

How to add space and value to your home

With so many of us spending more time at home, building a garden room can not only maximise space and provide downtime, it could also be a wise investment. It's a win-win, says Jessica Doyle



The live-work studio

When interior designer Jen Choate (interiorfox.co.uk) and her husband decided to add a garden building to their London home, they wanted to maximise the available space to create a structure that could house guest accommodation, as well as an office that could be completely separate from the house. "We did consider buying a prefabricated building initially, but then we had one custom-designed for our garden, and I'm so glad we did," says Choate. "It gave us the opportunity to include a bathroom and kitchen, which you don't get with an off-the-peg one."



◀ Jen Choate, pictured left, opted for Japanese/Scandinavian decor to give her garden room a minimal feel

▲ The main part of the interior is one open-plan room with a small kitchenette

The main part of the interior is one open-plan room, with a table and chairs on one side and a small kitchenette. Originally Choate had wanted to incorporate a mezzanine level with a bed, but this was rejected by the planners as it would have made the structure too tall, so plan B was a Murphy (pull-down) bed attached to the wall, which proved to be too much of a technical challenge. Her solution was a system of stacked mattresses set against an upholstered wall on the left side of the room, which acts as a daybed when not needed for guests, and fold out into a super king size bed. Built-in storage cupboards have been fitted either side of the bed, and another near the table.

The shower room is on the right-hand side, and there's also a small gym in a separate room on the left-hand side of the building, accessed via a hidden door concealed within the cladding. Decor-wise, Choate went for "a Japanese/Scandinavian vibe". "As I do my design work here I needed it to be an inspiring space," she says, "and we both wanted it to feel very minimal and clean, with light floors and light walls. It's very calming to work in."

As it faces north-west, the building is only hit by full sun in the early evening, so it remains relatively cool during the day. Thanks to good-quality glazing and plenty of insulation, it's also designed to be an energy-efficient as possible over winter. As the building is completely self-contained, it also offers the option of letting it out in future to make some extra income; but for now, it's reserved for family and friends at weekends, and as Choate's office during the week.



ANDREW CROWELEY FOR THE TELEGRAPH

The concept of a room of one's own has always had a certain appeal, and never more so than now. The working from home revolution – coupled with the growing trends for entertaining and exercising at home – has led to a growing demand for that extra space; and even better if it's a self-contained one, set apart from the house. No wonder, then, that building a standalone garden room is one of the most popular home-improvement plans for this year, according to research by the trades website Rated People. It could also be a wise investment: building a good-quality garden room can add value to your house and make it easier to sell, says Grant Letts of estate agent Curchods. "We recently marketed four comparative properties for sale and the only one featuring a garden room sold first. We estimate the added value to be around 1.25 times the cost of the garden room build, so if you pay £50,000 for a quality garden room, you can expect to see an increase of around £62,500 to the value of your property."

Compared with the cost of an extension or loft conversion, adding a garden room can be a relatively cost-effective (and less disruptive) way to add more square footage to your home, to use as an office, an extra living space or accommodation for guests. It can also add all-important breathing space for those who have outgrown their home but don't want to move. As long as your garden offers enough space to house a building, the options are limitless, as these examples demonstrate.



◀ Flock star: the shepherd's hut where interior designer Bee Osborn, below, is living while her house undergoes renovations

▼ Bee has found the experience of compact living to be liberating



The home from home

Interior designer Bee Osborn (osborninteriors.com) bought a shepherd's hut for her and her partner to live in while they renovate a derelict Cotswold cottage. She bought the hut from specialist company Arbor (arbor-shepherdhuts.co.uk; prices from £35,000; a model with bed, kitchen, bathroom and woodburner would be around £55,000), but sourced the materials herself and had it custom-made to suit her requirements and aesthetic. As the hut is on wheels, and situated close to the cottage, it's classed as a mobile home or caravan, so planning permission wasn't required, even though it is used as a sleeping area (in most situations, a caravan that is used as an annex of the house, and not hired out, will not need planning permission). With a footprint of 6 x 2.5 metres, the hut has a shower room and a small kitchen with a sink, a fridge with a freezer compartment, and storage for a microwave, kettle, toaster and coffee maker (cooking is done outside, on a barbecue with a hob on the side).

There's a woodburner to keep it cosy when the weather turns colder, as well as underfloor heating. The interior of the hut is clad in pine boards which have been sandblasted to bring out the raw character of the wood, then whitewashed so that they resemble reclaimed boards – a neat trick that is far cheaper than buying reclaimed wood cladding. Osborn has found the experience of compact living to be liberating. "There's a massive sense of freedom; less clutter, fewer decisions to be made; you can clean it from top to bottom in 20 minutes. There's something immensely relaxing about being here. It's the escapism thing, there's just something a bit different about it." Once she and her partner move into the cottage, the hut will then become a self-contained spare room for visiting friends and family, and Osborn plans to add a square tin bath outside too. "My grown-up daughters are already fighting over whose room it will be when they come to stay," she says.

The office/bar/breakout room

The owners of this bespoke garden room in Surrey both work from home, and needed an extra office space outside their house – but they also wanted a breakout area for their three young sons. According to designer Paul Ransom of Into the Garden Room (intothegardenroom.com), thinking in terms of multifunctionality is key when planning a garden room, to ensure it remains usable if your requirements change. "People often specify a garden office, or a garden gym," he says, "but I'll always ask, do you really want to devote a whole room just to an office, particularly if you're spending £30,000-

£40,000? A one-dimensional room is not a good investment, but with a bit of clever design you can make that room multifunctional. With a simple room divider, you could have an office on one side and a games room on the other."

In this case, the interior of the 6 x 4 metre building has been designed to accommodate various activities: two desks are set up in opposite corners, a leather sofa is positioned to face a wall-mounted television, and a central bar provides a socialising area. Bifold doors open the front of the building onto a covered deck for evening entertaining.



▲ Clever design offers multifunctionality

and pencil windows in the side allow further daylight to filter in. The building is clad in burnt larch boards, treated using the Japanese shou sugi ban technique, which helps to preserve the wood. A similar-sized structure would cost around £52,000.

The treatment room

This compact building was custom-designed for an osteopath to use as a quiet study space but also as a place to treat clients from home. With a footprint of 3.5 x 5 metres and a fairly low profile, it didn't require planning permission. "We needed to make it as affordable as possible," says architect Nicola Chambers (pardonchambers.com), "so we chose materials wisely. The doors are made from oak, so we offset that cost by



▲ Because of its low profile, this room didn't require planning permission

using more cost-effective timbers for the cladding – larch for the exterior and pine for the interior. We were also able to offer some unusual choices with the materials, such as the copper for the roof cladding, which gives it a unique, refined look."

The building is positioned to control solar gain during the day, and the doors are full height and slide back into the walls to maximise indoor-outdoor flow. A similar building would cost from around £40,000.

The off-the-peg option

The cheapest option for a garden room is usually a prefabricated version, which won't allow you to customise it in terms of materials or size, but will be relatively straightforward to buy and assemble. Prefab garden rooms can cost



▲ Prefab rooms can be relatively cheap

as little as a few thousand pounds (although this won't include assembly, or the concrete base, or the trench you'll need to dig in your garden if you want to connect the room to your electricity supply – all of which could add a few thousand more to the final cost). The garden room pictured is from Green Retreats (greentreats.co.uk), and costs £15,495 for a 2.2 x 2.2 metre building, which includes installation, flooring, wall finishes, heating and lighting.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING A GARDEN ROOM

A garden building that isn't going to be used as self-contained accommodation doesn't normally require planning permission, as long as it is at the side or back of the house, less than 3 metres in height (or 2.5 metres if it sits within two metres of your boundary), and, along with any other sheds or outbuildings, takes up no more than 50 per cent of the land

around the house. If you live in a conservation area, it must be at the back of the house. If you live in a listed building, you will require planning permission. If the garden building has a footprint of 30 sq metres or more, it will also need to comply with building regulations (at an extra cost of up to £5,000).

When choosing where to

place a garden room, avoid an overly sunny spot if possible. Paul Ransom of Into the Garden Room says to look at where the sun sets in July. "That will naturally give you the best position, because you don't want to be in full sun all day, but you do want to gain that extra light into the late afternoons and evenings, particularly if you want to

use your room for entertaining."

Your choice of cladding will have an impact on the price of your garden room, and the maintenance it will require. Wood cladding is the natural choice and will age well, but it will need to be oiled every 18 months or so to look its best. Composite cladding should last for 25 years

without needing any maintenance, but looks less authentic. To save on costs, Ransom suggests using industrial cladding on the sides you can't see, to save up to £4,000-£5,000.

Remember that the style of glazing you choose will have an impact on the view of your garden. For this reason, sliding doors are becoming more

popular than bifold doors, as they involve fewer glazing bars to interrupt the view. The benefit of bifold doors, however, is that the front of the room can be completely opened onto the garden.

Think of the future; you may not be able to afford to install a bath in your garden room at the time you have it built, but if it's something you

might want further down the line, it's worth having the plumbing put in at the start.

If you plan to keep expensive equipment in your garden room, think about fitting a smart home-security system.

It may be possible to claim back tax against some of the cost of building a garden office,

depending on whether you are self-employed, a sole trader or you own a limited company – seek advice from an accountant.

A well-built bespoke garden room should last around 25 years, according to Ransom. After that point, you might need to replace doors or windows, or upgrade the cladding.