

THE  TIMES

bricks & mortar

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This year's makeover style

Everything you need to know for your spring project *Pages 6-9*

Makeover special

Find out what lies beneath...

Strip away the ugly exterior of your home to reveal its true spirit, says **Abigail Butcher**

Have you ever rejected a house just because of its lacklustre exterior? If so, you're not alone — when a home lacks "kerb appeal" a large number of would-be buyers or tenants will be put off simply by looking at a picture of the façade. This explains the growing trend for giving the outside of properties a makeover. Where once owners focused on the interior, now they change the exterior. Alterations range from small aesthetic improvements to an entire renovation. The aim is to increase both the property's appeal and value, so where do you start?

Location, location, location

Any value added by improving the exterior depends heavily on the property's location. Ian Alexander, a partner in project and building consultancy at Cluttons estate agents, says: "Like renovating the interior of a house, there is a very delicate balance between spending more than the value you create."

"You can spend £20,000 on the exterior in the right place and add £40,000 value. In the wrong place you could spend that money and not get it back." He adds: "Ask an agent for advice. If there's potential for a future instruction they should be open to giving their opinion."

Create a vision before you even buy
Architectural antique dealers Lin and Julian Chambers have just sold a

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four-bedroom house in Elham, Kent, which they gutted and transformed inside and out, increasing its overall value by £130,000. They have moved on to their fifth renovation project. "The trick is to take a lot of photos even before you buy it, go away and look at them, and superimpose your vision upon it. Look at it from every angle," Mrs Chambers says.

Seamus Slattery of HKR Architects suggests creating a mood board by pulling together all the elements of design you like. "Look at neighbouring houses — always be sympathetic with the local area," he suggests. "What do you like and what will fit with your property?"

Do the structural work first

"It is essential that repairs and maintenance are undertaken before aesthetic improvements," says Peter Bolton King, global residential director at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. He says some structural issues could become apparent during a sale, which the buyer may use as a negotiating tool — or in extreme cases lead them to withdraw from the purchase. Bolton King adds: "At the same time as renovation, think about improving the energy rating, which may also help with saleability."

Get permission and seek advice

Many changes to the exterior of a property will require planning consent. Slattery says: "Planning permission is very sensitive, so speak to your local council first. A builder can guide you through but



Removing pebbledash can expose beautifully patterned brickwork

if you plan to completely change the look of a house, consider talking to an architect. It will cost nothing to ask them to have a look at your plans and might save you money in the long run."

Changes don't have to be big

If you're planning small tweaks, consider adding shutters, changing windows or doors, removing paint or adding it. Other minor changes include adding a porch or balcony, tinting bricks on an extension to blend with the rest of the house or simply smartening paintwork around doors and windows. Alasdair Pritchard, a negotiator with Knight Frank Country department, says: "First impressions are vitally important when buyer confidence is as low as it is currently. I am a firm believer that repainting doors and window frames, repointing brickwork and generally tidying up the external appearance go a long way."

Replacing period features

Most work undertaken by Lingfield-based builder Bryan Williamson, of Bryan Williamson & Daughters, is on listed houses or property in conservation areas in London. "People are adding back the beautiful Victorian and Georgian features that were removed during the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties," he says. If your house was a postwar build, the alternative is to add period features to blend with prewar houses on your road.

Render or pebbledash

Houses were pebbledashed or rendered in the 1980s when brickwork began to deteriorate and repointing was considered expensive. Williamson recommends careful and sensitive removal of anything from the exterior — even paint. He recently removed pebbledash from a Victorian property in Bexley and exposed beautifully patterned brickwork. "We had to negotiate with the council because they wanted us to replace the insulation provided by pebbledash but we put insulation in the roof as a compromise," he says. "We had no idea what would be underneath — often brickwork will need repointing."

Weatherboarding

The New England look is becoming increasingly popular, particularly in coastal areas, with homeowners opting for shiplap, half lap or tongue-and-groove weatherboarding styles to clad their house. As an added benefit, insulation boards can be placed beneath.

The Chambers changed the look of their ugly 1950s chalet bungalow in Kent by replacing stone cladding and tiles with weatherboarding. "It is very traditional to Kent, so we weren't doing something completely alien," Mrs Chambers says.

Roofing

Along with pebbledash, a lot of slate roofing was replaced with cheaper concrete tiles in the 1970s and 1980s. Changing the tiles at the same time as a general improvement is another popular option — though work should be sympathetic to the style of surrounding properties. Changing roofing can have structural implications and should be signed off by an engineer. Most builders would include this within their price, but it never hurts to confirm this.

To find a registered architect, visit architecture.com (the website of the Royal Institute of British Architects)



watch video

... or beautify a basement



Artful design has boosted the size of this home by a third, says Francesca Steele

Basement conversions can be a tricky business at the best of times, both in terms of gaining planning permission and spiralling costs. But when the property in question was designed by John Nash, the Regency architect behind Buckingham Palace and the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, you can be sure of a few objections to whatever plans you propose.

But for Ruth and Donald MacDonald, the refurbishment of a three-bedroom terrace designed by Nash in Regent's Park, costing around £600,000, was worth every penny. The couple — whose involvement in the famous 1987 Oxford-Cambridge boat race mutiny was told in the 1996 film *True Blue* (Donald, captain of the Oxford



crew, was played by Dominic West, below) — bought the property in 2007 after deciding to downsize from their family home in Oxfordshire. They always planned to do some work on it but decided on an extension because Ruth, 60, an artist (ruthmacdonald.co.uk) found the studio she had rented for work in nearby Camden too small and expensive.

"We weren't really allowed to excavate underneath the house because it's listed. So we decided to extend out the back and underneath the back patio. We saw a few architects before we made up our minds, but Belsize Architects had done an extension that is extremely similar to the one we have now next door and so they seemed a good fit."

Eventually the couple decided on a glazed extension at garden level behind the house for extra



living space, with a basement excavation below it for Ruth's studio. It took about a year to obtain permission for everything they wanted to do from the local council, English Heritage and the Crown Estate (a pretty standard amount of time, according

to Shahriar Nasser, one of the architects) and then another year for the renovations themselves. During this time Ruth relocated to the couple's second home in Edinburgh, and Donald, 57, who works in the City, stayed in their studio flat in the Barbican. They paid regular visits to the property throughout.

Macdonald's studio, above, has a light, contemporary feel despite the home's period charm, above left and right. Below, the stylish new kitchen

“ This kind of work is one of the most disruptive you can do ... but in the end it was even better than we had visualised ”



Nasser estimates, on the basis of what previous clients with similar renovations have sold their properties for, that the works have added about £1.2 million to the value of the house, plus 69 sq m to the 184 sq m area of the original house.

"It was a huge relief to have it all finished," confesses Ruth. "This kind of work is one of the most disruptive and challenging things you can do to your home, I think. But in the end it was even better than we had visualised. It's such a fantastic space, really big and airy. And although the continuation from the main house is seamless, in a way my studio feels slightly separate, which is very useful for my work."

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