Complete Guide to Renovating a House

PART SIX: EXTERNAL CHANGES

Completely overhauling the external details of your house will transform its look and the way you feel about it — and the good news is that there are ways of doing this to suit all budgets, says Natasha Brinsmead.

Renovations are not always carried out to picture-perfect cottages and regal period properties. More and more people are seeing the advantages of buying less than beautiful post-war properties — they’re often cheaper, with lots of light and open spaces — over period homes. And the best bit is that these properties provide a great opportunity to give the exterior a completely new look, with new cladding, roofing materials and window treatments.

If, on the other hand, you have a period property to renovate then it is unlikely that the exterior will have completely withstood the test of time — and cladding and external details will most likely have taken a battering over the years and would benefit from upgrading.

DON’T FORGET THE SMALL STUFF

Before you consider the larger-scale improvements, bear in mind that it is often the smaller, seemingly insignificant details that can make all the difference to the overall external appearance of a house.

Take a look at the rainwater goods. Cracked, discoloured plastic rainwater goods do nothing for the appearance and new replacements will hugely smarten things up.

Although cast iron is a fantastic and really good-looking choice for period homes, it is far more expensive than PVCu and may not be a priority if you are at the end of your budget. Contemporary makeovers suit rainwater goods in metals such as copper, galvanised steel and aluminium (try Lindab).

Repainting and, where necessary, replacing the timberwork — such as fascia boards and finials — will also add to the façade.

Adding a porch is a great way to add character. Period homes often had open or closed porches, or just a canopy, so if the original is missing, consider having a new one made. And a simple flat-roofed canopy makes a great addition to a contemporary makeover.

Finally, don’t overlook the importance of landscaping, including gates, fences and planting. Where the budget is limited, planting and natural screening can help to disguise ugly brickwork or other unattractive features.

The Ultimate Makeover

The original house is used as little more than a structural starting point for this charming American-style renovation which has been achieved with only modest extensions. New windows (and dormers), tile-hanging, landscaping and a fabulous wrap-around veranda give the impression of a hugely transformed home.

Expect to pay from £15-20/m for cast iron or copper guttering. Steel will cost from £5/m, with the cheapest option, PVCu, from £2/m.
CHANGING THE CLADDING

Post-war houses are not known for their attractiveness and this is, in the main, down to the cheap bricks that were used, commonly in combination with concrete tile hanging or pebbledash — along with low-cost roofing materials, design and ugly windows. But these houses can often be an almost blank canvas, with no original features to worry about or character that needs to be preserved.

Those on a tight budget, or who are thinking of moving on in the not-too-distant future, should look at some of the more cost-effective ways of giving the façade an overhaul — such as painting the brickwork, or any dull grey pebbledash a clean white.

You should also know that it is not vital that the entire house be given a new cladding. Often just cladding the upper storey or covering a particularly unattractive section of the cladding with a feature panel will be enough to transform its appearance.

So, what should you clad the house with? At the cheaper end of the market is PVCu cladding. However, always bear in mind that the delicate detailing that can add so much character to a property (which is presumably what you are setting out to do) is often lacking, as is its ability to withstand the test of time in terms of keeping its fresh white look. Of course, there are those PVCu products out there which manage to achieve something close to the good looks of timber cladding, but they will cost as much if not more than timber versions.

Softwood timber cladding is an option that is far kinder to your budget than hardwood, but which requires more preparation and maintenance to look good. Amongst the best options for those looking to save a little money are pine and spruce. Boards supplied in their raw state and unfitted can be picked up very cheaply, but they need treating, cutting and require a lot of maintenance and regular preservative treatments, leading some to claim they can actually end up costing more than hardwood in the long term.

If you are happy to spend a little more on your cladding, there are

CLADDING COSTS

The cost of cladding a house varies hugely from material to material. Expect to pay as little as £6/m² for softwood timber (unfitted). Budget £40–45/m² for hardwood (including fitting) and £45–50/m² for render and tile hanging (again, both installed).
Many of these changes can be carried out under Permitted Development, but if your home has a special designation (i.e. listed) these rights are removed.

Planning Permission

Not all materials can be used below a certain roof pitch.
- Interlocking slates: minimum 20˚;
- Overlapping slates: 25˚;
- Plain clay tiles: 35˚;
- Machine-made tiles: 30˚;
- Thatch: 45˚;
- Metal is fine regardless of pitch.

Making up a huge part of the look of a house, the roof covering has a big impact on the way it looks — and the best bit is that planning permission will not normally be required to change it (although you may require Building Regulations approval — see page 90 for more.)

The covering you choose will very much depend on the style of the house you are renovating. If you are working on an ugly 1960s house, for example, a contemporary look might be something you are considering. Slate works really well with a contemporary scheme, although those on a tight budget would do well to consider dark grey, large-format concrete tiles as an alternative.

If you are restoring a period property, it is likely that you will be after materials which suit the period and style of the house and so will be more limited. If your roof already has its original covering in place, it will be worthwhile attempting to repair any damage as opposed to replacing it — both from an aesthetic point of view and cost wise as a complete change of roof covering will likely cost from £60-180/m².

If, however, the roof is beyond saving, or has been given an unsympathetic covering of concrete tiles, a complete re-roof would be wise. Depending on the era of your house and its location, choices will include slate, plain clay tiles, stone slates or thatch. Although natural materials will always be the best choice, where your budget just won’t stretch, reconstituted stone will still be an improvement on large-format concrete.

In England and Wales, if you’re carrying out any work to more than 25 per cent of your roof, including re-covering, then you will need to submit a Building Regulations application (largely because the local authority might want you to improve the roof insulation). See planningportal.gov.uk for more. The situations are similar in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but do check with the local authority in the first instance.
CREATING A DRIVEWAY

Many period properties in need of renovation are missing the one thing which so many of us take for granted these days — somewhere to park. In times gone by, a car was not a priority for house designers so renovators of period properties that have been largely untouched over the years are often faced with this problem. Sometimes, particularly in the case of terraced houses, there is no space at all to the front of the house for parking — in which case, rear access or space to the side of the house will need to be explored. Other times, such as in the case of cottages, a garden full of cottage-style plants will be in place.

Apart from the practicalities of having somewhere to park your car, adding a driveway will add upwards of £2,000 to the value of your home, but it has to be done well and enhance the kerb appeal of the house — for example, adding a large expanse of tarmac to the front of a pretty thatched cottage is not going to do anything to pretty-up its appearance.

If you plan on adding a hard surface to your rear garden then there is no need to apply for planning or Building Regulations approval. However, if it is your front garden that you’re changing, there are a few rules you need to be aware of — although perhaps less than you might have thought.

You will not need planning permission if the new driveway uses permeable (or porous) surfacing which allows water to drain through, for example, gravel, block paving or porous asphalt, or if the rainwater is directed away to an area of grass or border. You also won’t need planning permission in the unlikely event that the new driveway is less than 5m².

If, however, the driveway to be covered is larger than 5m² and will be covered with impermeable surfacing (e.g. block paving), then permission will be required.

Where things change is when a drop kerb is required — which it often is. So, if you are making access to your front garden across the pavement, you will need to get permission from the local authority to drop the kerb, and in some cases, the pavement may need strengthening, which will add to costs. The local authority will usually give you a list of approved contractors. Be sure to get a good range of quotes — they can vary quite wildly.

Building Regulations do not apply unless you are making access to the dwelling ‘less satisfactory’ than it was before (i.e. introducing steps when there were none).