

## THINGS THE CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING AN ADDITION.

So you're thinking about making an addition onto your home, but don't know where to begin. Well, a good place to start may be to ask a few basic questions.

The first question to ask before starting an addition project is whether an addition is in fact a better option than buying a new home. One good reason for choosing an addition is that your house has become too small for your family's lifestyle, but you like the neighborhood. Putting an addition onto your house is usually less costly than trading up to a larger house in the same neighborhood. Another reason might be that you are looking for a new home and you find a house that would be perfect if it had ... An addition may be just the thing to bridge the gap between "pretty good" and "just right". Some people consider additions to increase the financial value of their home before a potential sale. This may or may not work depending on the kind of addition you make and how soon you plan to sell.

Regardless of the reason for your addition, there are two basic components that any homeowner needs to think about. What is the scope of work and what is a viable budget?

An important factor in determining your budget and scope of work is when, and if, you plan on selling your home. Generally, most improvements will not recoup their full cost if you sell the house within one year. Kitchen remodeling projects and bathroom additions typically recover your investment value quickly, while finishing a basement is usually the slowest to pay back.\* Payback time frames will vary with the economy and strength of the housing market in your neighborhood. A "Buyer's Market" means longer payback periods.

If you intend on selling your house in the near future, use the existing size and value of the house compared to the rest of the neighborhood to help determine how much to spend on the project. Examine the financial value of the *improvements*. This is not the same as the construction cost. Determine how much the house is worth prior to the addition and then try to get a feel for what the house would be worth when you are finished by looking at comparable properties. The difference between these two is the financial value of the improvements and represents the money that could be recovered if you were to sell your house in the near future. This represents a good starting budget.

If you intend to live in your home for years to come, short-term return-on-investment figures don't really matter. The longer you stay in your home, the longer you'll enjoy a higher quality of life because of the improvements you make... any you can't put a price on that.

When trying to determine the size and use of your addition, you should carefully examine your assumptions about how much space you need. The existing space in homes is often poorly utilized. This is typically due to a poor fit between the original design of the house and the lifestyle of the current homeowners. This problem can often be solved through a renovation, allowing the size of your addition to be reduced and the quality of your finished home to be increased for the same cost. Remember that the smaller you make your addition the higher the quality of the detailing and materials that you can use. Since most people prefer a smaller home with more character to a larger one with very little, it's usually best to think in terms of better square feet and not more square feet.

Come up with a list of desirable design characteristics for your addition. Involve your entire family. Many homeowners assemble a "shoebox" full of design ideas to share with their design professional. When thinking about features that you would like, remember that this is your home and not a museum. It should express your lifestyle and be comfortable to live in. Don't make decisions solely

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\* 2003 Cost vs. Value Report, Remodeling Magazine

to impress the neighbors. In assembling your list, be careful not to lose the positive aspects of your home. Instead, try and build upon them.

Finally, when you have an idea about what you want and how much you can spend, hire a design professional to make sure you get the best results for your money. Don't be shy about expressing your desires and ideas. This is exactly what architect's want to hear. Their job is to help you realize your dreams.

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- Why add on?
  - Your house has become too small for your family's lifestyle but you like the neighborhood so much that you are reluctant to move. Putting an addition onto your house is usually less costly than trading up to a larger house in the same neighborhood
  - You are looking for a new home and you find a house that would be perfect if it had ...
  - You want to increase the value of the home before you sell.
- Carefully examine your assumptions about how much space you need. It's usually best to think in terms of better square feet and not more square feet.
- The existing space in homes is often poorly utilized. This is typically due to a poor fit between the design of the house and the lifestyle of the homeowners. These impediments can be removed through a renovation, allowing the size of your addition to be reduced and the quality of your finished home to be increased for the same cost.
- Be careful not to lose the positive aspects of your home. Instead, build upon them. Start by listing all the things about your current home that you like. Involve your entire family. Once you have a list, your design professional can help you highlight these elements in the existing portion and carry them over into the addition
- Remember that this is your home and not a museum. It should express your lifestyle and be comfortable to live in. Don't make decisions solely to impress the neighbors.
- If you intend of selling your house in the near future, use the existing size and value of the house compared to the rest of the neighborhood to help determine how much to spend on the project.
  - Examine the financial value of the improvements. This is not the same as construction cost. Determine how much the house is worth prior to the addition and try to get a feel for what the house would be worth when you are finished by looking at comparable properties. The difference between these two is the financial value of the improvements and represents money that could be recovered if you were to sell the house in the near future. This represents a good starting budget.
  - Generally, most improvements will not recoup their full cost if you sell the house within a year. Kitchen remodeling projects and bathroom additions typically recover your investment value quickly, while finishing a basement is the slowest to pay back.
  - Payback time frames will vary with the economy and strength of the housing market in your neighborhood. A "Buyer's Market" means longer payback periods.
- If you intend to live in your home for years to come, short-term return-on-investment figures don't really matter. The longer you stay in your home, the longer you'll enjoy a higher quality of life because of the improvements you make... and you can't put a price on that.
- Adding a new porch to the south or west elevation can help shade the house from the sun as well as present an open friendly face to the neighborhood.
- Take advantage of the addition to improve your yard. You can change the grading to provide space for outdoor activities or add landscaping elements.
- Adding a second story onto your house can be expensive (20% or more than building the same square footage on the ground). But, in many cases, lot restrictions make this the only viable option for an addition and it is sometimes worth the investment both in terms of improved quality of life and financial return.
- Your existing heating, cooling and hot water systems probably won't be sufficient for the added square footage and will need to be upgraded.

- Hire a design professional to make sure you get the best results for your money. Don't be shy about expressing your desires and ideas. This is exactly what architects want to hear. Their job is to help you realize your dreams.

References for additional information:

Updating Classic America- Bungalows, by M. Caren Connolly and Louis Wasserman  
2003 Cost vs. Value Report, Remodeling Magazine