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GRAND DESIGNS

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FINDING THE RIGHT ARCHITECT

Consider what your project's challenges are (small budget, limited space or a conservation area, for example), then cast a wide net for architects whose work you like. Local practices may have more experience with the local planners, and younger practices are more likely to take on smaller projects.

The RIBA has an online database of members, and runs a referral service to draw up a shortlist of suitable practices (020 7307 3700; architecture.com). The RIBA Awards and Manser Medal, as well as our own Grand Designs Awards, also offer a snapshot of some of the UK's best practices, and the Don't Move, Improve Awards (newlondonarchitecture.org) are a good way to find London architects. The Architects Journal Small Projects Award (architectsjournal.co.uk/events/small-projects) showcases innovative practices doing smaller work.

Next, you should meet a few architects for a consultation, and if you like them, get references from previous clients, asking not just if they are happy, but also if they would hire the architect again.

'Speak to a few practices, to get an idea of what's available,' says Richard De Boise at Zminkowska De Boise Architects (07916 533 513; zdbarchitects.com). 'You will be working together for a year on a typical build, so it's vital you get on.'



McGarry-Moon Architects came up with a surprising solution for this house in Northern Ireland. It features a contemporary upper floor inserted within – but not on – the walls of a stone barn, in order to lighten the load on the existing structure. (028 2954 2323; mcgarry-moon.com)



An architect can work sensitively with your existing building, as this two-storey extension by Cousins & Cousins shows. It gives the owners a new kitchen-diner downstairs and a new bedroom upstairs, but looks as though it has always been there. (020 7482 4009; cousinsandcousins.com)