



HOW TO SAVE MONEY ON AN EXTENSION Part 1

Adding space to your home doesn't have to break the bank. Whether you're working with a tight budget or simply want to keep a close eye on spending, **Rebecca Foster** shows how to get the best value for money. And don't miss next month's issue to discover another 15 ways to save money on your extension project

1 Plan the size carefully

Building a smaller addition doesn't mean it'll be cheaper. There's an economy of scale on every project, so you'll want to strike a balance somewhere in the middle to get maximum value per m². "For every job there are site set up and running costs – insurance, scaffolding, skips etc. The smaller the project the higher these are as a percentage," says James Munro, director at Granit Architects. "There's a sweet spot where the work is big enough to build efficiently, without it being so complicated and prolonged that it swings the other way."

2 Type of project

Exactly what scheme will offer the best value (ie single-storey, double-storey, side-return or loft extension) hinges on the unique features of your existing property and what you hope to gain from the project. On a per m² basis, double-storey additions tend to reap high returns as you're building one set of foundations and roof for double the space compared to a single storey on the same footprint. But if there's enough headroom, a loft conversion could be a cheaper route to adding space and value. The



Above & top: This side-return kitchen extension was designed and built by **Simply Extend** (www.simplyextend.co.uk). Opting for a straightforward brick and block structure was one way of keeping costs down. Another reason the homeowner chose to work with this company was the fixed price contract associated with the build. Detailed stage payments were laid out prior to work starting on site, so they knew what to pay and when

costs will be influenced by what you need to do to the existing structure, too, in terms of re-jigging the layout.

3 Simplicity of design

Building your extension in a straightforward shape will be cheaper. When you add curved walls, clever angles or cantilevered structures, expect costs to rise.

4 Consider a fixed-price design

An architect can help you determine the best areas to spend money for maximum wow. If you're working to a tight budget, it makes sense to invest in their services for the pre-planning design stage of the project, rather than having them administer the contract later on. "Like many practices we offer a fixed fee up to planning, before moving into something more bespoke after that," says Simon Drayson, director at George & James Architects.

5 Get detailed drawings done

Spend plenty of time in the design phase to avoid headaches later. "At the early concept stage, we undertake a review of estimated costings on a m² basis to ensure

sum of money is going to change hands. A contract doesn't have to be a vast tome – just a five-page document that outlines where you, the client, and your builder stand. Having everything nailed down – particularly regarding when payments will be made and what happens in the event of any dispute – could pay dividends later.

8 Seek multiple quotes

Obtain three to five quotes when you put the project out to tender – this will give you a good feel for the market rate for the job. Remember, though, cheapest isn't always best. If a quote looks too good to be true, then ask yourself how the builder came to this sum and triple check the elements that are (and aren't!) included.

9 Check like-with-like

There's a difference between getting an estimate for a job and an accurate quote. "For quotes, you need to create a tender pack including architectural plans, technical plans, structural design, schedule of works and specification. It should also have a list of client supply items and a pricing schedule against which

Below: This addition by Granit Architects (www.granit.co.uk) was completed on a modest budget. To keep costs down, standard door sizes were specified rather than bespoke. The project also went through a detailed cost engineering assessment at the design stage to see how to scale back and simplify the scheme



we're not getting carried away with a design that's going to be prohibitive," says Ben Embrey from Base Architecture.

6 Use tried-and-tested systems

Be sure to use a build system that your contractor is familiar with to avoid having to go back and fix any mistakes later. "A traditional method of brick and block, or block and block with render, is hard to beat in terms of cost efficiency," says James from Granit. "The cost benefits of offsite construction kick in at larger scales."

7 Put robust contacts into place

Even if you're undertaking a small project, a large

the builder will input prices," says Johnny Lovett from Parkwood Builders. "Sending out this information means all the invited tenders have a standardised set of info and a pricing schedule to complete and you'll get prices back in the same formatted document. This will make your analysis of which one to choose a lot simpler."

10 Think twice before moving load bearing walls

If your project involves drastic changes to the floorplan, consider the budget implications that will be involved in relocating load bearing partitions. "This has significant cost," says James Munro. "New steels or structural

Right: To keep costs down, the owners of this house tracked down some materials abroad. The parquet flooring establishes a luxurious aesthetic and was sourced for just £7 per m². The project was delivered by Parkwood Builders (www.parkwoodbuilders.co.uk)



Above: This compact extension was designed by A2studio (www.a2studio.co.uk). Use of stained cladding has been used to accent the part of the structure that projects out into the side return, providing wow factor without breaking the bank

timber and associated works involve much more work than replastering and decorating.”

11 Lock down the design (and don't change your mind!)

Making ad hoc alterations as you progress through the build may cause costs to spiral. “The golden rule of construction is not to change your mind once the building contract has been signed,” says Simon from George & James. “It can lead to additional costs from the builder and professional fees from the architect, amongst others, for abortive or additional work.”

12 Reuse materials

As well as helping you save money on buying new items, recycling elements from your existing home will save on skip hire costs as you'll be generating less waste. Bricks, roof tiles and slates could all be incorporated into your new extension. “For example, the table in my kitchen is made out of old decking joists with legs fabricated from the old garage purlins,” says Ben. “It cost me £30 in screws, paint and wood stain.”

13 Reuse your kitchen

The same logic applies to units and appliances – if they're still in good condition, you might be able to reuse, reconfigure and update your old kitchen. If you've got your heart set on something new, you could always wait until your finances have recovered from the project and fit your dream setup later down the line.

14 Consider project managing

Taking on this role yourself is one way to save pennies. However, don't underestimate the time, skill and organisation that'll be required to run the build effectively. If you're working to a tight budget, it may be that you can share some of the management responsibilities with your contractor. The builder could oversee construction until watertight stage, for instance, at which point you could take over and manage the rest of the sub-contractors.

15 Use good builders & trades

This is one of the most important points here. Hiring reputable pros will save you pouring money down the drain on remedial work that might be needed to correct sub-standard jobs. “Carry out pre-tender due diligence by researching builders. Look for those affiliated with trade organisations like the Federation of Master Builders,” says Johnny from Parkwood. “These companies have been through a stringent process to achieve accreditation.”

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HOW TO SAVE MONEY ON AN EXTENSION Part 2

Rebecca Foster identifies 15 more areas where making smart choices before and after your project goes on site can keep costs down

Above: In a bid to save money, much of the roof finish from the original building was utilised on this new extension by Alter & Company. Further cost-savings were achieved via careful reduction in the sizes of windows and doors

1 Avoid paying for work upfront

Protect yourself by avoiding any hefty upfront payments before work has started. Deposits may be required on some projects, especially those that will run over a long period. However, the Citizen's Advice Bureau advises against parting with any more than 25% of the whole project fee (10% is typical). Even then, make sure you get a receipt for your deposit that corresponds to your legal contract. If a deposit is required for materials, one option could be to purchase them yourself.

2 Focus on the big-ticket items

Sink your cash into the structure and materials you won't be changing later on, such as exterior finishes, roof tiles and glazing. "We advise clients to invest in long term decisions, such as structural alterations, with a view to saving money on short term solutions like paint," says Simon Drayson from George & James. Items that fall into the latter category can be upgraded later when your coffers have had the chance to build up again.

3 Get value-for-money wow factor

A professional designer can help you identify where best to spend your money to create impactful design features that don't blow the budget. "The choice

of materials is a big factor," says Ben Embrey from Base Architecture. "There are various solutions that can give 80% of the aesthetic at 50% of the cost. Another way to incorporate striking design details on a budget is to use expensive or exotic materials on a smaller scale, to accent certain features in the build."

4 Look for standard products & solutions

Buying off the shelf rather than going bespoke is another way to conserve cash. Speak to your designer about planning your extension around standard window and door widths, for instance. Made to measure glazing is one key area likely to hike the cost of your build substantially.

5 Investigate ground conditions & drains

Good pre-build investigations will help you to avoid getting tripped up by surprises once the work is underway. Ground conditions are one of the most unpredictable areas of any project, so digging trial holes early will give you a feel for what the terrain is like, minimising your exposure to risk. "It's also a good idea to establish drainage locations where you can," says Ben. "You can get pretty much anything to work, but it brings the cost down substantially if a simple drainage connection is achievable."

6 Explore party wall solutions

If you're building near a party wall, you may be able to come to an arrangement with your neighbour(s) without having to spend money on a formal agreement (do still write it down!). This has the potential to save £1,000s, especially if you can avoid specialist surveyors. However, it is dependent on a good relationship with the people living next door, so it's worth getting neighbours onside early and maintaining cordial communication throughout.



A2studio are the brains behind this single-storey North London extension, which features a cost-effective blockwork shell with a rendered finish

7 Consider using self-employed trades

Any extension to an existing building will attract the 20% rate of VAT on labour and materials. One way to claw back some of this extra cash may be to hire sub-contractors who earn under the VAT threshold, so don't have to charge you it in the first place. Just don't skimp on references etc.

8 Don't go too open plan

A spacious kitchen-living-dining zone may be at the top of your wish list, but the more open the space is, the more structural steels are likely to be involved. This, in turn, will add to costs. If you live in a property with more than two-storeys, going open-plan on the ground floor may call for extra fire safety measures (such as sprinkler/misting systems or fire curtains) to be installed, too.

9 Plan the interior fit-out

Dedicate plenty of time to researching good quality fixtures, finishes and fittings that will offer a long service life and good value for money. Strategise by investing in a few luxury items and pairing them with lower-cost options for maximum effect. For example, high-end worktops could be laid atop cost-effective units from IKEA.

10 Think twice before going DIY

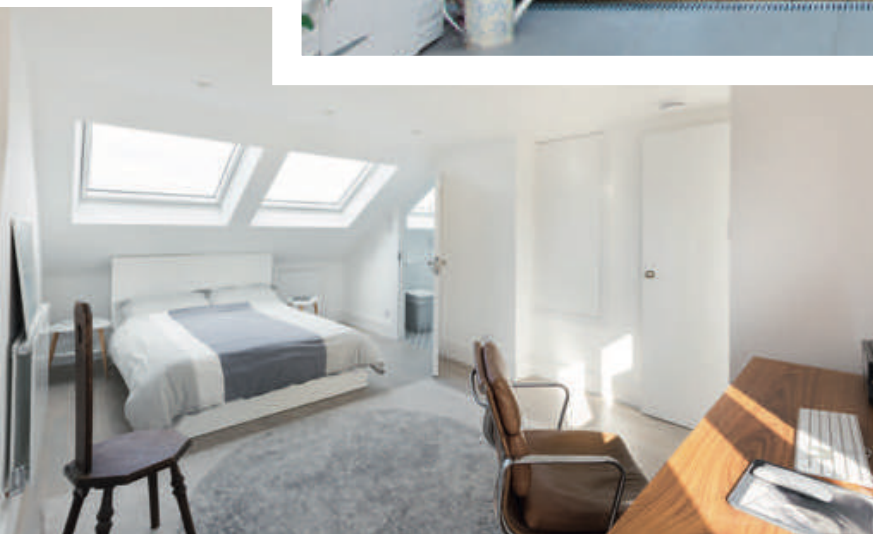
While getting hands-on could save money on small, straightforward tasks, it's best to leave the more complex jobs to the professionals. You might spend

Left: Investing in the structure and exterior finishes of your new addition is one way to make the most of your budget. Featuring gold-coloured copper cladding, this rear extension by James Dale Architects is a case in point. The wow-factor scheme was completed for £83,000

Right: On trend Crittall-style glazing gives this extension real wow factor. Typically, choosing French doors over bifolds or sliders offers a more cost-effective route when it comes to choosing glazing; and it can still offer a great garden connection



MEGAN TAYLOR



Above: Loft conversions are widely considered to be one of the best value routes to adding space. This project was carried out by Simply Loft, and has added a versatile master bedroom with an ensuite and work area. Right: Base Architecture designed this single storey extension to a grade II listed house. The owner kept on top of construction progress through daily catchups with her builder, as well as organising skips and sourcing materials herself to cut costs

more in the long-run if you need to bring in a decorator to fix the feature wall you made a mess of – even getting a good paint finish is harder than you might think!

11 Programme the works carefully Work closely with your team to plan an efficient build programme. If you are project managing, this means getting materials delivered at the right times so goods are on site and ready for the relevant trades. This will avoid the pitfall of subbies having too much downtime on site (ie periods when you're paying them but they can't work)

12 Tap into existing services If you can, building on existing distribution will avoid your electrician/plumber having to spend time re-routing pipes or cabling to fit a new layout. The average hourly rate for these trades typically ranges between £40 and £60, so you could potentially save £100s by working together to make the job as simple as possible.

13 Visit site & communicate This is essential to ensure work is progressing as you intend it to. Regular discussions with your contractor or trades will mean that any issues come to light sooner rather than later. This gives you an opportunity to fix these details before you need to backtrack too far, potentially saving you the cost and delay of undoing work.

14 Maintain a tidy workplace This is an easy job to keep on top of yourself. A clean and organised site means everything's easy to see and access. Plus, your build team won't need to spend time shuffling materials around and tidying up every morning before cracking on with their work.

15 Make sure snagging is included in the contract Your contracts should include holding back an agreed retention fee to cover snagging, with final walk-throughs to take place at an agreed time and date. By this point, any major faults should already have been addressed during your regular visits to the site. This final inspection provides an opportunity to have any minor niggles remedied. And if the trade in question doesn't want to do the work and get paid that final sum, then at least you'll have some cash to fall back on so you can get someone else to do it.



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