

EXTENDING A PERIOD PROPERTY

CREATING A NEW EXTENSION FOR YOUR HOME IS AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY TO ADD SPACE AND IMPROVE FUNCTIONALITY – BUT WHEN WORKING WITH A PERIOD PROPERTY, IT'S CRUCIAL THAT THIS ADDITION FEELS LIKE A NATURAL, EFFORTLESS CONTINUATION OF THE ORIGINAL HOME.



Extending a period property should enhance, not compromise, its original character. Most owners of a period property wish to retain its character and original features, but the layout of older homes rarely satisfies our modern desire for large multifunctional spaces.

The high cost of buying a new house means that it's often better value – and less disruptive overall – to extend. However, when creating an extension to a period property, it's crucial to create a careful balance of old and new.

A DEFINED DIFFERENCE

Heritage specialists have a preference for a clear distinction between the original and the modern. Using the same materials in a similar style can create visual confusion. This doesn't mean you have to go with the ultimate contrast – a frameless glass box – but a new extension that's of its time helps us to 'read' a building better.

Nevertheless, according to planning rules, an extension can be built under permitted development only if the materials are 'similar in appearance to the existing house.'

Homeowners are, therefore, being incentivised not to make too much of a clean design break. Some local authorities seem to have a looser grasp of this rule than others; so do seek advice pre-application or employ an architect familiar with your local council's policies.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Extensions to period properties need to be self-supporting, so that they don't put any additional structural strain on the house. Lightweight systems, such as timber frame, can help lessen the load.

But building an extension from modern materials can have detrimental knock-on effects on the older property. For example, if an old external wall, pointed with lime mortar and designed to be breathable, becomes the internal wall of an air-tight extension built to modern building regulations, this could experience damp issues.

It pays to employ a specialist conservation architect who has an intimate knowledge of the pitfalls. If you wish to extend a listed property then you'll need to get listed building consent, because any new addition is bound to impact on the special historic or architectural interest that is being preserved.

RESPECTING THE ARCHITECTURE

Before making any design decisions, spend time understanding your home's existing architecture – the proportions, mouldings, materials, and finishes. In her Preserve Cottage Project, Kate Fryer of Khaya Studio introduced bespoke panelling to both the original hallway and the new extension to create visual continuity. Panelling is a wonderful way to soften new spaces and provide an instant sense of heritage.

Consider echoing original details such as architraves, skirting boards, and ceiling roses. Even if you simplify them slightly for a contemporary feel, referencing these features will ensure your extension feels connected to the main house.

CHOOSING COMPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Materials tell a story, and in period homes, they've often aged gracefully. When adding an extension, opt for finishes that harmonise with the original property. In The St George House project Kate worked on she says, "We reinstated

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reclaimed timber flooring, sourced from a local reclamation yard, to immediately inject warmth and character. Using reclaimed or aged materials where possible will help new spaces feel rooted in history.”

You might also consider replicating original flooring patterns, like herringbone or parquet, or choosing stone and tile finishes that echo those found elsewhere in the home.

THOUGHTFUL FITTINGS & FIXTURES

Modern kitchens and bathrooms can still feel at home in a period property if you select fittings with care. In her Farnham Project, Kate used brushed stainless steel paired with grey-washed cabinetry which added a contemporary touch while remaining understated enough to sit gracefully within a classic setting.

She suggests opting for classic-style taps, traditionally styled radiators, and hardware in finishes like aged brass or antique bronze. Lighting too is key – blend period-style wall lights and pendants with a few more modern pieces to create layered, atmospheric spaces.

COHESIVE COLOUR PALETTES

A well-considered colour palette helps tie old and new together. Use tonal variations of colours found in your existing rooms and carry them through to the extension. Soft, muted hues work beautifully in period properties, while the occasional bold accent can bring energy and modernity.

CREATING FLOW

One common challenge in period homes is creating natural pauses and transitions. Kate often recommends defining entrance areas or visual stopping points with a beautiful sideboard, artwork, or rug to break up extended sightlines and guide you gently through the

space. Consider your sightlines from old to new – frame views with doors, panelling or feature walls to encourage a sense of flow and discovery, rather than simply adding a large open-plan box to the rear.

WHY MIX MODERN WITH PERIOD?

Lifestyle and functionality: Many period houses were built with discrete rooms, small kitchens, limited plumbing or wiring capacity. Modern living demands open-plan flow, generous kitchens, natural light, energy efficiency and integration with outdoor space.

Value uplift: Thoughtfully executed additions tend to add value, but only if they harmonise with the original building. A mismatched extension can feel tacked on.

Sustainability/performance: Adding insulation, better glazing, effective heating, smart controls, renewable energy features can modernise the function of a period home while retaining its heritage.

Aesthetic tension: The dialogue between old and new can be visually compelling. A minimalist insert next to original cornicing or exposed beams can make both stand out. But the trick is getting the balance right, too much modern and the building loses its identity; too little and you might be stuck with a beautifully preserved but impractical home.

WHY WORK WITH A SPECIALIST?

This delicate balance between preserving a home’s heritage and introducing modern comforts is something Kate has been fortunate to work on throughout her career. She understands how to sensitively enhance these properties while making them work beautifully for modern living.

With thanks to: www.khayastudio.co.uk

