



Extensions

Building on some extra space to your house is a good way of expanding your living area without having to move. However, unless you have a property that is unusual and particularly ripe for extending, it is not usually a way to make money – anyone who extends does well if they add the cost of the new work onto the value of the house, so that they can recover their money when they eventually move. The majority of extensions are built to avoid the need to move and usually result in a loss on paper. But if the result is a better house, with an improved lifestyle for people who expect to live in it for many years to come, it is well worth doing.

Design strategy

It is important to consider the design from an early stage, and be clear in your own mind what you are hoping to achieve. A badly designed extension may have an unfortunate appearance, provide space in the wrong place or the wrong shape or require lots of maintenance due to bad construction details and a poor choice of materials. Any of these mistakes will devalue your home and leave you disappointed.

There are two fundamentally different approaches to the style of an extension. You can either carefully match in with the existing building and its surroundings, or you can deliberately contrast the design of the new against the old. Either way, to get a satisfactory result the design needs to be carefully thought through.

Matching in

The extension to the left-hand side of this house has been expertly built to match exactly with the existing building.



The extension to the left-hand side of this house is another example of expert building to match the existing building.

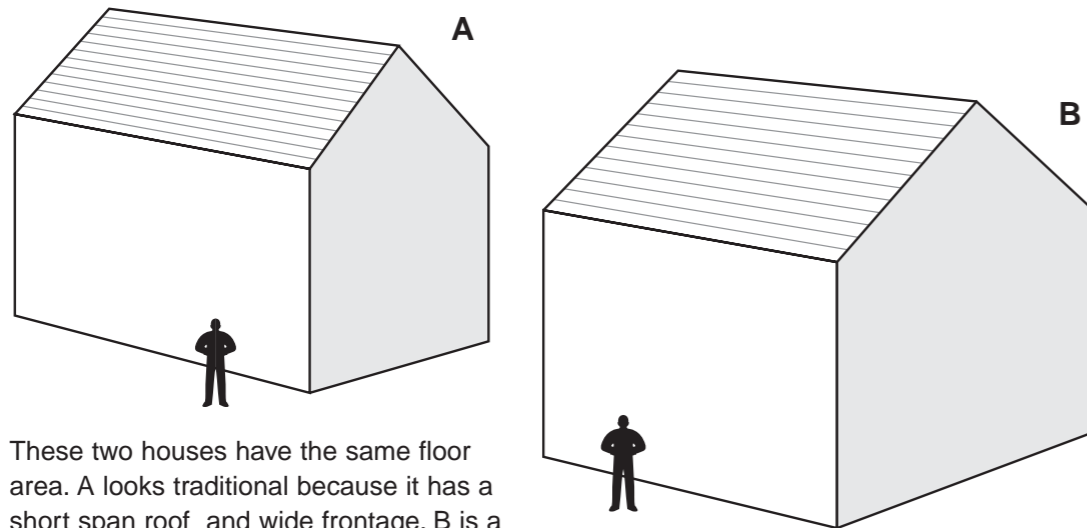


An example of an extension that has been carefully matched in scale and proportion to the original building.

In many ways matching in with the style of the existing house is easier than trying to create an appearance quite different from the original building. An overly simplistic view of this strategy is to assume that all you have to do is use the same materials – brick walls, tiled roof, etc. but there is much more to design, although this approach can often satisfy your local planning department. This is particularly so if the existing building

is older than 40 years or so. Traditional building methods and materials impose limits on the construction of houses that in turn affects their character. Understanding what these limits are is a good basis for understanding why some extensions may not be in character, however carefully the materials are matched. How this can affect the appearance can be seen by comparing two drawings.

How house shape and mass have been changed by modern building methods

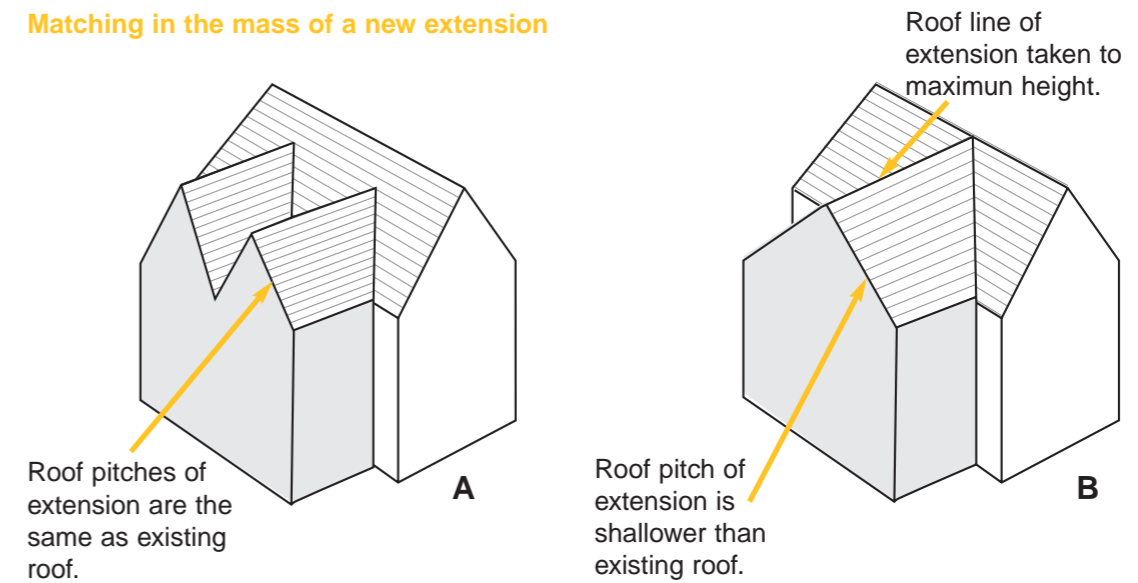


These two houses have the same floor area. A looks traditional because it has a short span roof and wide frontage. B is a modern house because it has a narrow frontage, deep plan and shallow roof pitch, requiring modern interlinking roof tiles.

If traditional building methods, using timber, are followed, a typical floor cannot span more than about 6m. Clay tiles use their weight to resist uplift from the wind, so they need to hang at an angle of at least 35 degrees. In past times, this limited the size and proportion of the rooms and the appearance and the height of the roof. Land was easily available, so houses could run parallel to the road frontage and have wide fronts. Modern houses work to a quite different set of rules. The wider the house frontage, the fewer can be built on an estate, because more road is needed to run

in front of them. As a result many modern houses tend to have narrow frontages and deep plans from front to back. The availability of steel and trussed rafter roofs mean that spans larger than 6m are possible. Modern concrete interlocking tiles can easily be laid lower than 30 degrees, which means that the roofs are lower, and use fewer tiles, so saving money.

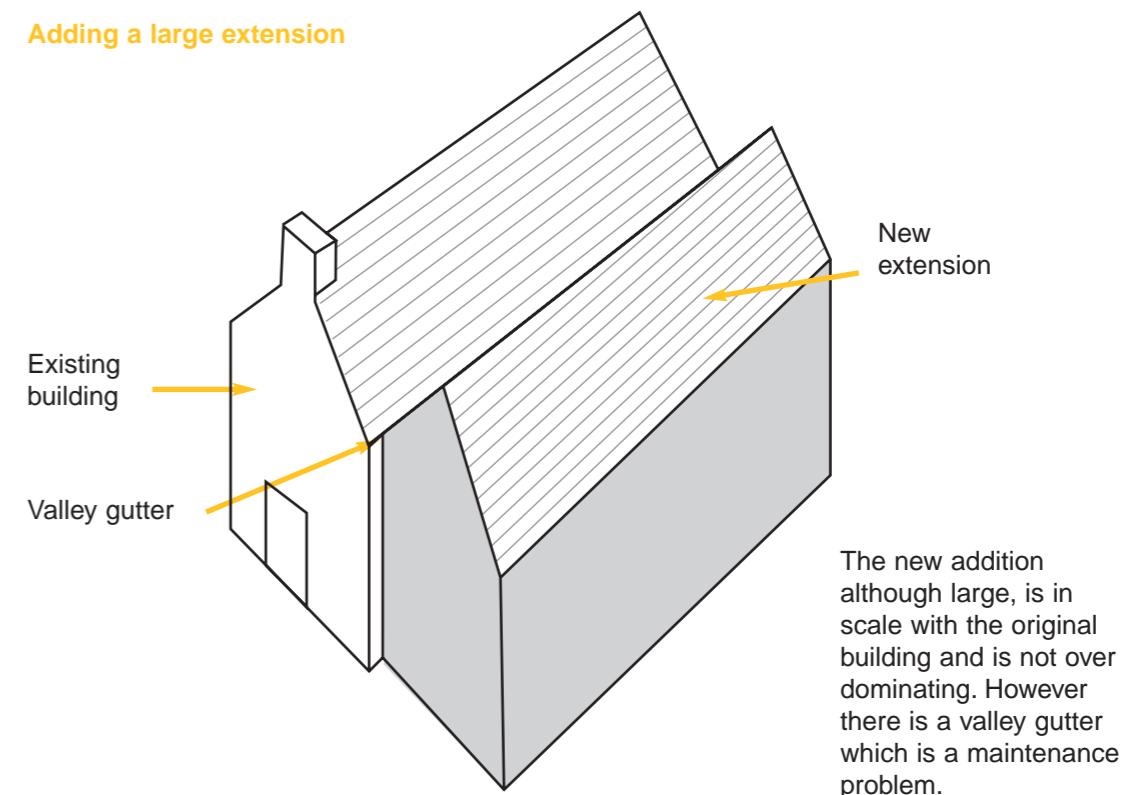
Matching in the mass of a new extension



The next illustration shows alternatives for adding a two-storey extension to the front or rear of a detached house. They both cover the same footprint, but the massing of Version A is far more sympathetic to the original house shape than Version B. In order to avoid the new ridge being higher than the existing, the pitch of roof B has had

to be made shallower. The result is that B will always look like a modern addition and without a careful design that deliberately contrasts with the main house, it will not look good. Aside from mass and proportion, the scale of the addition will also affect how much the altered building retains the character of the original.

Adding a large extension



The new addition although large, is in scale with the original building and is not over dominating. However there is a valley gutter which is a maintenance problem.

Contemporary style additions to your home



IDE-Architecture



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Turner Castle: Photographer Keith Collier

Top left: contemporary extension to an existing house. Left: contemporary extension to an existing house (exterior). Top right: contemporary extension to an existing house (interior). Above: contemporary extension to an existing house.

If you want to create a new, modern-looking addition to your house in most cases you will find that it is more difficult and expensive than matching into the existing building. But if it is done well, the results are immensely satisfying. There is a growing niche market for houses that are genuinely stylish and upgrading the right property in the right location can generate a financial return if the house is sold on afterwards.

It takes considerable skill to design a modern addition to a house, particularly if the original building is to remain mostly unaltered. A modern design may develop as a result of ignoring or deliberately breaking all the rules that are followed to match into the existing building described previously. Rather than following the relatively tried and tested methods so beloved of planning departments the designer needs to use knowledge, experience and aesthetic appreciation. Materials unfamiliar to traditional domestic design such as steel, cladding panels and metal roofs may be employed. A thorough knowledge is needed not just of the likely visual effect but also the practicalities of mixing materials with much lower tolerances with the skills of the average builder of domestic extensions. If a brick wall is incorrectly built it can be rectified, or even partially demolished and rebuilt relatively easily. Prefabricated materials, such as large sheets of glass or steel panels with their clean straight lines must fit exactly and will show up any deficiencies in the rest of the building. It may be necessary to find a builder who has experience working with these materials and is able to work to the fine tolerances demanded.

Local authority approvals

Some of the likely requirements of the local planning authority have already been listed in the earlier chapter 'Appraising the Property'. In particular it is well worth studying the section that covers 'permitted development' because if your proposal is modest it may not even require planning approval, saving time and money. If you do

need to get approval you will need to make a planning application and there are a number of things that the planners will check once they receive the drawings:

Overshadowing and overlooking

Will any windows have a view into your neighbours' windows, or directly overlook their garden? Will they lose significant amounts of sunlight or daylight once the extension is built? Most houses are close enough to other buildings for extensions to affect the neighbours in one way or another. A proposal that intrudes into neighbours' private space, or is detrimental to their quality of life will meet with resistance from the planning department, even if the neighbour has no objections. The planners are concerned not only with the effect of new work on privacy of the neighbours, but also that the level of privacy of the extension will be acceptable. The planners often set minimum distances between the houses, particularly where windows to the main rooms are concerned. Bathroom windows glazed with obscured glass overlooking a neighbour are usually acceptable.



Hot tip: Planner will not allow windows close to a boundary that overlooks a neighbour's garden or into one of their windows, but may relax this if the window is obscured glass or has a cill that is above eye level.

Planners are also fond of talking about the effects of extensions on the 'amenity' of the neighbours. What they mean is the right of people to relax and enjoy living in their home. There are no automatic rights to light or sunlight, for example, but if a proposed extension would significantly reduce these benefits for the surrounding families, the planners have grounds for refusing to give approval.