



ROOMS

Additions that make
your home more
functional and livable

Photo courtesy of Normandy Remodeling

FOR EXPANSION

By Lisa Sloan

If you're short on space in your current home but prefer not to move; if you want to improve the way your living areas flow together; or, if you need to make room for another child or an aging parent — you are likely considering a home addition project. A well-planned addition can expand your home's square footage and increase its value.

"Adding on to your existing home improves the resale value of the home, and, if the time comes to sell, opens the

prospective buyer pool," says Andy LaMantia, owner of LaMantia Design and Construction Co., Inc. in Brookfield. "Many clients will tell us that they have looked at the options of moving versus staying and decide they love their neighbors and location and want to add the details to their existing home to create their dream home."

Whether you want to expand out with a bump-out or first-floor addition, or build up with a second-story addition, there are many options to consider.

SUITE LIFE

Master suites are often at the top of many homeowners' lists when it comes to additions. "At the end of the day, people want to be able to have a master bedroom where they can retreat and relax," says Jeff Pavlatos, president of Silver Leaf Renovation and Construction in Burr Ridge.

Sometimes this results in a two-story addition, such as adding a sunroom on the first floor and master suite with sitting area on the second floor, though

many homeowners are opting for first-floor master suite additions, as they plan for aging in place.

In-law suites also seem to be a sought-after choice right now, according to Michael Campbell, operations manager at Reliable Home Improvement in Naperville. "I'm seeing more people adding on to the first floor to make room for their parents, but it can also be looked at as a guest suite." Such additions typically include a large bedroom with sitting area, a separate bathroom and options like an outdoor patio or small kitchenette.

Though some point out that these suites might just be useful over the short term, others note that they might be beneficial for homeowners considering their own future and whether they plan on living in the home during retirement and beyond.

Sue McDowell, co-owner of McDowell Remodeling in St. Charles, agrees that while senior living and assisted living can be very expensive, many people don't think about the things involved in creating a senior-friendly living space. Changes to the

home might need to extend beyond the addition, including wider doorways and hallways, uniform flooring and handicapped-accessible bathrooms.

"To retrofit a house or add on (for aging parents) can be very costly. It's not right for everybody, but it works great for some people," she says.

GOING BIG

Construction of large second-floor additions dropped off when the economy struggled, but those in the industry say these more-extensive projects are on the upswing.

Rob Quigley, partner at Bradford & Kent Custom Remodeling in Downers Grove, says that the firm has been doing many large additions — everything from entire second floors to additions to the back or side of the house. "For example, we recently did a major addition for a family who had inherited a small ranch house and wanted to add a second story and space on the first floor," he says.

LaMantia also sees larger projects making a comeback. "With the resurgence in the economy, we are now seeing a renewed interest in the second-

story master addition, the bedroom/master bath addition, and the complete renovation of the kitchen, including additions to include a family room."

Troy Pavelka, design manager for Normandy Remodeling in Hinsdale, has observed the same trend, noting his company has recently added second stories to ranches, Cape Cod homes and more. "People want to take a starter home and make it a forever home, as long as it's an older, established neighborhood that supports that type of improvement," he says.

SINGLE ROOMS AND BUMP-OUTS

When it comes to single-room additions, sunrooms and family rooms are frequent requests for families who seek more living and entertaining space. The most common often involves expanding the back of the house where a kitchen and/or family room is located. "It's still the hub of the home; it's by far the most important area in the house in terms of how often it's used and where people gather, so it's a strong and consistent type of addition," says Pavelka.

Sometimes all it takes is a small adjustment, such as bumping out a wall or adding a bay window, to gain space and make a dramatic change. "Bump-outs are smaller additions for homeowners who need the space to allow for an improved room layout. Even a slight addition can make a huge difference in the feel of a room," says Quigley.

Campbell also sees clients expanding with smaller additions that gain just enough space to make rooms like kitchens and baths more functional and allow for amenities like walk-in showers and islands. "We have a lot of clients who want to add six to eight feet to the back of the house to get a better workflow,



Expanding the back of the house to allow for a larger family room or kitchen is an especially popular addition.



Photos courtesy of Bradford & Kent Custom Remodeling



As part of a two-story addition by Bradford & Kent Custom Remodeling, a new 4-season porch opened the home to the outdoors while providing more room for entertaining. The added second floor space allowed for the creation of a second floor master suite.

more cabinet space and so forth.”

“It’s amazing how a couple of feet make a room feel different, larger and more useful,” adds McDowell.

REPURPOSED SPACE

Some solutions to gaining more living space do not involve adding square footage, such as taking down walls or changing the function of a room. “Technically, this is not an addition, but we are being asked frequently to open up the main floor in split or bi-levels,” says Quigley. “Taking down the walls between kitchens and family rooms/dining rooms really opens up

the layout.”

Another way to expand living space without adding on is to “repurpose” little used rooms, such as a dining room or living room. “Sometimes borrowing space and moving walls around internally can be less expensive,” says Pavelka. This might involve dedicating that space to a new use, such as an office, or moving walls and using the space to expand the kitchen.

Noting that a whole new addition is more costly than using existing space efficiently, Pavlatos says, “We like to re-appropriate rooms that are not being used before we add on or go vertical.”

SMART CHOICES

At the beginning of the process, remodelers recommend carefully considering what you need and the impact an addition will have on how you are going to use the space. “Don’t get too caught up in a wish-list or all of your wants,” advises Pavelka. “Put the focus back on everyday living, not just those few days a year when you entertain big groups, such as holidays or graduations.”

For those seeking ideas and inspiration, the websites/mobile apps Houzz and Pinterest are good tools. The former allows you to create and share idea books with your builder or designer

and also allows you to access real-world examples of remodeling costs and even order products for your home, such as light fixtures. “We can look at (a client’s) idea book and quickly evaluate their sense of style and what they like,” says Pavlatos.

If you present your needs and budget to your builder, they can help design solutions that fit both. They might even come up with options that are not what you initially considered. For example, a homeowner might want to add on to one end of the house, but an addition elsewhere might be more effective and value-conscious.

“Most prospective clients have an idea of what they are lacking ... or what they may need,” says LaMantia. “They may know they need a larger kitchen or another bedroom, but they worry they do not know where it should go.”

In many cases, homeowners are not aware of local building codes and zoning requirements that might impact what they want to do, and an experienced builder or remodeler can guide them through that process.

A good builder will help you determine if your lot is conducive to an addition. There may be factors, such as zoning or drainage, that affect what is allowable. You also don’t want to end up with an upgraded home that is way beyond the scope of comparable properties in the neighborhood or that won’t solve your needs long-term. For example, a small two-bedroom house with a tiny kitchen and single bath might not be a good candidate for a bedroom addition because the other rooms will still be small. In that case, it might be time to move.

Campbell believes that if you add something to your home that makes it more livable and plan to enjoy it for several years before moving, you should see a return on your investment. “Time is going to be your best friend,” he says. “Other people in your neighborhood are going to add on or remodel, too.” ■



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