

Additions

While older homes are admired for their character and charm, many potential buyers pass them by in favor of newly constructed homes with the modern amenities they have come to expect. Even those that do purchase older homes often expect to sell and buy bigger once their family expands and the small kitchen and single bathroom no longer accommodate their needs. However, with a little vision and creativity, older homes can easily be modernized to today's standards with the added benefit of quality craftsmanship and unparalleled charm. To start the modernizing process on your home, ask yourself the following questions:

1) Is the house structurally sound?

Before considering an expansion or renovation, make sure critical systems are sound including the foundation, framing, and roof.

2) What part of my house does not function properly for my lifestyle?

Set priorities on rooms or part of the house that are unsightly, dysfunctional, or both.

3) How concerned am I with my return on investment (ROI)?

Don't get caught up in ROI calculations; do what fits your needs. Suffice it to say that any home renovation project will return at least one-half its cost and most return over three quarters of the investment. In the meantime, you get to enjoy the results. When you do sell, it's likely that someone else out there probably thinks like you and will value the improvements you've made. However, if you are looking to make improvements that are typically desired by most homeowners, you may want to consult a real estate professional to help shed light on what is expected in today's housing market.

4) Do I really need more square footage?

Often, existing space can be repurposed to fit your needs. Even some large two-story houses can seem small because of the layout of interior walls. Removing a non-load bearing wall can create new space and is far less expensive. Converting an attic or basement can add considerable square footage without the need for new construction. Also consider that adding to the building envelope will increase your heating/cooling load. The following are some ideas for 'repurposing' space within your home's existing footprint:

- Rear porches, common in traditional floor plans, are good opportunities to convert existing footprint to other functions. Rear porches can be converted to support a new bathroom, a kitchen expansion, or both.

- Unfinished attic or basement space can be converted into extra bedrooms, office space, a media room, or a recreation room.
- Older houses are notorious for the lack of closet space. A small upstairs bedroom can become a large walk-in closet, a master bathroom, and even a laundry room.
- Breakfast nooks make a nice pantry if the original table and bench seating have already been removed. This area can also become a home for the refrigerator, a half bath, or provide more square footage in the kitchen.
- Remove an interior wall between the kitchen and dining areas.

More information on repurposing space specific to a particular style can be found in the Architectural Patterns section of this document.

5) If an addition is needed, should I go up or out?

If you decide you need to expand the envelope of your house, consider how you expand. Rear additions are most appropriate and typically the only option on narrow city lots. Moreover, zoning regulations generally provide the most leeway to the rear with an average minimum setback of 15 feet in residential districts. Side additions may also be appropriate in the form of wings or dependencies subordinate to the original house. If you have a two-story house, keeping the new foundation small and building up will save money and save valuable yard space. The following are some ideas for rear and side additions:

- Enlarge the kitchen. Kitchens are generally much larger now and have a greater function than just a place to prepare meals. Having some eat-in component is now considered mandatory. Kitchens are commonly located on the rear of the house and are ideal candidates for a rear addition.
- Add a downstairs bathroom. If the house does not have a main-floor bathroom, adding one should be a priority. Modern expectations dictate at least a half-bath on the first floor.
- Adding a large bedroom and bathroom (master suite) is ideal for vertical expansion to the rear.
- Consider relationships with outdoor living spaces. A French door on the rear can create/improve the relationship to a patio, balcony, or deck.

Remember to always consult a professional and ensure that additions are designed and built so that the form and character of the primary residence will remain intact if the addition is ever removed. More information on additions specific to a particular style can be found in the Architectural Patterns section of this document.