

Insight

BLENDING THE OLD WITH THE NEW

Considering adding an extension to an old house, in the manner of Jackie Bell's? These tips will help

When carefully designed, a modern extension can enhance an old house. It can help create a home that's more suitable for 21st-century living – perhaps by adding a large open-plan kitchen-diner that leads out to the garden, or a family space with floor-to-ceiling glazing, just like Jackie Bell has done. Many period homes suffer from a lack of light and space, so a well-planned addition can transform the flow of the interior.

Design advice

Weathered brick or stone fits well with an older building or, for a cottage, you might opt for an oak-frame with an exposed vaulted ceiling. Alternatively, you could go for a modern look, using zinc, copper and lead. This contrast is often easier to pull off. Copying the style of the host dwelling may result in a poor pastiche, whereas extensions with 21st-century features can make a bold statement. An expanse of glass is also effective. Not only is it an attractive foil for a period home, but it

can help with light. Glass walkways are useful for delineating the transition between two phases of development, as well as creating visual separation.

Do consider the scale of an extension. The aim is to complement rather than dwarf the property and planners will look more favourably on a design that respects the building's proportions and features.

Planning permission

With many properties, you can extend without planning permission. For instance, you are allowed to build a two-storey rear extension on a detached home as long as it is not more than 3m from the original wall.

If your house is listed, there are more restrictions. You will need to seek Listed Building Consent and liaise with a conservation officer. Buildings of historic importance or those in a conservation area will always have strict limitations and it is worth seeking guidance from the planning department of your local council or from the government's planning portal before embarking on a project.



PROFESSIONAL ADVICE



'Building any extension is a considerable undertaking and it's wise to hire a professional. Their insight and creative skills will prove invaluable. And not only will they consider how the

extension will make your life easier, they will also have knowledge of the planning process.

Schemes that limit the loss of historic fabric and don't radically alter a property's character will be viewed more favourably. But this isn't to say that a modern design can't work – if the structure is of a high quality, it will only enhance the building.

When you add a contemporary addition, there is a clear distinction between new and old, but you should also consider the parts you are removing to connect the two structures. For instance, targeting a less historic or previously altered element of the building to create a new doorway is going to be more favourable than removing sections of untouched brick.

Material selection is crucial if you are extending under permitted development laws. If you have decided on a modern addition, you can still provide a pleasing aesthetic with traditional materials. Alternatively, a minimal design might be a great addition to an old property.'

RICHARD WITCHER,
WITCHER CRAWFORD ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS

ADDRESS BOOK

Historic England

0370 333 0607, historicengland.org.uk

The public body that looks after and cares for England's historic environment

■ **Royal Institute of British Architects**
020 7580 5533, architecture.com

Find an architect with specific expertise in conservation projects and extensions.

■ **The Listed Property Owners Club**
01795 844939, lpoc.co.uk

Offers advice on maintenance and financial assistance for owners of listed buildings



Building onto the back will help it blend in well



Consider a glass ceiling if your interior is quite dark



Modern additions look striking against old buildings



EXPERT EYE *'Start by finding what is special about the existing building – an extension should respect what is already there as well as adding another layer of history. Generally, it's best to avoid the front elevation; an addition should sit more quietly'*

TREVOR MITCHELL, HISTORIC ENGLAND