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MOVING ON

UP

In part two of our ultimate guide to extensions, **Martina Lees** reveals insider tips and tricks for creating spacious loft rooms and light-filled basements



check your lease to see if you own the rights to the roof space, Dyson says: "You can't convert a space you don't own." You may have to pay to get it in your demise.

BE CLEVER WITHIN THE RULES

"Understanding the subtleties of permitted development (PD) rules will enable you to go to the limit of what is allowed," says Hugo Tugman, an architectural designer (tugman.co.uk). For example, you can add a dormer, mansard or gable within volume limits (50 cubic metres for a detached house or semi, or 40 cubic metres for a terrace) up to the "highest point" of the existing roof. This allows you to extend up to the main ridge height, even over the outrigger (a rear addition common to period terraces). "The art is to maximise the usable space you can stand up in," Tugman says. "Where possible, go with PD, as this will likely give you much more than you could achieve through a planning application."

In such cases, it is wise to get a lawful development certificate from the council, as this will answer any legal questions when you sell. Houses in conservation areas, though, need planning permission for loft conversions. The most frequent mistake Tugman sees is "understandable – you want a loft, you go to a 'loft' company. Loft companies are in the main just builders with the word loft in their name. Some are good, some less so. What they are not is designers." He often uses loft firms to build, but not to design – having seen their "free" services result in mistakes such as stairs being placed where they make sense on the first floor, but take up the best space at loft level.

For a conversion on the second floor or above, building regulations require a stairwell protected by fire doors to all rooms except bathrooms. That could mean closing off even your open-plan living space. To avoid this, Holmes says you can instead fit domestic sprinklers, costing £2,000-£4,000 a year to maintain. PD rules don't allow verandas that protrude, but they do permit french doors to a Juliet balcony or roof windows that fold out to create a balcony. Velux's version is called Cabrio (from £2,539; velux.co.uk), but other manufacturers offer similar designs. You can also use ordinary rooflights to ease headroom, such as above a desk or shower.

copper cladding for a lightweight, low-maintenance finish that will patinate with time. "It provided an attractive outlook from the kitchen window, and for the surrounding properties." Although it is the smallest room in the flat – intended for Ted, 2 – its treetop views quickly made it the family living room.

CONSIDER GOING UPSIDE DOWN

"If you live in a top-floor flat, you might decide to reverse the living space by putting your lounge, kitchen and diner in the loft," says Dyson, who has done this at her maisonette on the upper floors of a Victorian terrace in Wandsworth, southwest London. The £100,000, four-month build doubled the floor area of what used to be a "corridor of a flat" with one and a half bedrooms. Now it is a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home with an open-plan living/kitchen/dining space in the roof, from which bifold doors lead to a terrace.

Obscure glazing for the balustrades and windows prevent overlooking, and the walls of the L-shaped mansard had to be raked back at 70 degrees to preserve the neighbours' right to light. "Look at all the light," Dyson says of the two large Velux windows, four rooflights, three south windows and bifolds in her living space. "Do you need this in a bedroom?"

These upside-down designs, with bedrooms downstairs and the living area above, also "work really well in locations where homes have a great view – by the sea, looking over countryside".

DON'T CRAM

Plan storage and the bathroom from the start, says Duncan Gray, 40, who last year added a £60,000 loft conversion to the two-bedroom east London flat he shares with Asia Kowalczyk, 44, and their daughter, Iona, 7. To avoid fitting a macerator – noisy and prone to breaking – they needed enough floor cavity to install a soil pipe at the right incline. "Don't underestimate the difficulty," he warns. The loft was intended as a room for his father, who has since died, and Gray wanted "something special". The architects, Dedraft (dedraft.co.uk), clad the dormer in Cor-Ten steel, which over time would blend in with the red roof files of the terraces as seen from nearby Lloyd Park, and devised an inverted balcony with sliding doors and a full-height vertical slot window.

One way to create storage is to have a "bedhead wall" with eaves cupboards behind the bed, facing the windows for the easiest access to your lie-down. But don't box out all the corners for storage, Lutton says. "Let the building run down. Just because you can't walk in the space, that doesn't mean your eye can't travel there." In a loft conversion in Oxfordshire, his firm slid vintage suitcases under open eaves for storage. "It just became 'an object in the space' (charlieluxtondesign.com). The biggest mistake when it comes to lofts is trying to get in too much stuff, Lutton says: "Then there's no joy to the space." Do you really need a night ensuite bathroom, he asks, or lots of cupboards that are too deep to easily reach what is inside? "Do less, better."

BUILD ABOVE THE OUTRIGGER

Create an L-shaped dormer on top of the outrigger, says Dyson, who will be one of the speakers at the London Homebuilding and Renovating Show (September 21-23). It could become an extra bedroom, a study, a hobby room or – if your council allows you to extend to the end of the outrigger – even a roof terrace. Landmark Lofts has ready-made pod rooms that can be craned into place above an extension from £35,000.

When Charlie and Emma Radcliffe were expecting their first baby, they added a bespoke £47,000 copper box on top of the outrigger behind their flat in a crescent of Victorian terraces near the Emirates stadium, north London. Shortlisted for New London Architecture's Don't Move, Improve! awards this year, it sits on what used to be a large roof terrace that was rarely used.

Facing a stringent planning policy for roof extensions, Beasley Dickson Architects (beasleydickson.co.uk) fought for a year to gain consent. "Build a strong case," says Melissa Beasley, who chose

If the roof rests on a web of W-shaped engineered trusses – common in post-1960s homes – you'll need to replace these with steel beams. This used to be expensive, but the new telescopic TeleBeam system means you no longer have to remove the roof to do this, says Michael Holmes, property expert for the Southern Homebuilding & Renovating Show (June 30 and July 1, Sandown Park; homebuildingshow.co.uk/surrey). Lastly, ensure you have the right paperwork. In a flat, you'll need a "licence for alterations" from the freeholder. And

Blue-sky thinking
Jo Dyson, above, turned the living space in her maisonette in southwest London upside down, putting an open-plan kitchen/diner/lounge with a roof terrace into the loft extension

families in Trafford, Greater Manchester, chose to improve, not move, in the face of 45% property-price rises over the period.

So how do you get your loft right? Should you use an architect or a loft specialist? And how can you make the most of permitted development rights?

CAN YOU CONVERT?

"The best way to work out if you can have a loft conversion is to go outside and look at who else has them," says Charlie Lutton, an architectural designer and

Duncan Gray's east London loft extension is clad in Cor-Ten steel



We're going up in the world. The number of planning applications for loft conversions has risen by 22% over the past five years, to more than 42,000 in 2017. One of these was from Chris and Les Marshall, who added a fourth bedroom to their terrace in London Fields, east London, before the arrival of Eddie, now 1, who joined Malcolm the whippet.

"We were hoping to start a family. We didn't want to move – we have fabulous neighbours, a street party every year and great transport connections," says Chris, 38, a communications manager. "We started off with a standard loft company and realised they weren't going to be able to provide the impactful window we wanted." The firm insisted on fitting the required fire door at the top of the stairs, not the bottom – cramping the space – and installing a macerator to shred waste in the loft shower room, claiming that a soil pipe could not be installed with enough of an incline.

Instead, the couple turned to Bradley Van Der Straeten Architects (b-vds.co.uk), who – in an ambitious six-month project passed under permitted development – designed a striking full-width window and

lowered the generous first-floor ceiling by 25cm to accommodate standard pipes. By moving the fire door to the first floor, they could create bespoke timber stairs with a wall of hidden storage and open shelves running up its side. This used the otherwise redundant gap, required under planning rules, between the side of the dormer and the boundary wall.

If a six-month build sounds too daunting, specialist firms offer modular lofts that are built in a factory and fitted in two weeks. Landmark Lofts has two-module lofts with no bathroom from £50,000; one with a bathroom and a master bedroom would cost between £55,000 and £65,000. Clients normally supply bathroom fittings and flooring.

The design limits dust and delays due to bad weather – and, in many cases, you don't need a party-wall agreement with neighbours. In-house designers tailor each unit to the property before it is built in Yorkshire. Installation starts a week before the loft arrives, with the roof removed on the last day. Once the loft is craned into place, it takes another week to build stairs and connect utilities (landmark-lofts.com).

In a five-metre-wide terraced house, a basic conventional loft with rooflights and no bathroom starts at £20,000-£30,000,

or £30,000-£60,000 with a dormer. Raising a hip roof end to a gable costs £45,000-£80,000 and a 70-degree mansard conversion £50,000-£80,000, according to members of the Federation of Master Builders.

"Loft conversions don't take extra land, but to make them worthwhile financially, it helps if property prices in the area are high," says Michael Dall, lead economist at the data analyst Barbour ABI, which supplied its latest research on building trends to Home. "Three in four planning applications involving lofts are in areas with average house prices above £225,000 – that's 45% of boroughs in Britain.

Last year, a third of loft applications were in London, with the highest concentration in Richmond upon Thames, according to Barbour ABI. In St Albans, Hertfordshire, one in every 100 private households applied last year, placing it second countrywide in terms of lofty ambitions.

Thanks to lower land values, people in the northeast and Scotland were eight times less likely than Londoners to apply for a loft conversion. But the northwest bucked the trend, with loft improvements up 20% in five years – the strongest growth in the northern regions. Younger

TOP 10 DISTRICTS FOR LOFTS

District	Region	Applications*
Richmond upon Thames	London	10.8
St Albans	Southeast	10.0
Barnet	London	9.9
Elmbridge	Southeast	9.7
Redbridge	London	9.6
Kingston upon Thames	London	8.7
Three Rivers	Southeast	8.5
Brent	London	8.2
South Buckinghamshire	Southeast	7.7
Waltham Forest	London	7.5

Source: Barbour ABI (Annual figures for lofts per 1,000 private homes)

OVERLEAF: GOING UNDERGROUND

Home Cover

→ The basement boom is going bust in central London's richest areas, along with house prices – to the relief of neighbours who have had to endure diggers and dust for the sake of subterranean rifle ranges, indoor golf facilities and classic car galleries next door. At the "iceberg house" peak in 2014, Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster had 1,600 applications for basements, but by last year this was down by two-thirds, Barbour ABI reports.

Yet further out in the capital, applications to dig down are holding steady, as families who love where they live expand underground. "We're happy where we are and decided we'd stretch our house as much as we could," says Jenny Johnston, 35, a teacher. She and her husband, Craig, 41, extended their basement in Bethnal Green, east London, last year after "surprise twins", now 2, joined their 11- and 9-year-olds. "It's given us so much more living space. The older children can have a bit of respite from the younger ones."

So how do you ensure your basement doesn't feel like a cellar? A lightwell is not always best. The Johnstons' basement kitchen-diner used to have a courtyard, but it was a "dark dumping ground", Jenny recalls. Hüt Architecture filled this in to extend the kitchen into a larger open-plan family area. Four walk-on Sunsquare rooflights bring in light – two inside the "grown-up" lounge on the ground floor, where a glass side return now lets sun down to the lower level, and the other two in the newly raised garden (hutarchitecture.com; asap-construction.co.uk). "When the

weather was lovely last month, it was the first time we could sit outside with a glass of prosecco," Jenny says.

"Not even the gloomiest teenager will sit in a lightless room for days on end," says Chris Roman-Lee, co-founder of Studio Octopi (octopi.co.uk). At a Victorian terrace in Wandsworth, southwest London, his firm linked a new basement playroom to the ground-floor kitchen via a pre-cast concrete staircase in a glazed, zinc-clad rear extension.

Nadia and John O'Neill commissioned the £500,000 project when they had their fourth child, Ania, 4. Their other children, Kai, 10, Ayeishah, 8, and Lila, 6, have room to "play games, have friends and do homework", says Nadia, 41. "Before, it was everyone screaming and running around the kitchen table. Now it's much less stressful." Their 880 sq ft basement also contains a guest bedroom lit by a lightwell, as well as a shower room and a utility space (with a laundry chute) in the dark centre.

The O'Neills lived in the house throughout the three-year build. This is only possible if you have a timber-joisted floor: a concrete floor has to be replaced if you extend downwards. "Budget for cracking," says Nadia, who paid £20,000 for neighbours' repairs. Michael Holmes agrees: "Cracking is likely, even if it's minute." Arrange a schedule of condition at adjacent homes beforehand, so there's a formal record to stop undue claims.

You need planning permission to dig or deepen a basement, but probably not for internal work to turn an existing cellar into living space. Check with your



Room for two more **Jenny and Craig Johnston** hired **Hüt Architecture** to add a basement extension to their east London home after the arrival of their twins, now 2



“We're happy where we are and decided we'd stretch our house as much as we could. It's given us so much more living space

council – some will require drawn-out basement impact assessments, which can be costly.

Three-quarters of applications for basements are in boroughs where property prices average more than £400,000. The work costs £3,000-£4,000 per sq metre, Holmes says. To be exact, Phil Sacre (basementexpert.co.uk) calculates £400 per sq metre for the floor slab and all wall surfaces, and £1,500 per linear metre of underpinning.

For Cornel and Susie Riklin, it made financial sense to enlarge their Chiswick villa by 50% with a 2,000 sq ft basement and rear extension that cost about 25% of their home's new potential value. The bronze-clad kitchen wing opens fully to the garden, without any gaps for lightwells, thanks to a 15ft walk-on skylight

in the ground-floor terrace. This, and 9ft ceilings, means that Alexandra, 17, uses the new underground party room "a lot". "She's had sleepovers for 12 there," says Cornel, 62, a private-equity professional. "The best decision was that we insisted on high ceilings – it doesn't feel like a basement at all." The cellar also houses his 1,500 wine bottles, a cinema and a gym.

"We do at least two kinds of waterproofing for a basement," says Gregory Phillips, the Riklins' architect (gregoryphillips.com). Until the turn of the millennium, most basements simply relied on being lined with concrete. Now they are tanked on the inside with a heavy waterproof membrane covered in studs, which lets water run down to a pump (with an alarm and backup power source) that drains it away. "If you do the concrete really well, the pump – your second defence – will last a long time," Sacre says. "Have someone supervise so it's done properly."

Fit it out with light flooring such as the white chevron timber used in Hayhurst & Co's burnt arch extension to a basement flat in St John's Wood, northwest London (hayhurstand.co.uk). Dimmable LED strip lights brighten dark corners, while the white stained larch ceiling tilts upwards towards the large kitchen window, drawing in light.

"It's uplifting," says Niku Banaie, 42, who lives there with Fleur, 40, and their children, Belle, 6, and Ario, 4. "When we sit down to dinner, we feel like we're in the garden."

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