

# i-Build

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COVER STORY

**DREAMS CAN COME TRUE**  
Vale Southern Construction has unveiled its latest masterpiece on the Isle of Wight, Dreamcatcher. This stunning family home boasts six bedrooms with en-suites, a luxurious swimming pool and an integral garage.



CASE STUDIES

**STEP INSIDE NASHVILLE'S TWO-FACED HOUSE**

A ranch house in Tennessee has been given a makeover with the help of Kebony

ADVISORY

**ECO HOMES: NAVIGATING THE ECO+ SCHEME**

How to take advantage of the scheme, reduce your carbon footprint and save money

MATERIALS

**CLIMBING TO NEW HEIGHTS**

Stairways Midlands creates tailor-made staircase for visually-impaired homeowner

I-DEAS

**RENOVATE WITH CONFIDENCE**

Robert Hirschfield Architects explains that successful renovations require careful planning



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## Unlocking the hidden potential: Key considerations for renovating existing properties

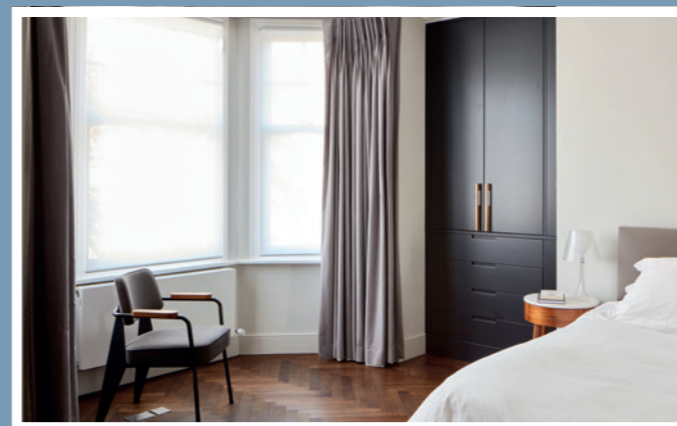
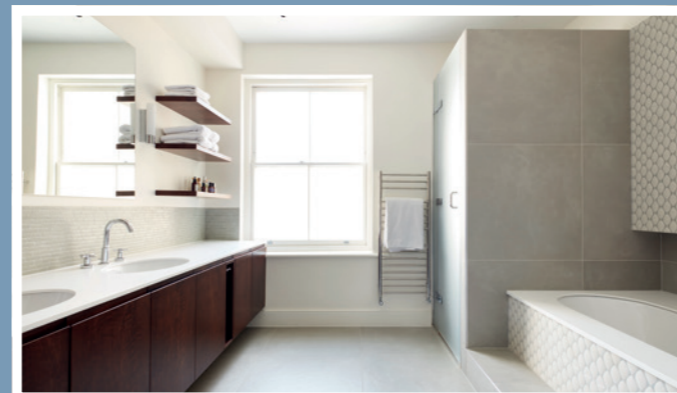
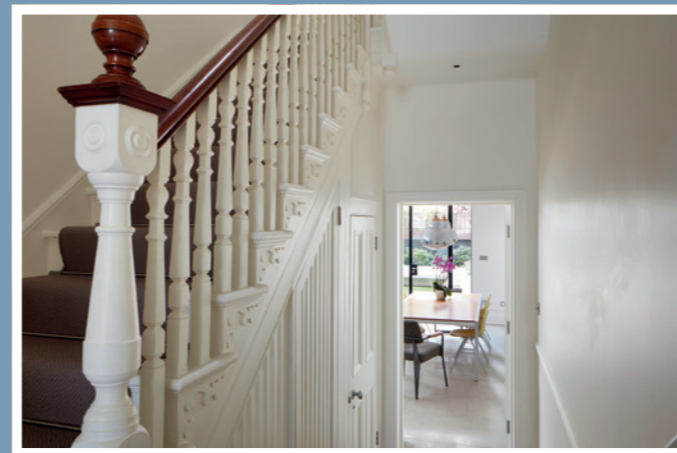
Robert Hirschfield Architects (RHA) is often approached by clients to look into the renovation of existing properties, and the practice has developed expertise in knowing what to look for when considering such an undertaking. Whether you're a developer who wants to see a return on their investment or a family looking to put down roots, there are several things to bear in mind early on that can unleash a project's potential. Here, Matthew Walker, Project Director at RHA, runs through some key considerations.

Let's assume you've done your market research and know the property you've found is in a desirable area but doesn't quite meet your needs. One of the first things you need to do is identify what those needs are and what your budget is. Sometimes, by taking a step back and assessing these seemingly obvious questions, you can make some fundamental decisions early on as to whether or not the property is suitable. For example, if you want a four-bedroom house but the property you're looking at only has three bedrooms and also needs to be refurbished throughout, your budget might not be able to support this amount of work.

By engaging professionals early on, such as an architect, you'll be able to understand what's achievable and how much it could cost. Architects not only design buildings but also act as lead consultants. They will work with cost consultants and other professionals to give informed recommendations early on.

The second, possibly counterintuitive, question to ask is whether or not you actually need to do any extension work to meet your needs. Building an extension is often the most expensive way to solve a problem, so we always like to look carefully at the existing layout of a property and think about what can be achieved within that space. Things like corridors, lobbies and oversized rooms can sometimes be rationalised to create additional rooms or more suitable layouts. This doesn't mean you're taking away from the building but rather adding to it with a more considered design. The benefit of this approach is that you not only avoid the expense associated with new construction work but also that these funds can be diverted into the fit out and upgrade of the existing building.

Say, for example, you had a budget set aside for a loft conversion that you realised you no longer needed; you could spend this money on upgrading the insulation and heating system of the building, making the property more comfortable to live in, more economical to run and, most importantly, more sustainable for the planet as a whole.



Whilst this approach has many benefits and we would employ it on all projects, whether requiring extensions or not, sometimes the footprint of an existing building just can't accommodate the special requirements of the end user. In this case, we do need to consider adding to the building and sometimes releasing hidden potential. Now, we could have dedicated this whole article to subjects like the planning law, conservation areas, rights of light legislations, drainage agreements, restrictive covenants, the Party Wall Act, permitted development rights and many more (all of which need to be considered when undertaking building work). If we did, however, we'd all be bored stiff by now! Even if you did manage to stick out the whole article and found it interesting, our conclusion would be the same.

If you're undertaking building work, we would always recommend engaging a professional. The list above gives a small insight into the quagmire of bureaucracy that professionals in the building sector have to study, and it's, therefore, better to let them dwell on it. By appointing a professional, this stress is not only taken away from yourself, but you could potentially save money where you'd miss something that they've otherwise come across multiple times.



Moving onto the more interesting stuff. On top of the aforementioned regulatory jargon, during their studies, architects are also taught critical thinking. This not only means you can talk about post-Modernism until the cows come home, but we can also apply this style of thinking to spatial design.

When looking to renovate a property, we would, therefore, suggest trying to think outside of the box and don't just assume a loft conversion would be the best solution.

What would happen, for example, if you moved the living and kitchen space into the loft where you get more light? What would happen if you turned the narrow side passageway into a two-storey extension providing the missing en-suite bathrooms? What would happen if you demolished the staircase and relocated it somewhere else instead? What would happen if you ripped out a floor entirely and had a room much grander than next door? What would happen if you dug down to create taller ceilings or even additional rooms? All of these things are hypothetical and, of course, come with their own pros and cons, but the approach remains the same. Potential can often be hidden, and by looking where others don't, you can achieve something special.

This thought experiment ties back to the original suggestion that building work is not always the first card to reach for, and that by stepping back, just for a moment, the bigger picture can sometimes reveal itself. The most important thing is to end up with something you're going to be happy with, whether it's to live in yourself or to know you've got the true potential from a building. Engaging the right professionals – which very often starts with finding the right architect – can always help smooth this process, but we hope the thoughts and ideas shared above can offer an insight into how we would get you there. ●

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