

grow UP!

Need a larger home? Consider topping up rather than moving on.

BY VICKY SANDERSON



Your growing family loves their home but space is becoming increasingly tight. It's a common dilemma.

You could relocate to a bigger house in the same community. The move may gobble up tens of thousands of dollars in real estate, moving expenses, and taxes. Opting for a larger place, in a less expensive area, would mean saying goodbye to everything you love about your present home – great neighbours, good schools – but the trade-off could save you money.

An increasingly popular alternative is to build an addition. In fact, there's

enough growth in this sector that Lou Orazem, owner of design/build firm Inspire Homes (inspirehomes.ca), switched his focus from building custom homes several years ago to, almost exclusively, building additions.

"We took on some renovations to fill a bit of time we had. But over three years or so, it came to the point where most of our work, now, is house additions. It's purely market driven — the demand is huge," Orazem says, adding that it's also one of the most challenging niches to occupy in the building business. "They are the

A renovation of this kind means a family can remain in the neighbourhood they know and love.



hardest thing to do because you are mixing old and new.”

A new build, says Orazem, is easier because “you’re starting from scratch, so you can build everything right from the beginning. Older buildings might not be square, straight or structurally sound. And, with a second-storey addition you need to think about the exterior, and how to make it fit with the look.”

Orazem’s company has clearly mastered those challenges; Inspire

Homes won renovation awards from the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) in 2009 and 2012.

“Whether or not families decide to build up, or out, rests on the lot size, how much extra space is needed, and whether the main floor needs to be reconfigured,” says Orazem.

“Homes built before World War II, in urban areas, can often only go one way – up. But even on bigger lots, some

“*A second-storey addition can also allow homeowners to expand and upgrade main-floor living spaces.*”

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homeowners are reluctant to sacrifice their yard space.”

Orazem says that adding on the back typically results in about 500 additional square feet, while a second storey would be more like 1,000.

Bole Cirovic, director of sales for Modular Home Additions, which

specializes in building modular homes and additions, agrees it makes sense for many families to top-up a bungalow for additional living space.

“It’s a simple way to expand your space, especially in the city, where lots are typically small and narrow, and the only way is to go is up,” says Cirovic.

Modular structures are built and partially assembled in an enclosed space. Temperature, light and humidity are controlled, and weather doesn’t play havoc with either the integrity of the material or the tradespeople’s ability to work with it. Finished components are shipped to the buyer’s site, where they’re assembled in a few days.

Despite — or perhaps because of — a recession, Modular Home Additions has seen annual sales jump about 20 per cent for a few years now. That’s even better than the national average: the Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute says manufactured building in 2011 in Canada was up about 13 per cent, and was worth about \$1.3 billion.

Pinning down an average price per square foot is difficult, says Cirovic, because so much depends on the finishes and materials, but they start at about \$150.

“There are a lot of variables, but price for the building is pretty much the same — conventional or modular. The savings realized with a modular addition are in shorter construction and installation times, and better use of construction material,” explains Cirovic. “And a more efficient flooring system that requires fewer expensive beams and allows extended height on the renovated ground floor with a minimum expense.”

As with any expenditure of this magnitude, Cirovic advises close scrutiny of the quote.

Whichever route you take, Orazem counsels people to use a full-service design-build firm.

“They will make sure you work within your budget,” he explains. “Sometimes an architect or designer can design an addition but if they don’t have a good sense of what it costs, clients will be shocked at the quote when they bring it to a builder, and realize they can’t afford it.”

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