

Don't move, improve!

Why bother with the cost of moving home when you can spend the same cash creating your dream pad where you are?

Catherine O'Dolan seeks out expert tips for home projects

Go high

A loft conversion can be a sound investment. 'Any additional square footage is highly valuable in London,' says Miles Shippide, housing market analyst at Rightmove. 'A suitable loft could upgrade your property from a two-bedroom price bracket to a three-bedroom one. You could get back twice what it cost.' The loft should be easy to access, says Ben Cousins of architects Cousins & Cousins, with good overhead space. 'You want to sense that you're not in a loft at all!'

Go low

'Basement conversions are not for the faint-hearted, both in terms of cost and upheaval,' warns Shippide. 'The rule of thumb is that it's worth doing either if it is ideally suited to your property, or if the property is in a sought-after location.' Cousins advises, 'You can do this to stunning effect with a feature deck or staircase, or have a double-height glass panel from the ground floor to the basement for a real 'wow' factor.'

Go reconfigure

Non-load-bearing walls can be removed to create open-plan living (expert advice essential: don't go wild with a sledgehammer). Don't forget the garden. 'An outside sitting space, stylish decking or a shielded patio and barbecue area is a real bonus to future buyers,' says Shippide. 'It might only be used a few times a year but the fact that it's there offers a positive feelgood factor.'

Extend

Kay Hughes's Gospel Oak home won New London Architecture's Don't Move, Improve competition. Architects Maccreeor Lavington turned the three-bed, one-bathroom home into a chic pad with four big bedrooms, two bathrooms, a study/library and large living room with kitchen. 'We could have spent the same moving [£250k], and got just one more bedroom,' says Hughes.

Think kitchen

'A kitchen refurbishment gives you the best bang for your buck, as you get the benefit of using and enjoying it every day,' says Shippide. 'Buyers love extra space, but it does not catch the eye quite like a smart kitchen that acts as the hub of the house.' Apart from happier mealtimes, what can you really expect a well-crafted new kitchen to bring to your home? Often around 5 to 15 percent added to the value of your property!

GETTING STARTED Check your local council's website for planning guidance before you even consult a professional for a quote, so you know your grand designs are achievable.

