



Expert advice

Choose the right design and your conservatory will add value to your property

10 things to consider before buying a conservatory

TODAY'S CONSERVATORIES are far removed from the standard pentagonal plastic-looking versions of years gone by – with a vast array of designs, styles and materials now available, it's easier than ever to add a unique conservatory space to your home. Michael Barnes, Managing Director of Apropos Conservatories, offers his expert advice on what you need to think about before you buy a conservatory:

1 WHETHER YOUR HOME'S TRADITIONAL OR CONTEMPORARY, you'll need to consider the design of your conservatory – do you want one that reflects the style of your home or would you rather it was a contrasting feature?

2 CONSIDER WHICH MATERIAL YOU WANT TO USE – aluminium is light, strong, contemporary and comes in an infinite range of colours. Timber can be hardwood or softwood and has a traditional feel, but is less durable and not as strong. The most common material is uPVC, which is light, strong and durable, but it's not as attractive as some of the other materials available.

3 DECIDE WHAT THE SPACE WILL BE USED FOR – living space, garden room, dining room or kitchen extension? The use will dictate its design, its relationship to adjacent elements of your property, its orientation with regards to sunlight and the heating requirements.

4 HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF YOUR BUDGET and what you are expecting in terms of a return on your investment. It may be that you wish to enhance the value of your property and this is certainly possible with the right structure.

5 GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR LOCAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT to see if you need to get planning approval for your project. Your designer should be able to advise you of the relevant restrictions in your area, as well as ideas on the choice

of design and material. Some suppliers, including Apropos, offer a full design service to simplify the process for you.

6 THE DESIGN SERVICE YOU RECEIVE will depend upon the complexity of the structure you require, the sophistication of the respective organisation and the skill of the individual designer. You should expect an initial fact-finding visit and at least one further presentation visit afterwards.

7 AFTER-SERVICE WILL VARY – some companies operate on a basic design and supply basis, while others provide a full design, planning, installation and building service. Others, particularly those involved in bespoke situations, will work in conjunction with the client's builder and architect to achieve the ideal solution. You need to be sure that the fit is right between your requirements and the capabilities of your chosen supplier.

8 ESTABLISH YOUR FUNDS – you need to be clear as to how you are going to fund your project. Many companies offer a finance facility and many such facilities are good value, but you should carry out some research in advance to be sure that you are making the right decisions when it comes to placing your order.

9 GET REFERRALS – the best suppliers will have genuine clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Naturally, there will be clients who prefer their details to remain private, but beware of companies who shy away from referrals.

10 RESEARCH THOROUGHLY – immerse yourself in the topic for some time to ensure that you have your own ideas about the kind of design you want. Your structure will probably represent a significant investment, so make sure you are clear on the point where your desires meet your needs and coincide with your means.

Trade secrets REVEALED!

What to do if...

you think you've found asbestos in a wall you're knocking through

Unless you're an expert, you're unlikely to know if you've come across asbestos,' says Fran Bell, Quality Manager at asbestos specialist Eton Analytical Limited. 'The only way to know for sure is to get an expert to survey and test it. The UKAS website, www.ukas.org, lists labs in your area that will charge between £10-25 to do that.

Your best bet would be to assess beforehand the likelihood of a wall having asbestos in it. If it's a dividing wall, constructed with plasterboard, it may be. It depends on the age of the house and the likelihood that remedial work was undertaken since it was built. The UKAS site also has a list of accredited surveyors you can call out to look at it. If you do come across what may be asbestos, the best thing to do is to wet it so the fibres don't become airborne. Then get out, shut the door and don't let anyone in.

How fast a surveyor can visit will depend on their workload. Removal firms come straight away, but be careful – with some, advice may be biased towards making money. Without having a survey, you won't know if the material truly is asbestos and whether it's a licensable product that needs their removal skills. If it's licensed, it's too dangerous for you to remove yourself. A specialist company (which has trained staff and invested in the correct containers to take it away) will be needed and so the costs will rise.

If it's a non-licensable product, you can remove it yourself, wrap it in polythene and call the council's environmental department to collect it. Things like Artex and corrugated roofing can be dealt with in this way. As a householder, the council will take those away for free, but if you're a business, you'll be charged around £150 per ton to dispose of it. Visit the Health and Safety Executive website (www.hse.gov.uk) for advice sheets on asbestos and which types are safe to deal with yourself.'



Ideally you should get suspect walls checked for asbestos before knocking them down