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Is it time to move... or improve?

Lockdown has sparked a home makeover boom and a sharp rise in property sales. So whether you're looking to maximise your home's potential or relocate for a better life, read on for inspiration and practical advice

IT'S BEEN A GOOD YEAR FOR AMBITIOUS RENOVATIONS
By Anna White

Ever since March, we have been staring at our four walls, assessing our housing needs. Never before have we done so much living in our own homes and, it seems, felt so dissatisfied with our lot.

The upshot is an uptick in home sales and also in home improvements. Both have been sluggish over the past three

years, owing to Brexit uncertainty, but this summer's hurried quest for space has reawakened our obsession with renovation. New data from Santander shows that UK homeowners applied for planning permission for more than 60,000 extensions and conversions in the first 13 weeks of the lockdown.

Once complete, these projects will add more than 150million sq ft to British housing stock in statement kitchens, extra bedrooms and converted attics.

"In April we saw a surge in demand for small-scale jobs, such as redecorating," says Rory Gordon, founder of Good London Builders. People were spending more time at home eyeing up patchy paint jobs. "Next there was a run on outbuildings that could double up as home offices, and more recently we are doing full-scale renovations as the property market regains momentum."

The pipeline of projects in Santander's analysis totals £1.9 billion and is

being funded by savings and a rise in remortgaging. "When people buy a new home they typically live in it for around 10 months before they remortgage to renovate," says Andrew Montlake of mortgage broker Coreco.

"On top of this usual demand flow, the lockdown has been a catalyst with more people wanting permanent home studies and garden rooms," he says. Low

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Charlotte Jones-Pearl

interest rates - the base rate was held at 0.1 per cent last week by the Bank of England - are another motivating factor. "Customers are coming back within their fixed-rate period to refinance, or asking the bank for a further advance (an additional loan with the same lender)," says Moustaki. Some banks are even offering five home valuations and legal services with a mortgage to entice for customers.

For Wandsworth architect Oliver Leech, the rise in renovations is not just down to necessity but also a shift in mindset caused by Covid. "People are looking to do their dream project," says Leech. "These plans are to remain in place for five years are taking the pressure off," he says. "There is a feeling among my clients that life is short and the future uncertain. Rather than housing from one door up to the next, they are investing their savings in the creation of one very special home for the long term."

Without exception, his clients want a study or a breakfast room that performs many functions. Through clever joinery a desk, shelving and printer can fold away into a cabinet at the end of the day. The reverse is also true: Leech is designing offices with a bar, desk and sofa that transform into a guest room.

Other new priorities include tech. "We need to design in cables for internet routers that in the key spaces of the house - some every room must have



A Biara Bennett-Britton, 41, spent months re-arranging extensions with her husband. They're re-arranging on the process of choosing a design company to draw up plans for a glass and aluminium rear extension on their three detached house near Tufnell in Islington, which they finished using savings.

pro-eco energy consultant to fit into the budget for foot camps. The couple are trying to create Covid-proof facilities in a future that favours outdoor working.

After four months in a small rental house during the lockdown they learned the importance of creating separate spaces for different members of the household. With Neil also working from home the pair needed another office, away from the kitchen.

Costs of spiralling costs, he bought a cabin from eBay for £2,500, transported it by trailer and got it together himself. "It was a bit of a mess, several workstations, all neatly distanced, so we could also use it in the future as co-working space," says Bryony. "But it would also make a lovely office training studio - we're yet to have that built."

Delays are inevitable on structural projects but the virus halted work altogether. Two builders carried on in different parts of the house but it was difficult to find enough people to carry and embed the rebar steel posts. Eventually Neil managed to put a team together himself. Work continued at a slower pace until a plaster shortage then hit the UK. "It was six months of the pink powder war," says Oliver Leech. Other material supply chains broke down too.

"We always knew we would consult our savings to this but we had expected to be working full-time too. On the flip side Neil was able to project manage it with our excellent carpenter then that house began, but his capacity on Instagram."

In what are Bryony's tips, having completed the renovation during a global pandemic? "Don't be afraid to complain," she says. "I had to get the plasterers back twice as their plastering of the high ceilings was shabby." And juggle over everything, she adds, follow the final touches on Instagram at the granary renovated.

Living over time and over budget are common pitfalls of renovating projects, warns Leech, who recommends that

ing an architect who you get with as there will be times of tension.

"Set out clear costs and a contract, at 30 per cent of build plus and on design," he says. "I also suggest clients keep back a 10pc contingency budget to cover hidden surprises, and if you are going to go it alone without a project manager or build partner, you need time and dedication."

Biara Bennett-Britton, 41, spent months re-arranging extensions with her husband. They're re-arranging on the process of choosing a design company to draw up plans for a glass and aluminium rear extension on their three detached house near Tufnell in Islington, which they finished using savings.

"When I first came to view the property I stood in the back garden and could see what I wanted to change," says Bennett-Britton, who has two children. "As an Australian living in the UK I wanted to make the most of the good weather when it comes with a little bit that opens out into the garden."

"I was getting over post-metal depression at the time so I began with lots of natural light and a strong connection to the garden was really important to me."

"If you are going to go it alone without a project manager, you need time and dedication"

This sentiment resonated across the country during lockdown as people tried to nature for value and space. The project broke ground in July 2019 but suffered a series of delays. Owing to the roots of a nearby tree, the foundations had to go deeper and wider than planned and matching the brickwork was difficult. "The brick is not a standard size and more distressed, to fit in with the period cottages in the village. After hours of calling around brick merchants and turning up at different manufacturers I tracked them down to York. They were handmade bricks that had not been produced for 30 years," she explains. As they needed 3,500 bricks, the Yorkshire merchant required production for the Bennett-Brittons.

They were finally approaching completion in February. The island, with its non-porous black Casarredo top, was in place and the kitchen units were delivered but not installed. Everything was covered in Correx plastic sheets and all the building equipment was stored at the dining end of the room. Then the UK shut down.

"I couldn't believe the sequence of things going wrong. Had no idea when we would be up and renovating and I



What will our homes look like in 2030? For the answers, see today's Telegraph Magazine

4 James and Ally Downing Reynolds, who have transformed their Grade II listed home in Leeds

I NEED MORE SPACE FOR MY GROWING BUSINESS

Chloris Awa, 32, was a property paralegal with a baking business on the side but she always hoped to quit the day job as a business development lead. "I was frustrated, so I focused on my business and started looking for a second wave of demand. I had to be careful and work hard to store my cakes, a separate fridge and 35 litre containers for flour and sugar."

Awa is living in shared rental flat on the first floor of a new build apartment block in Poplar with little view space. So, she is now looking for a place to either rent or renovate in Fulham, near her customer base. But what are the red flags when it comes to finding the right property to renovate?

"I can't be tempted by the promise of a Grade II listed building or anything in a conservation area due to strict rules on what can be altered," says Becky Farnell, founder of high-end estate agent Bokstone Properties and Property Doctor for the Telegraph. "You need delivery based business. Chloris will need good parking and for any renovation work she will need easy access to the back of the property - particularly if she is thinking about a rear kitchen extension or side entry. Avoid buildings with lifts too, she adds.

HOW TO HOUSE YOUR SIDE HUSTLE



4 James and Ally Downing Reynolds, who have transformed their Grade II listed home in Leeds

THE PANDEMIC HAS TAUGHT US THAT WE WANT TO FEEL RELAXED, HAPPY AND CALM AT HOME

with a bold jungle pattern called Mischievous Monkeys by Rebel Walls. Although the structural part of the project was completed before lockdown, the experience shaped the way they designed the downstairs bedroom suite - the old kitchen. "It has its own suite, its own gate into the garden and its own front door. There's space in the room for a desk and the Peloton bike too in case Phil has to travel with work and needs to still isolate," she says.

Ally and James Downing Reynolds, both who completed their renovation project this summer. They too were influenced by his home life. The couple, who run direct retailer flooring & Reynolds, bought their home in Leeds from a development firm that had restored the dilapidated Grade II listed building.

They set to work transforming their blank canvas, starting with the kitchen and master bedroom. There is a built-in desk in both these rooms. They painted the master bedroom pink in last November, the Downing & Reynolds signature shade with bold artwork by Cassandra Yap. The kitchen walls are spray-painted blue, but pendant lighting, dropped to wooden planks, add light and soften the look, along with moss-green walls.

The bathroom and hallway, which were redecorated during the lockdown, have an altogether different feel. "We wanted a tranquil bedroom space in which to unwind," says James. He designed a wall to go in the middle of the bathroom with a shower on one side and the bath on the other with inset shelving for lotions and potions. Red tones line one side of the wall as a natural backdrop behind the stone rain bath. The bathroom renovation cost close to £7,000 but they used their own products and secured second-hand items such as a chair.

The design also originally painted the hallway dark to match the rest of the house but found a striking contrast in the shadowed space from the outdoors was preferable, so it was light and uplifting.

Home renovations are stressful enough, but the typical pitfalls of delays and rising costs have been multiplied by the lockdown, along with an inability to escape the back chat and chaos. If you are undertaking a renovation as a couple, it's worth deciding what your roles will be before the work begins.

James and Ally Downing Reynolds designed different rooms from each other, while Bryony and Neil Bennett had different roles - he led on structure and she decided on design. Biara Bennett-Britton project managed her renovation while her husband Phil took a back seat.

"The most important thing the pandemic has taught us is that we want to feel relaxed, happy and calm at home," says Downing Reynolds. "We have designed the rooms to help support those emotions such as feeling energised and focused in the home office, de-stressed in the bathroom, and cosy and cocooned in the living room as we look into an uncertain future."



good Wi-Fi," says Leech. Bryony Bennett-Britton and her husband Neil moved from Clapham to Harwards Heath in 2012 to find a ramshackle house with land and create their forever home. After seven years of renting they sold their Clapham home and bought an old granary and pig shed in a nearby village. They started work on it just three weeks before the national lockdown was imposed. The intention was always to create a practical family home for three boys, 10-year-old Cameron, Alex, who is eight, and six-year-old Lecky. But doing the project during the pandemic changed the end result. Midway through they realised their home must meet both family and career needs.

The two former traders added two bedrooms to make a six-bedroom house, ripped out the law porch and built a new flat facade with a large window. The kitchen is now double the size (100 sq ft) and runs from the front of the house to the back. "We always wanted to extend the kitchen, but it's far bigger than we first hoped," says Bryony, who runs her own nutrition and fitness business with her husband. During the lockdowns she was holding healthy cookery classes on Zoom from a rental home while work on the granary was under way. With future nutrition workshops in mind she wanted a professional kitchen with a large island. Once lockdown restrictions are fully lifted it will be able to get five people on each side of the island. Whether lessons are online or in person, it's now a kitchen I am proud to work from," she says.

The new layout house also complements her personal training practice. There is a separate entrance into the back room with a shower, and Neil is



TOP FIVE RENOVATIONS TO ADD THE MOST VALUE

1 Ultimately, building above ground is the best way to gain extra space and return on a cost-effective way to increase your property's square footage and create an open-plan statement kitchen that connects to the back garden. This type lets the current trend of building inside with outside and can add 10 per cent to the value of your home.

2 Loft conversions add the most value (15-18 per cent) at the lowest cost but buyers want a complete bedroom suite, master suite to add a bathroom too.

3 A two-storey extension can allow the addition of another bedroom, which is the simplest way to increase value when marketing a property. Of course this bedroom could double up as a study too, creating current needs.

4 Depending on the attitude of local planners, there's a growing trend to convert barns into modern homes that they'll spread on using what you've got to dig out the basement, potentially adding 10-15 per cent to the value of your home.

5 Outbuildings are a clever way of adding extra rooms if you have already maximised the main building. Not only are they flexible and can change use easily, they can change use easily.

*Figures provided by Savills

MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT YOU HAVE



4 Leslie and Martin (pictured) reduced the help of a French House to improve the layout of their Chelsea terrace house

WE NEEDED MORE STORAGE SPACE

Martin (pictured) says his two-bedroom London terrace house in Central London was beautiful but not practical, with little storage. Hannah, who runs the Jane label Vintage Music, and his wife Leslie, founder of Felina London jewellery, also needed a creative space to work from home.

The pair have amazing artwork and sculptures from around the world that they wanted to display, while opening up the first-floor living room into a space that could switch from study to entertaining space.

Q Design House took on the project, which ended this summer. The brief was not to add square footage but maximise the layout.

The central wall on the first floor and hallway were stowed to create an open-plan first floor. Clever joinery heated their art facts, with light fixtures that changed with the function of the room. The chimeys were replaced, doors ripped up and underfloor heating laid and all bedrooms refitted. Q Design House used lots of marble for vanity worktops and polished plaster to create tiles and great.

"Thankfully we made the decision to do the project before we knew what was coming. It is now even more important to us to have space and work areas, and we have an environment that is inspiring," says Martin.

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