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TOP TIP

Wooden window frames can be awkward to paint so, if possible, choose powder-coated aluminium frames, which are low-maintenance and provide good insulation.

This loft conversion by Stiff + Trevillion is part of a roomy two-level family maisonette and involved both internal and external structural work. Previously used for storage, the space was transformed into a bright home office. A loft project like this would cost from £30,000, depending on size and finish.



6 BUILD A LOFT EXTENSION

This is the most cost-effective way to gain more space in your home, but just because it's budget-friendly doesn't mean it's a less satisfactory option. The views from a loft can be amazing. A well-designed space will be bright and dramatic, and can be used as a penthouse suite. Another advantage is that, as a loft is relatively self-contained, early-stage access can be from outside via scaffolding, so you can continue living in the house, which can save money too.

■ A basic conversion transforms an existing loft into a habitable room, whereas a loft extension adds more cubic feet, with the addition of one or more dormer windows. If the former is sufficient for your needs, a loft-conversion specialist is your best bet, especially one that has done other jobs in your area and will know what's permissible. If you want a more bespoke build, consult an architect, who can explore a wide range of options and come up with a custom design. 'Bring a little more personality to the space by using materials other than just white

painted plasterboard,' says architect Dominic McKenzie. 'And rather than opting for a standard grid of downlighters, consider more interesting light fittings to add individuality.'

■ Properties built before 1975 are most likely to be suitable, although a modern trussed roof can be converted with a little more structural work. There is no minimum height for a loft room, but anything less than about 2.2m is impractical.

■ Ceiling joists will need to be strengthened, which may raise the floor slightly, but if you can afford to lose the inches downstairs it's possible to lower the original ceiling. This can make all the difference, and if you're putting in a new loft floor anyway, the cost won't be much more. A conversion also needs a permanent staircase if it's to be officially classed as an extra room.

■ A straightforward loft conversion could start at £1,500 per sq m and take around six to eight weeks, while a bespoke build may take as long as four months to complete.



One advantage of a loft bathroom is you can luxuriate in natural light and views via huge windows, unimpeded by blinds, because you're not overlooked. Velux could supply windows like this, from £396 each.