

MAKING THOSE EXPENSIVE MISTAKES

ALL THE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT PLANNING SPACE

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MAKING THOSE EXPENSIVE MISTAKES

- Planning an Extension?
- What don't you know?
- Space is not for space sake
- Builders and Design Professionals
- Planning Permission has a lot to answer for
- If I had a wish
- Size Obsession
- Beautiful spaces aren't always well designed
- You probably have it already

A black and white photograph of an architectural floor plan. A wooden ruler is placed diagonally across the upper left portion of the plan, with its markings clearly visible. A metal paperclip is attached to the ruler, holding it in place. The floor plan itself is a detailed technical drawing showing various rooms, corridors, and structural elements. Numerous dimensions are labeled throughout the plan, including room sizes like 14.40, 14.14, 14.13, and 14.12, and corridor widths like 1.20, 1.50, and 1.80. The plan also includes labels for different areas, such as 'BYT 201' and 'SP2 11.93'. The overall layout is complex, with multiple interconnected spaces and a central corridor system. The drawing is oriented horizontally, but the ruler and paperclip are placed at an angle, creating a sense of scale and measurement.

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It's really a shame, but it's happening all over the country as we speak. Too many people do not understand that by simply adding meterage onto a space, you are not necessarily adding functionality or usability. You are probably just adding cost and reducing light to the other spaces within your home. Most homes can have the obstacles and lack of utility resolved with some clever floor planning and the adjustment of a walls or two. In the scope of things, these are relatively minor expenses compared to a fully extended space. When you extend a home, you push the room that was on the exterior wall into the middle, and you deaden the light it receives. You also leave markers in the form of ceiling beams which subconsciously indicate a divided space as opposed to helping to unify the opening.

Unless the whole home layout is considered to make use of the new meterage, (and available light) the likelihood is that your addition will also be a cost that will waste money and place you further away from the goals you were aiming to achieve.

SPACE FOR SPACE SAKE

The mentioned obstacles are something that designers are aware of, but homeowners looking to cut corners are often enticed by builders who suggest they will do the design work for them for free. These clients will never benefit from professional design knowledge that could prevent missed opportunities and unnecessary spend. Some builders and general contractors (but not all) do not want to work with design professionals. This "type" of builder does not want to stop and review alternate ideas. They feel that designers look a little too closely at the details, and that we find ways to add elements (character and features) that are “unnecessary” and require a little more craftsmanship and care in the building rather than a bog-standard straight-lined box. This type of builder will encourage the idea that designers are a cost you could do without. A service that will cost you more money to build and that they could offer for free. A service they prefer you don't have to make their lives a little easier.

Understanding this relationship may give you a little more insight about what to expect when you meet a builder or general contractor that responds unfavourably to receiving the support of a designer. Think carefully on this, and what it might mean for the quality of their work, or their ability to take on your point of view if you want a change. There are plenty of builders who would insist upon having properly laid out design plans, and who will provide you with itemised quotes so you can really see what you are spending on.

Free advice is rarely the best advice. I'm the first in line for a little cost saving, but only when I still get the best possible result in the end.... like getting two for one pizza. I just get more for my money, but the pizzas are the same – good value. This is not what happens when you scrimp on design support by using a builder for your design or drawings.

SCRIMPING ON DESIGN SUPPORT BY TAKING A BUILDER'S PREFERENCES OVER A DESIGN PROFESSIONALS IS LIKE HIRING A DENTIST TO DO BRAIN SURGERY.

A dentist is a perfectly qualified medical professional that does work inside your head, and yet they have nothing to do with how well your brain is functioning even though both teeth and brains are in the same general location.



There is however another culprit in the (not so) savvy-savers-club of bad design, and that is your local council's Planning Permission department. In principle, I love the idea of a department for considering quality design! I think that's a brilliant idea! But how many designs have been improved by the input of your local planning team? In my own experience I can count many amazing projects which were obliterated by the local Council Planning for their lack of flexibility and vision.

These council employees have the power to reject, but not advise (with commitment) towards simple amendments that might help to pass a design through with approval. Did you know that some councils take on residents (volunteers who have free time during the day, and needn't have any design credentials) to set about first stage review and rejection of plans? This is an outrage! A proper design crime! First off, how likely is it that the "residents committee of volunteers" is a diverse age range and demographic given that the volunteer work involved takes place within standard business hours when many of us are working paid jobs? You can draw your own conclusions, but simply put; planning departments have not resulted in a distinct improvement or progression in the look of buildings across the UK.

The lack of flexibility that many planning officers present; looking at guidelines rather than adapting to meet common sense situations. Only standing in position to find areas of objection and not suggestions or adaptations according to circumstances. Championing a standardised approach which suggests one-size-fits-all for any house in the UK has not benefited architecture! It is ludicrous to think one set of rules fits all homes. This process has a lot to answer for in terms of badly designed builds across the country.



IF I HAD A WISH

If I had a wish for home design, I would wish for a fully qualified and diverse independent planning body with a bit more vision and care for architecture and aesthetics, rather than red tape pencil pushers, and a league of unqualified volunteers. This system is holding the future back and preserving nothing of character or detail in our buildings. A generation can be defined by its architecture, and yet what statement are we making right now as we literally build a box to live in? It makes you think twice about the saying “think outside the box” when you realise you are living in one!

So many people are trying to avoid the nightmares they've heard about council planning departments (delays, costs, revisions, consultancy periods, involvement with neighbours, unclear discussions with a multitude of officers who interpret the rules to their own preferences) that these potential home innovators instead default their new design to bog standard guidance. All this simply because,

It's easier to conform to bad design
which meets the approved height, width, depth restrictions,
then it is to forge a new path.

How depressing! We should be celebrating architecture and maximizing what our homes can do for us when space is so limited. We should be paving the way and encouraging people to push the boundary of outstanding design, so that we can move forward and continue progressing and preserving. At very least we should stand for a level of respect towards the existing buildings and as such, address them in a better way than adding a basic box to the rear of our homes.

Sadly, the pain of the current planning process is too much for most homeowners to risk, and so ugly boxes with flat roofs continue to be the go-to structure for a pain free building experience.



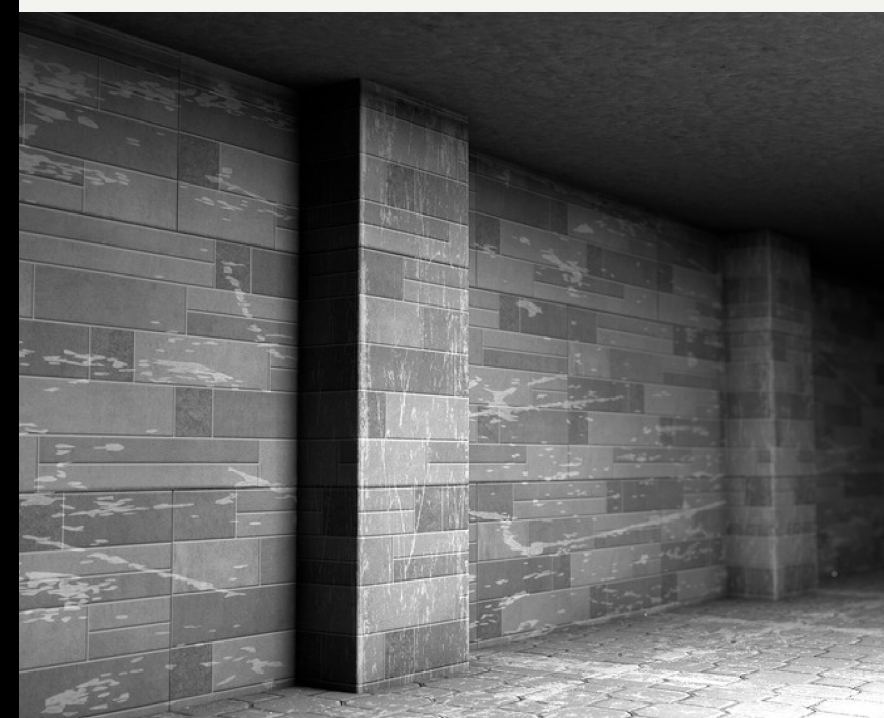
SIZE OBSESSION

There are hundreds of thousands of ugly, purposeless, ill-considered extensions around the UK. People often think that if they have added square meters, they've added value. I hate to break it to you, but you are WRONG!

Size for size-sake has no benefit to the existing home, or even for the newly added space. Anything added must be integrated to the lifestyle of the homeowner, and well considered against the other existing spaces within the home (and outside of the home).

At very least the way that natural light penetrates the interior rooms needs to have a moment of truth and awareness before the owners commit to reinventing Aladdin's cave.

For those who cannot visualise their future reality, who will tell them that the result of their actions will be a dark wide corridor that once was their reception room, and a new over-lit sunroom that has too much reflection to watch tv?



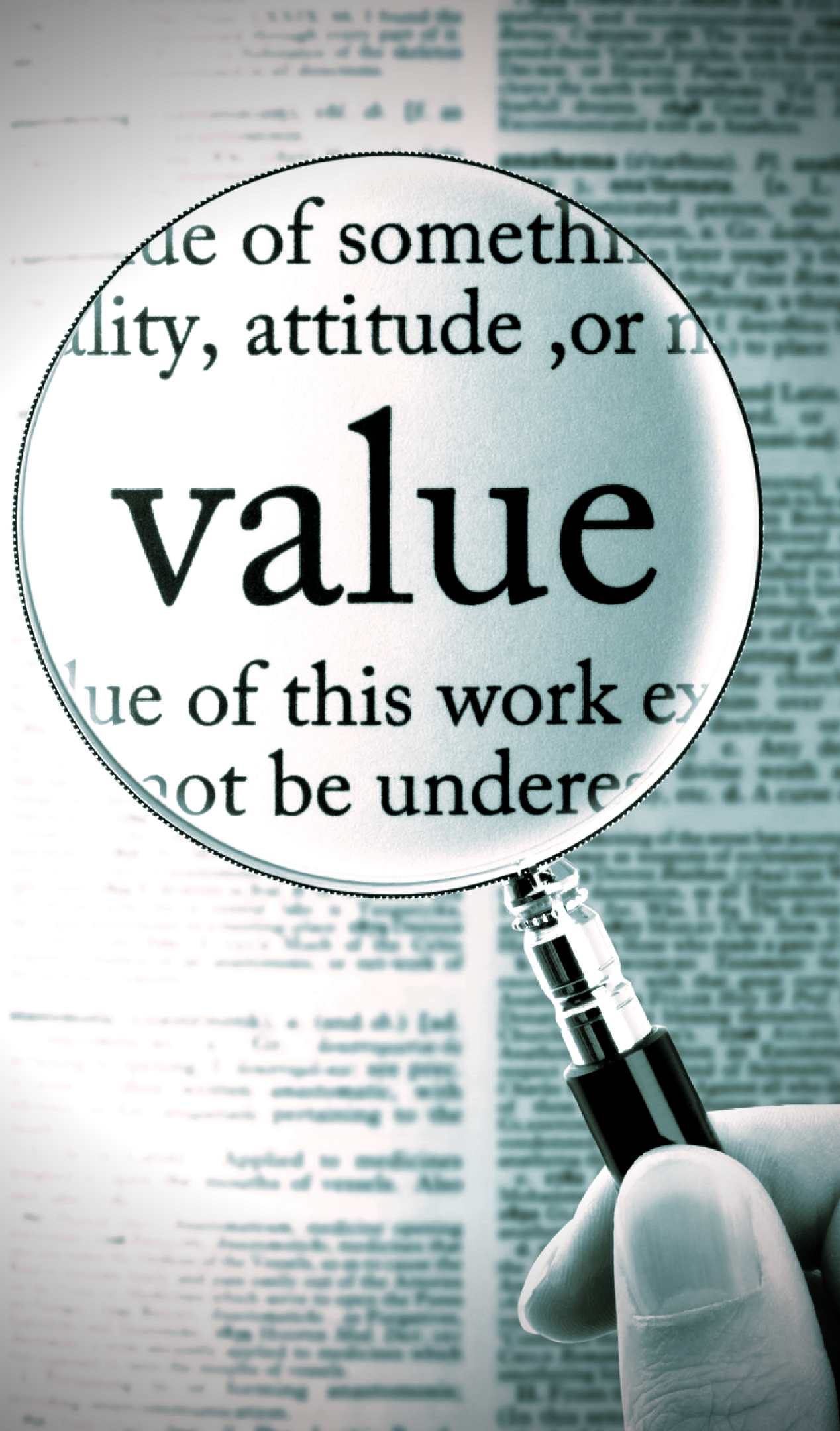


BEAUTIFUL SPACES AREN'T ALWAYS WELL DESIGNED

My final thought on extensions is a little feedback about utility and functionality. I have a few friends who are naturally creative-types and although they are not designers they have built beautiful extensions. They have considered both the integration of the back rooms of the existing house with the new extension, and they have also been sympathetic to the look of the outside of the building and how the new fits with the original structure. The spaces themselves are successful and a joy to spend time in. So, what could I possibly say about this?

Well, it's simply that they no longer use the front half of the original house. Isn't the point of adding more space to a home, a solution to remedy the need for more space? Isn't it about creating more functionality?

My friends have built beautiful extensions which link perfectly with light and space to the back of their existing home and the rooms that were there, but because they have created these amazing multi-functional rooms, they no longer use the front of their house. They are heating the front half of their home for nothing. No one uses these rooms, no one needs these rooms, for their purposes they could function perfectly well without the existence of the original house. Urgh.... Why!!?? This isn't well designed? The extension has not considered the utility of the whole home.



IMPROVE THE LAYOUT FIRST

This brings me back to the beginning. . .

There is often a way to make your existing home function for you without investing further by adding on. My friends have added more space, but they are continuing to live in the same amount of (new) space, just in a better layout. They have in essence moved-house, within their house. Ridiculous.

Just because you can add volume, doesn't mean you should; and it doesn't mean that you need to, or that it will add value to your home.

Their money could have been put into improving the layout and functionality of the original building, and the whole home would be in use, heated with purpose, enjoyed as it was intended, maintaining their (previously) large garden and with money saved for other adventures (or the new furniture that they want to buy, but can't yet afford because they spent it on the new build). My friends will never know this reality because they didn't save money by hiring a designer.

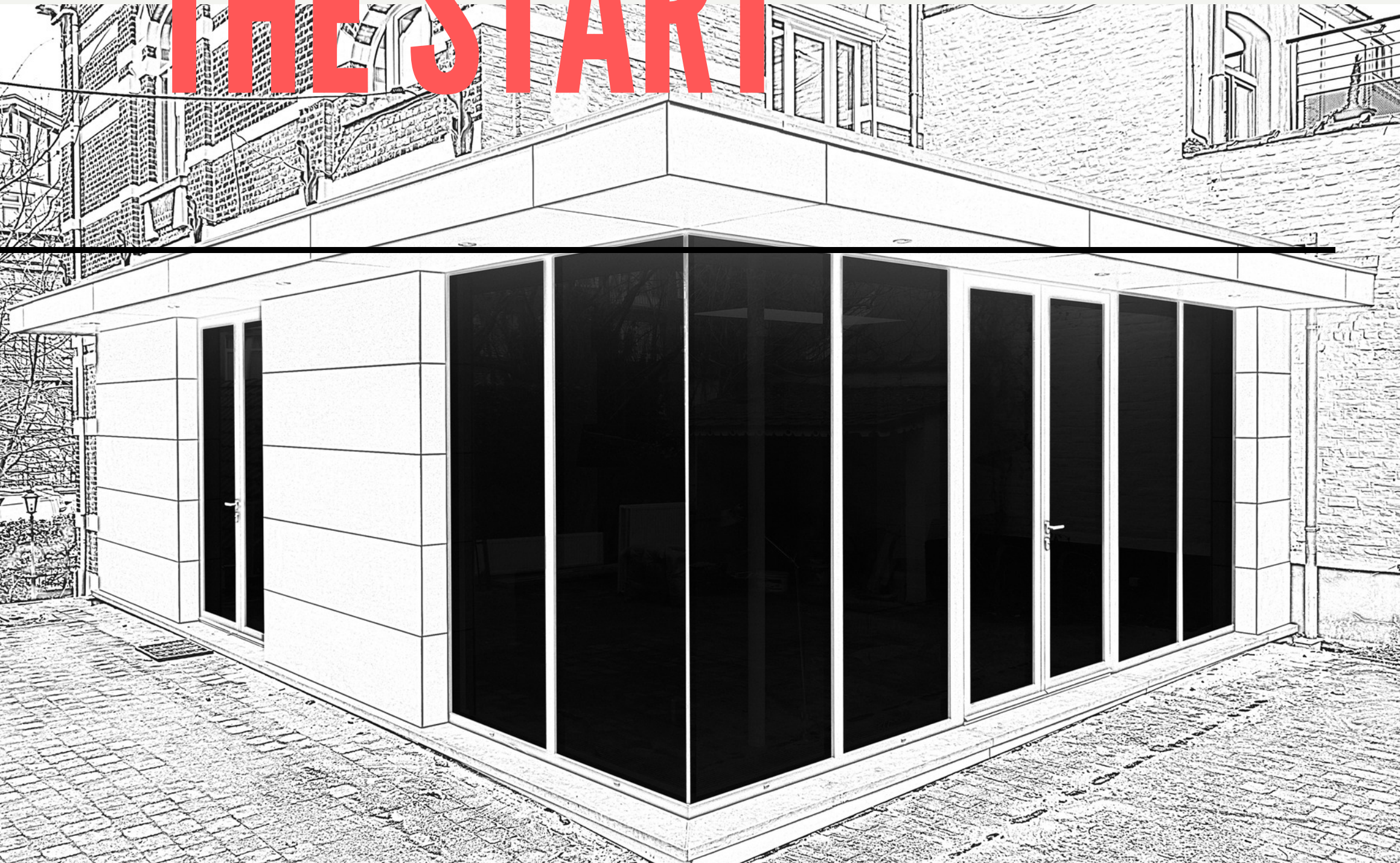
SEE IT FROM THE START

I understand that not everyone is born with an ability to visualise a space. I find that fact somewhat lucky, because in my case this is something that I can do! It provides me with an opportunity to earn a living supporting homeowners in this manner.

However, I don't know that I will ever fully understand the reluctance to invest on support for very expensive modifications without any guidance? For certain, considering an extension or renovation can already be overwhelming. The costs can escalate with every electrical socket you add. True! But "adding" the cost of a designer is an insurance policy you can't afford not to have. Afterall, ...

A terrible design, is a terrible design forever – or at least until it's remedied for a greater investment.

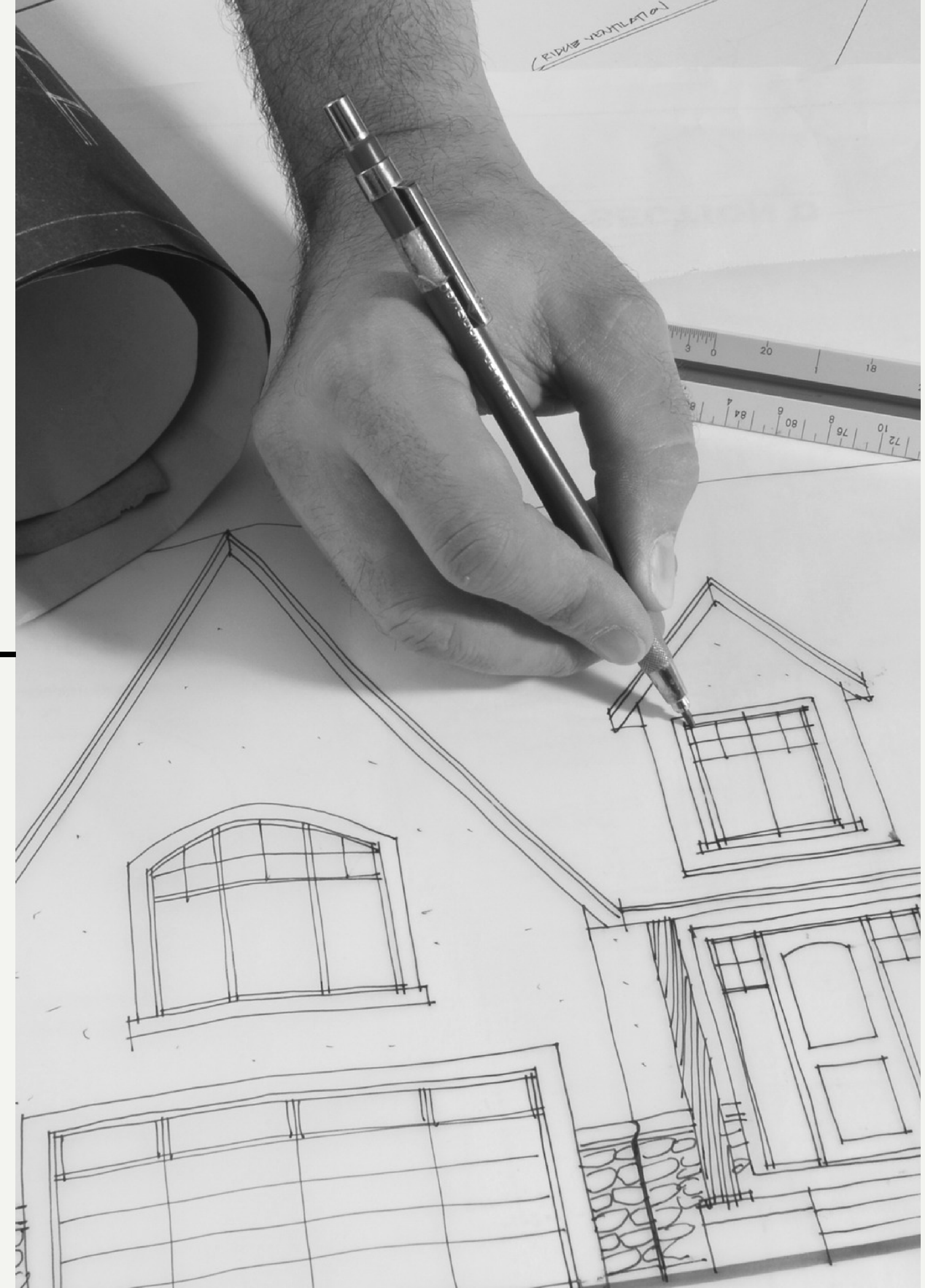
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ABOUT DESIGNERS

Designers can provide you with options and different solutions at different price brackets. This is costs saving. They can provide you with visualisations that will put your mind at ease so that you will be able to see what you are spending on and what you will get at the end of the build.

Designers are adept at recognizing that the direction of natural light is going to be impacted by the position of doors, the location of the property, the size of the extension, the addition of skylights, and the type of roof light that has been chosen too. These are just a few elements that impact colour, materials, window treatments, countertop surfaces, slip rating, placement of televisions and a myriad of other variables that (good eye, or not) you may be unaware of. You may even find that a designer can provide you with solutions that mean major construction work is entirely unnecessary, maintaining the size of your garden and your pocketbook too.



DESIGN BLOG



Remember,

- Space is not needed for space's sake.
- Stop the hole in your pocket and start really considering the possibilities a designer can provide you with.
- Your job is to think about how you really use your house currently? Where do you spend your time? Are there areas that feel too cold, too dark, too remote, too small? Are there needs that your house does not currently provide?
- After you have analysed your situation, do yourself a worthwhile favour and share these findings with a designer. See what they think. They can show you solutions you would never even have considered.



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