to-day life then the schedule should reflect this (for example, building an extension to watertight stage before knocking through). Your designer may have some invaluable tips for you on the process.



MANAGING MATERIALS



Managing the large amount of materials and waste on site should be an essential part of your plans

Whether you have bought a property in need of modernisation or a complete wreck, the chances are that you will have a great deal of stuff to get rid of, ranging from old carpets and wallpaper, to electric fires, flooring, bricks and windows. By far the easiest solution is to simply hire a skip. Skips cost from around £120, but this really will vary depending on the size of skip you need and where in the country you live. (You may require a skip permit too if placing it on the road — though many hire companies will arrange this for you.) There are also certain items which cannot be placed in a skip, however, including refrigerators and freezers, asbestos, paint and solvents, TVs or lightbulbs.

But, you should be aware that whilst you may not want some old materials, other people might. A visit to freecycle.org, eBay.com and even a flick through the local papers reveals that there is always someone out there who wants your old stuff.

You should also check with any salvage yards in your area whether they offer a demolition or house clearance service. Some will come and clear your house for free (or for a very small fee) in return for items they may be able to sell.

know how

Don't get confused by the terminology around professional design. Not all designers are architects (only those registered with the Architect's Registration Board can call themselves one — it involves completing the seven years' worth of training) but, equally, not all architects are accomplished house designers

EXTENSION DESIGNED BY WILLIAM TOZER ARCHITECTS



DO YOU NEED A DESIGNER?

The scale of your project may be such that the services of a designer are just not needed, but if you are extending or carrying out major remodelling work, you should not underestimate what a designer could bring to the table. Of course you do not have to hire a designer — there is nothing to say that you cannot draw up your own plans, and act as project manager. Even some builders might offer basic house design on simple jobs (and some builders might not even feel they need a design to work from). However designers have the

talent, experience and expertise to get the very most from your space and your budget and could well offer ideas and solutions beyond what you had considered possible. It certainly is not something you should scrimp on. They will also have connections with local tradespeople and may have a relationship with the local planners — as well as some knowledge of what they are and aren't willing to accept. They will also be able to submit your plans and advise you on any red tape surrounding your application.

PRO TIPS

- **Check out your neighbours** for an idea of the projects that people are carrying out on your type of house — to see what works and what doesn't.
- **Planning permission** will have a huge impact on your plans. Raise it with your designer early on and take into account any designations, e.g. Conservation Areas.
- **Specification is a key part of design** so carefully research external finishes and prioritise budget on them (e.g. bricks).
- **DIY design software packages** are OK for playing with ideas — but they're not always suitable for serious plans/submissions.

WHICH DESIGNER?

ARCHITECT

An architect is someone who is professionally qualified and registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB) following the usual seven years of training. Around 70% of architects are chartered, which means they are members of The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). All practices on RIBA's register must hold professional indemnity insurance cover to a minimum of £250,000.

ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGIST

Like an architect, a fully qualified architectural technologist can take on a project from the plan drawing stage to completion. Architectural technologists have their own professional body, The Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) who ensure members achieve approved standards of training, adhere to a code of conduct and maintain professional indemnity insurance. The Institute's qualification MBIAT, is accepted by banks and building societies. Architectural technologists tend to focus more

on the technical performance of buildings and draw on science and technology in building design. Often they are employed by architectural practices to prepare detailed plans and specifications.

FREELANCE DESIGNER

There are plenty of house designers out there who, whilst not qualified to practice as an architect or architectural technologist, have great experience and skill in this field. Some building contractors offer a design service and will also act as project manager. This does tend to work out as a cheaper option, but be aware that not all will carry indemnity insurance. You should also get recommendations and ask to see previous work and speak to previous clients.

You may also need to use the services of a **structural engineer**. If you are using an architect or designer, they may work in conjunction with a structural engineer, who will calculate how the building will respond to additional loadings, the removal of walls etc.

WHAT TO PAY FOR DESIGN

What an architect or designer will charge varies — from £500 to £50,000 (yes, we've heard of someone paying that!) — depending on the practice, the type of project they are working on and where in the country you are. Some will charge on an hourly basis, particularly if they are providing a drawings-only service, whilst others will work out their fee as a percentage of the total building cost (common for the full project supervisory). Architectural fees for a full service come to around 7.5% to 16.5% of the build costs, although smaller practices tend to be cheaper and for plans only will be around 5%. Architectural technologists charge from around 5% of construction costs.

THE BIGGEST RENOVATION DESIGN MISTAKES

THE MISMATCHED EXTENSION

This is where an extension has been added in the hope that it will blend in with the existing house, only to stand out like a sore thumb. If you have decided to create an extension that is in-keeping with a period property, materials that blend in with the existing versions and well-designed windows are a must – this is not the time for scrimping on external facing materials. Matching bricks for many is the most difficult challenge but also essential to a 'period' extension's success (and don't forget to match the mortar). It might also be worth considering designing the extension to look like a later addition, although not necessarily a contemporary one. For example, adding a Victorian-style extension to a Georgian house, gives a sense that the house has evolved over time and allows for a more liberal approach to design.



GETTING STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

With high-quality 'period' design difficult to get right and contemporary schemes putting many people off (as well as some planners...), the resulting scheme can all too often end up being a safe, bland, middle-ground mix of styles that achieves space but does nothing to add to the look of the existing house. Be bold with your scheme and follow it through in the specification, whatever you choose.

GOING TOO FAR...

It's important not to view a renovation project as a chance to live out your house dreams unfettered. A programme of extensions and renovations that not only towers over the original but takes away all its (even minimal) character will look wrong in scale and not work as a house. Better in that case to consider a new build – indeed many renovation design schemes become so grand that the homeowners conclude it might be wiser to knock it down and start again (saving 20% on the VAT, for a start).

WINDOWS...

The number one way to spot a badly renovated house? It's the windows. They are an essential part of the overall look of the house and you should prioritise budget on them. Their design needs to tie in with your overall scheme, modern or traditional.

how to

A good design starts in many cases with a good survey of what you've got and what state it is in. It's no good building a flash extension if you're going to have to carry out disruptive work to the drains beneath the floor later on, for instance. So take stock, and get a surveyor in as part of the early design process ▶



OLD HOUSE, ECO HOUSE?

Houses in need of renovation are not usually the most energy efficient of places. Ill-fitting windows and doors, a complete lack of insulation and dated heating systems are all commonplace; the house will likely have a low Energy Performance Certificate rating. Repairing and draught-proofing windows and doors will go a long way towards improving the energy rating, but adding insulation and installing a new heating system will make a huge difference — indeed some renovated homes can now reach PassivHaus standard.

The walls are unlikely to be cavity walls in older properties, meaning insulation will need to be added either internally or externally. Adding it to the internal walls means building a framework up against existing walls, adding insulation, then plasterboarding and finishing. Adding external insulation works in a similar way but will obviously alter the whole appearance of your home — not always a bad thing.

The key is to put eco improvements centre stage in your works schedule and therefore as part of the design — particularly the ones, such as insulation, which will have an invasive impact. A great starting point is the *Old House Eco Handbook* (see page 24). ■

know this

Planning permission is a critical factor in a home's future development potential. One of the first bits of research you should do, having identified a house, is to see if any planning applications have been taken out by a previous owner (search the local authority's planning website). Do the same for neighbours' homes — it will be a useful steer on future work.

PLANNING PERMISSION

A significant number of renovation and extension projects won't need planning approval at all. These include internal improvements that don't affect the external look of the building (e.g. creating a kitchen/diner) and extensions of a small scale. These are classed as Permitted Development, and you can find out exactly what type of project you can carry out at planningportal.gov.uk. (The Government recently completed a consultation of changing Permitted Development rights for some types of project including single storey extensions, but as yet has not decided an outcome.) Other larger-scale renovations will require planning approval in the usual way.

● See homebuilding.co.uk/planning for more information



IMAGE: SIMON MAXWELL

THE 60-SECOND VERSION

While some renovation projects can be carried out without the need for a designer, larger-scale schemes need professional advice — and a schedule of works to ensure the improvements are carried out in a logical way that minimises disruption and duplication. Don't necessarily feel you need an architect, however — many regular house designers and even structural engineers can provide good solutions for specific problems. Ultimately, design is something

that should be prioritised within your budget and not an afterthought, particularly if you are to avoid the key common mistakes that will not only limit the livability of the house but also its end value. Planning the project is a key part of this early process, including ensuring that materials can be re-used where possible or, if not, dumped at minimal cost. Planning permission will be a key factor on your design, as will the desire to improve the home's efficiency.