

STORY
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An addition to your home can boost its value and improve the family's lifestyle but plan carefully before the builders move in

Make it bigger & better

Many homeowners who want a bigger and better home will consider renovating their current property rather than selling. If you want more space there are two main ways to go about it: extend at the same level and add a new master bedroom with walk-in robe and en suite or go up and add an extra floor.

SCENARIO 1 Extend at the same level

One of the most common projects homeowners are attracted to is adding a new master bedroom with en suite and walk-in robe. It makes a lot of sense for growing families: add another bedroom, which then gives you options to reshuffle the kids, gain a space for a study or even a small toy or TV room, and treat yourself to a new en suite to get you out of the grotty bathroom shared with the kids.

The value is obvious – you're the ones paying the mortgage so you should spoil yourself with some space of your own. Potential future buyers will certainly see the value as well. A four-bedroom home with a bathroom and en suite is far more attractive to a typical family than a three-bedroom house that shares one bathroom. And they'll be willing to pay extra for it.

Even if you already have a four-bedroom home there may still be a lot of appeal in this type of project, possibly to accommodate more kids or to cater for guests more comfortably. Another attractive consideration in a project of this type is the likelihood that in many cases you can continue to live in the home while the job is being completed. This has the potential to save you thousands of dollars in rent as well as being far

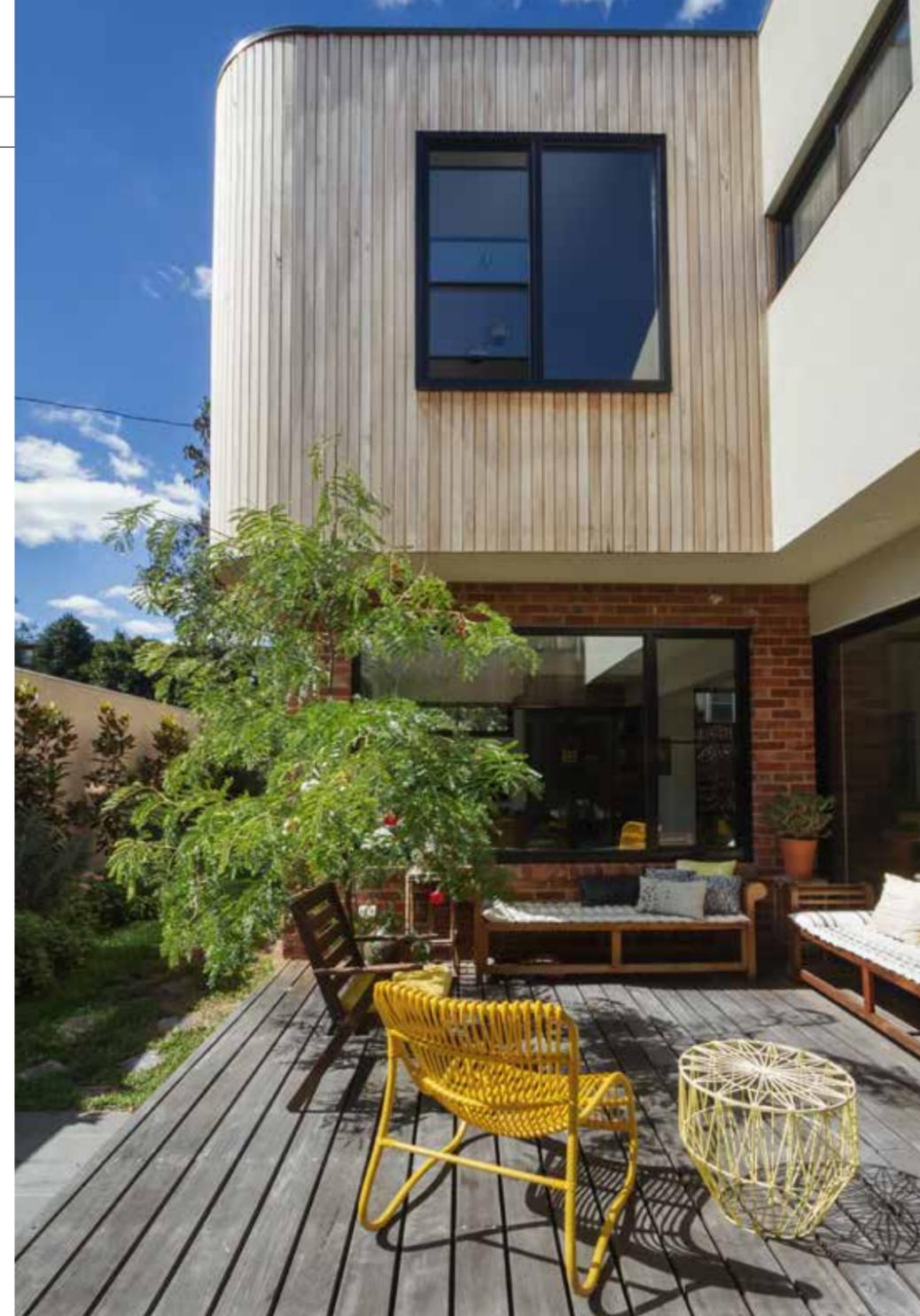
less disruptive to the routines of your life, which is an important factor when considering the demands of work, schooling and extracurricular activities.

What it will cost

Each project will be different and there are many influences and decisions that will contribute to the final cost. These include the location of your project and market conditions, council and planning considerations such as heritage restrictions, site accessibility and site conditions (slope, orientation, etc), the design and construction of the existing home and how easily the addition connects to it, the style and complexity of the proposed addition and, of course, your own personal preferences when it comes to selecting the finishes and fittings that will go into the new spaces. The price of a new toilet, for example, may range from \$300 to \$3000, so there is huge scope for costs to drift.

If the proposed additions are comfortable, mid-range and good quality rather than expansive and luxurious, this type of project will typically add 30-40sq m of floor space to the home. Assuming your project is without any significant complications and for the purposes of budgeting, you might expect to pay \$2700-\$4200 per sq m (depending on the above considerations) for the extent of the build that is new.

At this point it is important to understand the variability of building costs. The building industry often uses the cost/sq m method to help evaluate total building costs; however, it can be misleading. This is mainly due to the fact that the cost/sq m of building a bedroom is very different from the cost/sq m of building and finishing a bathroom or even a walk-in robe. This is because there are far more trades, finishes, joinery items and fittings



that go into a bathroom compared with a bedroom, so in reality the cost/sq m of a bathroom may be double that of a bedroom.

The takeaway from this is that if your en suite and walk-in robe are large and luxurious in proportion to the total size of the addition, you should budget at the upper end of the scale.

There are also likely to be some additional costs. For example, it is likely that the existing roof will be affected to a greater extent than the footprint of the new space, as it is integrated with the new roof.

Some demolition is likely to be required to execute the new work. If it is extensive the costs will increase, and you will also be exposed to potential

extra costs if load-bearing walls are affected. The knock-on cost after demolition is the "make good" work, such as new plastering, cornices, skirtings, painting and flooring, that then needs to be completed to seamlessly tie the new spaces to the existing home. If several existing walls have to be removed, these costs can be significant.

It is also likely that to make the new additions function properly, some modifications will need to be made to the inside of the existing house. A common example is that the toilet is removed to create a new hallway to access the new bedroom. This, of course, means that the toilet needs to be rebuilt as part of the new additions, adding another wet area to the costs.

Pro tips to keep you on track

- Invest in good design; it makes no sense to spend that amount of money badly! Work with a building designer or architect who has a proven track record of delivering projects of similar scale and budget to yours.
- Don't miss an opportunity to make the home more passively comfortable, meaning cooler in summer and warmer in winter, with less reliance on heating and cooling.
- Consider upgrading all the windows while you have the trades and suppliers already involved. If you live in a cooler climate you'll get great benefit from double-glazed windows.
- Sometimes small compromises result in big savings – for example, moving an existing load-bearing wall slightly to make a room a little bigger may add a lot of cost that you might be better off spending elsewhere.
- If you're taking the roof off, be sure to upgrade the insulation in the ceiling, a relatively small cost for significant comfort gains in all climates.
- Stick to your plan! As the scope of your project increases, so will the cost.
- Beware of the quote you were hoping to receive. Look for a grouping of similar building quotes to indicate the likely "right" cost to complete the project. If there is one quote that is markedly less than the others, it should be approached with great caution. If it looks too good to be true it probably is, and is likely to bite you before too long (Remember the stories you've seen about rogue builders on current affairs TV programs ... don't be next!).



Surprise, surprise!

The most common cause for budget blow-outs in renovations and extensions is the element of surprise, and there are any number of items that can pop up to catch out even the most experienced designer or builder. Some of the more typical unforeseen costs for a project of this type are asbestos removal (common to many homes of the 1970s that are likely to be undergoing renovation), upgrading of electrical work to meet current standards and remediation of previous work done, and structural upgrades. Generally none of this can be assessed until the project is under way. For a simple extension to a conventional home, a contingency of 5% may be ample if you are well prepared. However, if you are dealing with an older heritage property or a terrace-style dwelling for example, then even a contingency of 20% may not be enough if you haven't prepared properly.

How long it will take

While you will be keen to get your extension finished and ready for occupation as soon as possible, be sure not to rush the design stage – the last thing you want to do is spend your money badly and live with the regret that you could have got a better result. A good building designer or architect will be able to steer you through the design and approvals stage, which should take four to six months, assuming your project isn't overly complex or burdened by restrictive planning rules. The project itself is then likely to take another three to four months.

**SCENARIO 2
Go up – add a level**

If you lack the space to extend your home at ground floor level, or if you believe that going up might add more value (by capturing views, for example), adding another level is an option you're likely to consider. Much as for scenario 1, the benefits are obvious: more space for the family to spread out, more options for the location of kids' bedrooms and the potential of gaining a living space in the reshuffle.

However, this kind of project is a bigger undertaking in terms of the processes involved and the financial commitment. To begin with, it is often trickier and more time consuming to get development approval through your council. Unlike many ground floor additions, which can be assessed as complying development under a streamlined process, upper floor additions present more challenges. They may have a greater impact on neighbouring properties in terms of visual appearance, overshadowing and privacy and are therefore more likely to be subject to a more rigorous approval process.

It's also a bigger project in terms of the total floor space added. A common approach is to move the kids upstairs into two or three new bedrooms, which will need to be served by a new bathroom.

Then, of course, there is the extra space to locate the new stairs. The stairs are an important consideration in any upper floor addition because they also impact the existing lower level. Most bathrooms are too small to accommodate the space required for a well-designed,

This is the kind of project where you are more likely to be exposed to the many cost variables

ergonomic staircase, and if you don't want to lose any space from your living area it is often an existing bedroom that gets sacrificed (sometimes with a little study nook in the small space left over).

In making room for the new stairs you are now one bedroom down, which will mean you are more likely to want to add three bedrooms upstairs, giving you a net result of having added two bedrooms, plus a bathroom, to the house. If you have some unused space in the lower floor and are able to locate the stairs without losing a bedroom, you'll manage to add three bedrooms.

In both of these cases it is more common for the kids' bedrooms to be located together and to therefore move upstairs. This provides the often desired outcome of some segregation for the main bedroom as it remains on the lower level. It also draws out the potential to create a new en suite for the main bedroom if there isn't one already.

Unlike the first scenario, where you can often live in the home while the building work is being carried out, it is unlikely that you could live through an upper floor addition. Significant work will be carried out to the roof and the house will be open to the elements for a time, making it very difficult to live with. In many cases you won't have a choice – for a project of this type, the builder will require you to vacate the house for a time. Unless your dear mother-in-law has a couple of spare bedrooms nearby, this will add costs in paying for temporary accommodation for a few months while the project is completed.

What it will cost

As in the previous scenario, building costs are highly variable depending on a wide range of influences, some of which are in your control while others are not. An upper floor addition is the kind of project where you are more likely to be exposed to all of those variables, and more so than for a lower floor addition.

The main reason is that the additions have a far greater impact on the existing house. For example, one of the first things to establish will be if the existing home's footings and wall construction have the structural capacity to support a new floor (you'll need an engineer to confirm that). If any of the existing conditions are found to be unsuitable, you will then need to seek advice and explore the costs of making those upgrades.

The other big-ticket item integral to an upper floor addition is the significant amount of work required to the existing roof, which in turn generally impacts existing ceilings.

A three-bedroom plus bathroom addition of this type is likely to add 65-75sq m of floor space, and the building costs for this project type will be dearer than for lower floor additions, with a range of \$3500-\$5300 per sq m likely, depending on all of those variables.

There will also be additional costs to consider, including the likely need to address structural requirements

Budget breakdown		
GROUND FLOOR ADDITION	LOW-RANGE COST	HIGH-RANGE COST
Cost for 30-40sq m	\$81,000-\$108,000 ¹	\$126,000-\$168,000 ²
Demolition and "make good"	\$7000-\$17,000	\$12,000-\$25,000
Internal renovations	\$4000-\$15,000	\$8000-\$20,000
Roof integration work	\$3000-\$9000	\$5000-\$12,000
Contingency (5%-10%)	\$4750-\$14,900	\$7550-\$22,500
Budget range	\$99,750-\$163,900	\$158,550-\$247,500
<small>¹Based on \$2700/sq m. ²Based on \$4200/sq m.</small>		
ANOTHER LEVEL		
	LOW-RANGE COST	HIGH-RANGE COST
Cost for 65-75sq m	\$227,500-\$262,500 ¹	\$344,500-\$397,500 ²
Demolition and "make good"	\$15,000-\$25,000	\$18,000-\$30,000
Internal renovations	\$10,000-\$25,000	\$15,000-\$30,000
Roof integration work	\$10,000-\$15,000	\$12,000-\$20,000
Contingency (5%-10%)	\$13,125-\$32,750	\$19,475-\$47,750
Budget range	\$288,750-\$360,250	\$408,975-\$525,250
<small>¹Based on \$3500/sq m. ²Based on \$5300/sq m. Rent at temporary accommodation not included.</small>		

within the home to support the upper floor. This is because there are rarely enough existing internal load-bearing walls to cope with the new level and this often translates to the need for steel beams and new work to the interior of the home.

Another common cost incurred when adding a level is that of replacing the remaining existing roof, often involving an upgrade to Colorbond, which is dearer than tiles. This is often a good investment if the existing roof is tired, damaged or leaking. And given that a lot of the roof is being removed anyway, it makes sense to consider an entirely new one so that the roof at both levels is the same finish and quality. As in scenario 1, some demolition will be required, which in turn triggers the need for "make good" work (plastering, cornice, skirtings, painting and flooring) to tie the new spaces into the existing home and blur the distinction between what is old and what is new.

How long it will take

As mentioned previously, this project is likely to take a little longer. It may take more time to resolve the final design given the additional considerations and constraints and it is likely to take longer to be approved by council – sometimes eight to 10 weeks. Once again, a good building designer or architect will be able to steer you through this process, which should take five to eight months. The project itself is then likely to take another five to eight months to build depending on its complexity. **M**

Adam Hobill is a three-time winner of the HIA Residential Building Designer of the Year and author of Nail It! Take Control of your Building Project and Save Thousands. He is also the founder of buildingquote.com.au, a site designed to help homeowners better understand the building and quoting process.