

10 upgrades that will add value to your home

Thinking of upgrading? Get it right and you can expect to recoup the investment, with interest, when it comes time to sell



Sandra O'Connell

The pandemic has changed people's views about how their homes work, and what needs doing to improve it. It has also changed buyers' views about what's worth paying extra for. Here are some expert views on where money could be best spent.

Create a home office

The urgent need for a quiet space in which to work is perhaps the single biggest transformation in terms of how we view our homes. "We recently staged a two-bedroom apartment and, for the first time ever, set up the second bedroom as a home office because, for our target market of individuals or couples, that is what they will be using it as," says estate agent Owen Reilly, who specialises in city and docklands homes.

If you have a bedroom big enough to hold a desk comfortably, putting it in will instantly create greater buyer appeal for younger buyers. Older buyers also want enough space in a house for a separate workspace. "If you have a room you can set up as a home office, do so," he says. "If you don't have decent wifi and broadband, look into cabling so you have it."

Fix the garden

Stay-at-home orders and 2km limit rules had people craving outdoor space like never before. For many, the joy of gardening was a revelation. "Very many people who were never interested in gardening before developed an interest in it during the lockdown," says John O'Sullivan, a director of Lisney.

That has already begun feeding through to buyers. "People are definitely looking at gardens differently. They are much more sought after since Covid arrived," says Reilly, who stresses you don't have to spend much money to increase buyer interest. "If you have any sort of decent garden that has maybe been a little unloved, just add some colour, put in a few pots and give the hedge a good trim."

Pay particular attention to the front. "Make sure your house has kerb appeal because as soon as the sign goes up, the cars start slowing," he advises.

Convert the attic

Anything that adds space to your home is money well spent. "Attic conversions have always added value but especially now, with Covid," says Rowena Quinn of Hunters Estate Agents. Not all attics are suitable to convert, but if you're lucky enough to have one that is, without needing to raise the roof, it can be a very economical way to expand your home, and typically without the need for planning approvals.

Even if the attic space is not high enough to qualify as a "habitable room, it is additional living space and we've never needed that as much," says Quinn. If there are two similar houses in an estate, and one has its attic converted, it has an immediate advantage, she says. "As vendors, we look at price per square foot. If you can expand your home, it brings its value up above the general guide value."

Convert the attic



Seamless flooring



Create a home office



Spend on storage

Covid has driven up interest in built-in storage solutions. Cleverly designed presses, cupboards tucked into wall panels and worktops that hide a multitude are more attractive to buyers than ever before, especially now that they have work items to stow at home too. It means commissioning additional storage solutions looks increasingly like money well spent.

"It's bespoke furniture really but there is now huge interest in anything such as

built-in bookcases or a hidden desk under the stairs, really clever stuff that can be expensive to put in but can be a good investment," says Ivan Gaîne of estate agency Sherry Fitzgerald.

Go neutral

Fresh paint is the single most effective upgrade you can give your home. "A good fresh paint job can cost €2,000 but you'll get that back," says Rowena Quinn.

The rule is, if you are upgrading to stay,



Fix the garden

And 5 that probably won't...

Timber decking

In this climate, it takes endless work to maintain timber decking. If you don't, it looks shabby and becomes lethal when wet. "If you like the idea of a timber deck and yet the maintenance is too daunting, the same effect can be achieved using a decking composite material," suggests garden expert Leonie Cornelius.

Conservatories

Conservatories can be an expensive addition and may not return the value in terms of usage. If you must, then explore timber-framed options. "Stay away from

plastic conservatories, they overheat and become the room people don't use," says interior designer Róisín Lafferty. "It's much better, and a more cost-effective use of space, to build a proper extension that can be used year-round."

New kitchen

Fitted kitchens can be horrendously expensive so if you are planning on selling up within a few years, the money could be better spent elsewhere. An off-the-peg kitchen from Cash and Carry or Ikea can be customised with fresh tiling and paintwork for a quick update. A bespoke designer kitchen

may not pay its way when it comes to sell.

Extratech

Be careful of over-specing your home with technology, whether it's surround sound in every room or devices that help you manage the house from a distance. "One person's tech wizardry may be of no interest whatsoever to the next. In any case, technology just dates so fast," cautions Lisney's John O'Sullivan.

Jacuzzis

"I don't think anyone ever made a return on that investment," says Ivan Gaîne.

Government's Rent a Room, homeowners can earn up to €14,000 a year tax free from renting out their spare room. But only do it if the room is big enough, cautions Quinn. "With some of them you couldn't even fit a suitcase in, in which case you'd be better off putting your money into a nicer and more spacious family bathroom."

Go sustainable

Anything that helps boost energy efficiency is worth doing, not just for the environment but because you'll save on utility bills too. Sustainable solutions of all sorts hold great appeal for buyers. "BER is all important," says Quinn. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has grants worth up to €3,500 towards the installation of energy-efficient heat pump systems, as well as incentives to reduce the cost of installing solar panels and better insulation.

"Electric car charging points are a great way to futureproof your house too, and a great investment these days when more people are going green," says DNG's Gemma Lanigan.

Tackle the windows

Replacing windows and frames is a daunting and expensive job but if you've done it, it's the kind of renovation work that can help tip a buyer over the line, when compared with a neighbouring property. By the same token, if buyers can see a house's windows are in need of replacing, the fear factor alone is enough to put them off.

In such cases, estate agents recommend that you at least get the job costed for buyers, so they know what's involved. It's likely to be less than they fear. If at all possible, replace the windows yourself. Not alone will it make your home cosier while you're living there, but "they are a good investment," says Róisín Lafferty, interior architect with Kingston Lafferty. "People don't want the hassle of having to do them."

Let the light in

Anything you can do to boost natural light in your home will make it more attractive to prospective buyers. Roof lights make for a particularly savvy spend. "They are so worth it, especially the flush-finish fixed ones, rather than the opening style Velux ones," says Lafferty. "With elongated roof lights, when you look up all you see is sky. It's beautiful and if you can afford it do it so because you can't underestimate the importance of natural light."

On the same basis, if you've a kitchen window overlooking a garden, turn it into a glass door. Where you already have a glass door, consider making it bigger. "If you've a 2.3m high extension, normally doors would be 2.1m. Putting in a taller door, which almost fits the entire space, is priceless," she says.

Seamless flooring

If you're replacing your flooring, a good wooden floor will hold its value better than any carpet. "It won't have stains. Also, very many people are conscious of asthma now and so have a preference for wood too," says Quinn. Whatever flooring you choose, get maximum bang for your buck by having it run through the house with no saddle boards or junctions. "It's a good investment and timeless," says Lafferty.

Flooring that works inside and out make more sense now than ever too. "Kilkenny Limestone has inside and outside versions of the same paving, so once you open up the doors you get a sense of, wow, am I inside or out?" says garden and interiors expert Leonie Cornelius, who says Covid has given us a new appreciation of fresh air.

All the right angles in garden room that lets the light in

Alanna Gallagher

Architect Shane Cotter transformed a three-bed semi with an angular garden room

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 the idea of rooms has become more important than one big open-plan living space. One Swords couple, both keen horticulturalists, wanted more space but something that wasn't the typical big-box extension tacked onto the back wall of the house.

Shane Cotter of Architectural Farm came up with a garden room idea, that is part-orangery, part-potting shed, and that immerses them in the outdoors, where they can enjoy their outside space 365 days a year, whatever the weather.

It is unusual in that it has a zig-zag shape that was designed to frame views of the greenery, which included two trees that were to fill those frames, he explains. It was also distracted from an existing, funny-shaped internal wall, the result of an earlier garage conversion.

The owners felt a large extension, across the back of the house, would plunge their dining room into darkness.

The room to the rear of the house already had double doors leading outside to the west-facing space.



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It helped that the couple had already lived in the house for several years and so knew exactly where the light fell and what parts of the

garden most intrigued them. Cotter suggested two large windows, to make the space feel more generous than it actually is. He also put forward

the idea of multiple ceiling planes, that slope up and away from the existing ceiling heights, to further open the room up to the sky and make it

feel loftier than it is. Simple, hand-rolled natural ibstock brick lends the walls a sense of texture. The choice of champagne-coloured mortar

joints that work well with the parquet underfoot. Because the shape of the room was complicated he kept the brick-bond simple.



33sq m

The total extent of the space, well under the 40sq m allowed without needing planning permission

The back room now has four facades. The garden is stepped up and away from the house so when in the room you feel like you're in the middle of the green outdoors, Cotter explains.

A secret door conceals a utility room-cum-potting shed that serves both house and garden. Here laundry is put through its cycles and there are sinks for potting.

In total the space extends to just 33sq m, well under the 40sq m allowed without needing planning permission, but has completely transformed this three-bed semi.

"You want your home to hold you like it is wrapping an arm around you," he explains.

"It feels solid but meanders so there are places to naturally position furniture without obstructing the view."

architecturalfarm.com

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