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We've all longed for more space in the house during the lockdown – but do we really need it, asks *Linda Daly*

Is your house getting you down? Are you dreaming of more space? There are two schools of thought on how people will react after the restrictions are lifted: we'll have no money to do anything; or we'll all rush out and spend our hard-earned cash on new hairdos, holidays and, yes, even extensions. If you're one of the latter, itching for a home that is befitting of people who will spend more time in it, then you should brush up on the ins and outs of getting an extension before you do.

Hold your horses

Not all extensions are essential – sometimes people just need to maximise what they have already.

“A lot of the time, if people extend they end up not using the front room and just replicate the space they already have at the far end of the house. You make the original part redundant. We try to look at the house as it exists and see how it might be reworked,” says Gareth Brennan of Brennan Furlong in Dublin.

Patricia Mangan of Studio M Architects in Dun Laoghaire agrees: “If you just add on rooms, each addition can take away from what was there.” She says the original house and the extension should “ideally flow seamlessly into the other, as opposed to a room that is just an add-on”.

If you insist on an extension

Before you approach an architect, decide what you want and why. The size of your extension will depend on the room on your site, your neighbours and such issues as whether trees must be retained.

You should also look at how you live now and how you are likely to live in the future. Write down what you love about your house and what you don't. You can save inspirational cuttings from newspapers and magazines, and look up the projects sections of architects' websites to discover your likes and dislikes.

Joe Fallon, architect with Dublin- and Wexford-based Joe Fallon Design, says the biggest consideration should be future-proofing your house. “A front room that may be a play room now can change to a remote office in the future.”

Think of the planning

Some local authorities provide guidelines to building extensions, so check them to see what you can and can't do.

If the extension to the back of your house is less than 40 sq m, you may not need planning permission. However, to increase the height of your house you will need consent. You must also leave a minimum of 25 sq m of space free at the rear of your house. You can convert an attached garage without planning permission, if it is smaller than 40 sq m, and in some cases add a porch to the front.

Double extensions to the back of the house can be difficult to obtain if you live in a housing estate because you are more likely to overlook your neighbours. If your house was built before 2000, you will need an asbestos survey before any building work can begin.

While local authorities like extension facades to complement the existing house, architects prefer to design something for the time, using elements of the original house.

“You don't want to end up with a glass box on the back of the house that doesn't have any relationship with the property. But you also want your extension to be functional, which doesn't mean boring. We feel our job is to marry the functionality with the beauty,” says Brennan.

Communicate with your neighbours

Telling your immediate neighbours of your plans before they see them online or in the newspapers is one way to get them onside. There could be issues around overshadowing and boundaries, which architects will take into consideration when designing your extension.

“The most prudent thing you do, before you lodge for planning, is to go to them with a set of plans. However, don't do it too early in the process because you may find that you are too swayed by what the neighbours think. Do what you want, get the design you want, and then go to them,” says Fallon.

Let there be light

An extension shouldn't take away from the light of the original structure. If you are adding on an extension, the working



Flat roofs get a bad rap, but modern examples — such as in this Brennan Furlong-designed extension — can have a real wow factor with their raised ceiling heights, and won't obscure views upstairs

How big is your dream extension?



Joe Fallon Design used sliding doors to link this home to the garden, above; Brennan Furlong married functionality with beauty in an internal refurb, below; Studio M added a striking modern extension to a period house, inset right



rooms – the guest lavatory, utility room or boot room – should go in the centre of the house, while the living spaces should go on the outside to get the most light.

“People tend to add on dens and utility spaces because that's where the problem is, but by doing that they often darken their main spaces. Reconfigure the house so that you get your dark utility spaces in the depth of the plan and get your living spaces to the back or front of the house,” says Mangan.

Most modern extensions are heavy on the glass but you must allow for solar gain. That means that the light may come in from different angles at different times of the year and overheat your home, especially with new insulation standards. Mangan and Fallon say there are ways around this.

“Designing in cross ventilation, and also some shading through motorised blinds, deciduous trees outside, canopies, and solar-controlled glass should be considered,” says Mangan.

Decide on your roof and windows

Flat, sloping, apex, dome – there are lots of different shapes of roof you can choose on your single-storey extension. Sometimes flat roofs get a bad rap but Fallon says modern flat roofs have good drainage and can create a “wow factor” if you are coming from a room with a lower ceiling into one with a higher one.

“If you are opting for an apex roof, you may not be making the best use of the space,” says Fallon.

Mangan says there are pros and cons for all roofs. “You see the advantage of a flat single-storey roof from the first floor because it doesn't obscure your views. I always consider it as a fifth elevation and you can dress it up with sedum, decking or elements of planting,” she says.

Don't forget the garden

A good connection between your house and your garden is a must, but you don't always need big patio doors.

“The connection to the garden is always important, but as well as glazed

“**A good connection between your house and your garden is a must. You don't always need patio doors**”

doors you can put in screens or frameless windows. A play on both of these can work really well. It's then up to you what level of privacy you want – so you can treat the windows with blinds, curtains, black glass for the night time, or lighting outside,” says Mangan.

Concertina doors, which look good pulled back in photos, can ruin the view, she says. “You only open them a handful of times each year,” says Fallon.

He says it is worth paying more for a good sliding door. “PVC windows are about three times cheaper than aluclad windows. You could treat yourself to the more expensive aluclad sliding door but then use PVC for the rest of the house.”

“The rule of thumb should be that whatever you spend on your kitchen is what you spend on your garden,” says Fallon. He says that getting your garden professionally designed can make a huge difference to your quality of life, as it is an extension to the home.

The costs

Asking architects how much extensions cost is like asking them the length of a piece of string. Brennan says costs are usually between €2,000 and €2,500 per sq m. Mangan says her recent projects have varied from between €350,000 to €1.5m – it depends on the client's budget.

Those with smaller homes can expect to pay at least €100,000 for an extension, according to Fallon. The good news is that he expects build and design costs to be cut by up to 20% this year. However, he says he has been fielding “three to four” queries a week about new extensions since the lockdown began.

If you want more space on a minimal budget, consider converting your attic. “You're probably looking at between €35,000 and €40,000 on a good attic. Per square foot, it's the best value you can get. The cost will go up if you want an ensuite.”

“I would say take your time with the design because you are going to spend a lot of money building the extension. It's about spending that money as wisely as you can,” adds Brennan.

