

home

extension, according to research from Sainsbury's Home Insurance. These are an easy way to gain an extra reception room and bedroom without upping sticks. Kandutsch says: "It's popular for homeowners to extend into the garden, creating a more open-plan kitchen and dining space for the family. And instead of a room on top you can have a small private terrace."

Cost about £50,000

Digging a basement

Basements have become increasingly popular in areas where rising house prices have made the cost of moving too expensive. It's a good solution for those who don't want to lose garden space. It is now possible to have full-height rooms with natural light.

Robin Chatwin, the head of Savills, southwest London, says: "Basement conversions can be expensive and it's a long process, but in the end if it does add the extra living space and bedrooms in balance with the rest of the house, they can be very worthwhile."

Cost £80,000 to £120,000

Upgrading a bathroom

One of the simplest ways to upgrade a family bathroom is to install a separate shower cubicle to the bath. If you have the space, adding a small bathroom is a good idea to increase value. Savills estimates installing a downstairs cloakroom or a separate shower in a bathroom in London can add between 2 per cent and 3 per cent in value.

Cost from £1,000

Floor-plan redesign

If having an extension is not an option, architects can redesign an existing home. Kandutsch says: "We can do this by opening up the floor plan, drawing more light into the house to create the illusion of space, lifting the ceilings in some cases, or simply ditching built-in furniture and choosing freestanding units so the floor is visible to the perimeters of the room."

Cost from £500

Planning permission

It's worth checking with the council if permission is needed for any major works, particularly for listed buildings, which makes things more tricky. The chancellor recently announced that certain restrictions on house extensions in London will be removed, allowing those who cannot afford to move to build upwards by as many as two storeys — to the height of adjoining buildings — without planning permission, as long as the neighbours do not object. When this will come into effect is unknown but, once it does, it could knock thousands off the cost of an extension.

Finding an architect

The Royal Institute of British Architects (Riba) has about 34,000 architects on its books, and has launched its own search service. You can search by postcode or any number of filters, but you can also contact the Riba client services team, which can provide you with a tailored list based on your requirements. You can view each architect on the shortlist as well as look at any uploaded projects or case studies. Alternatively, Architects' Republic allows you to filter architects by budget, specialist skills, location, project type or visual concept on its website architectsrepublic.com. Make sure tradespeople are fully insured and have good warranties.



The restricted colour palette of this home helps to maximise the space and feels airy and light

'We spent £120,000 but gained £300,000 in value'

When buying their first home, Hiromi Kaneko and Marek Krawczyk obeyed one adage of property purchasing — and entirely disregarded another.

With a limited budget the couple bought the worst house on the best street they could afford. Yet when it came to improving the property they spent a six-figure sum reinventing the space they had, rather than extending it.

While increasing floor space is the time-honoured way of adding value to a home, their take on open-plan living in east London has paid off with a handsome paper profit and a wonderful living space, which pays homage to Kaneko's Japanese roots.

The couple moved to London from the US just as house prices were collapsing at the start of the recession. Nonetheless Kaneko, who is training to be a chef, and Krawczyk, an accountant, say they were always keen to buy a property.

By 2012 they were ready to make their move and paid £460,000 for the three-bedroom house close to Victoria Park in Hackney. The house had previously been rented and was in an unloved condition. "I don't think it had been updated since the 1950s," Kaneko, 45, says. "But we did not mind that it needed some work."

As well as its location, they liked its size. It was built in the 1950s — likely to infill a bomb site — and although it followed the traditional Victorian layout of its terraced neighbours it was on a wider than average plot and measured a not ungenerous 1,292 sq ft.

They moved in immediately, redecorated the bedrooms and began hunting for an architect in the firm belief that the sort of project they had in mind was beyond their basic DIY knowledge. "We knew we wanted to remodel it, knocking down walls and really changing the space," Krawczyk, 35, explains. "We knew that we would need professional help."

They chose Scenario Architecture partly because it was a local firm and partly because they felt that the project architect, Fanis Anastasiadis, had



The owners of this home chose to improve the existing building rather than extend it, and made £300,000 as a result

the best understanding of their dream — a calm, simple, open space with plenty of light — and how to achieve it.

In reality, the house they have ended up with is not quite conventional open-plan space. Rather than going wild with a sledgehammer and removing all the internal walls, Anastasiadis opted to remove sections of walls so that, while each space flows into one another, each is distinctly separate.

The palette of materials and shades is almost monastic — the walls are white, the floors are either a dark stained oak or, in the kitchen, polished concrete. The sand-coloured quartz work surface in the kitchen is as close to a pop of colour as it gets.

Krawczyk was determined to have an open fire and they opted for a two-way fireplace set into a section of wall that stands between the living room and the kitchen, providing a feature for both. Logs are stored neatly in a bespoke alcove below.

Indeed, this is a small house full of neat features. The wall between the entrance hall and living room, for instance, has been rebuilt in an "S" shape. On either side of this wall, set into each



curve of the "S", is a low seat that doubles as a storage cupboard. The kitchen table has been designed to slide under the kitchen island if the couple want more floor space, and their two pet cats have been amply catered for. Chuck Norris and Darth Vader do not need to climb all the way down the stairs in search of food and company. Instead they can climb through a small cat-sized hatch cut into the balustrade, take a narrow walkway over the top of the hallway and stroll into the kitchen. The cats also have a den, accessed through another hatch, this time at skirting-board level, to a space under the stairs.

This project is an exercise in remodelling rather than extension. The original house had a dated conservatory extension, which was demolished and rebuilt as part of the kitchen, with a new skylight and two sets of french windows overlooking the garden. Rather than go for a straight across "glass box" extension so popular in family kitchens from Islington to Barnes, Anastasiadis gave the rear of the house a slightly asymmetrical façade, which breaks in to two sections what would otherwise be a potentially monotonous wall of glass.

Outside, the flat kitchen roof is planted with wildflowers — pretty and practical because it helps with insulation — and the roof overhangs a few feet. "It means that even when it is raining we can have the doors open without a problem," Kaneko says.

The work increased the floor space of the home — but only by about 10 sq ft. "What we realised was that to make the house much better we did not need to make it much bigger," says Ran Ankory, the director of Scenario Architecture.

The couple remained in situ during the ten-month project, creating a makeshift kitchen in one of the bedrooms and gritting their teeth.

The work cost £120,000, which included all professional fees and landscaping the garden, and the couple could have freshened up the space themselves for a great deal less. However, not only

are they delighted with the stylish, light space they have to live in but the market is on their side.

Hackney has been one of London's great property success stories, with prices up 11.4 per cent in the past 12 months,

according to the Land Registry. The couple had the property valued shortly after

work was completed at £850,000 — not bad for their overall £580,000 investment.

Right now, however, they have no plans to move and have more work to do on their home. "We still have to do the upstairs," Kaneko says. "Although I do like a minimal feel, I think we might also think about some more furniture."

Ruth Bloomfield