

LOFTS, EXTENSIONS & BEYOND

HOW TO ADD SPACE TO A LONDON HOME

LOFT CONVERSIONS / SIDE RETURNS / REAR EXTENSIONS



DAVID DELAVEGA

LOFTS, EXTENSIONS & BEYOND

How to add space to a London home: loft conversions, side returns and rear extensions, with real programmes, structures and costs.

DAVID DELAVEGA

25 YEARS IN PROPERTY DESIGN AND RENOVATION

A practical design handbook

Published in London, August 2026.

This book is written for homeowners preparing a serious addition to a London house. It explains design logic, project sequence and commercial decisions in plain language. It is not a substitute for project-specific architectural, structural, planning, party wall, building control, tax or legal advice.

- All costs are indicative model budgets at an August 2026 price basis.
- Every property, access route and borough creates different risk.
- Obtain written professional advice and competitive quotations before committing.

DAVID'S RULE

A beautiful project begins with a disciplined brief, a buildable design and money reserved for the unknown.

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Why add space?

The best extension does more than add square metres: it improves the whole house.

London homes often have good bones but poor circulation, dark middle rooms and underused roof volume. A successful project solves these weaknesses together. Start by defining the life the house must support, then choose the smallest intervention that delivers it.

- Loft: private rooms, study, bathroom or principal suite.
- Side return: light, width and circulation at ground level.
- Rear extension: depth, garden connection and a new family centre.
- Combined scheme: maximum transformation, maximum coordination.

DAVID'S RULE

Design the journey from front door to garden, not just the new room.

The value of one better metre

Space is valuable, but usefulness is the real return.

A narrow metre added to a kitchen can unlock an island, a continuous storage wall and comfortable circulation. A modest dormer can create a full-height bedroom where the old roof stored boxes. Judge value by daylight, storage, privacy and daily ease, not area alone.

- Measure existing bottlenecks.
- List the rooms that must work harder.
- Protect the best original features.
- Set a maximum all-in investment before design expands.

DAVID'S RULE

The most expensive square metre is the one that does not improve how you live.

Choose the right move

Loft, side return, rear extension or a coordinated combination?

A loft is usually the least disruptive way to add a bedroom zone. A side return repairs a narrow outrigger plan. A rear extension can create a generous kitchen-living room but consumes garden. A combined project may be efficient if temporary works, design and services are planned once.

- Need bedrooms? Test the roof first.
- Need width and daylight? Test the side return.
- Need family space? Test the rear.
- Need all three? Design the structure and services as one system.

DAVID'S RULE

Select the intervention that solves the main problem with the least permanent compromise.

Four ways to add space

Feasibility comparison before site-specific design.

ROUTE	BEST FOR	BUILD TIME	MODEL BUILD RANGE
Rooflight loft	1 room / study	8-10 weeks	£55k-£85k
Rear dormer loft	Suite / 2 rooms	10-14 weeks	£85k-£135k
Side return	Width + daylight	14-18 weeks	£110k-£165k
Rear extension	Family space	18-24 weeks	£145k-£240k
Combined project	Whole-house change	28-40 weeks	£260k-£450k+



Write the brief

Translate aspirations into decisions that can be priced.

A strong brief names the rooms, performance, atmosphere, storage, technology and budget. Separate must-haves from preferences. Record what can change and what cannot. This becomes the reference when attractive extras appear during construction.

- Household and future needs.
- Room schedule and adjacency.
- Material character and maintenance.
- Energy, acoustic and comfort targets.
- Maximum budget and move-in date.

DAVID'S RULE

If a requirement cannot be written clearly, it cannot be designed or priced clearly.



The new work will expose old weaknesses.

Inspect roof condition, damp, movement, drains, electrical capacity, boiler and hot-water strategy. Record floor levels and hidden changes. A measured survey is the base; targeted opening-up and specialist surveys reduce surprises.

- Drain survey before foundations are fixed.
- Asbestos survey where relevant before disturbance.
- Trial holes where foundation assumptions matter.
- Roof and chimney inspection before loft design.

DAVID'S RULE

Spend a little on evidence before spending a lot on construction.

The measured survey

Accuracy protects design, structure and cost.

London terraces are rarely square. Party walls lean, outriggers narrow and floor levels change. Survey the full house, roof, garden, drainage clues and neighbouring context. Photographs and a level survey help the design team coordinate steel, stairs and thresholds.

- Check headroom along the proposed stair route.
- Record chimney breasts, nibs and service risers.
- Survey boundaries; do not design from fence lines alone.
- Include neighbouring windows for planning assessment.

DAVID'S RULE

Ten millimetres on a drawing can become an expensive site decision.

Planning route

Permitted development is a legal test, not a design style.

Some house lofts and extensions can fall within permitted development limits, while flats and maisonettes generally do not benefit from the same householder rights. Conservation areas, Article 4 directions, previous additions and conditions can change the route. Confirm the lawful route before procurement.

- Review planning history.
- Check whether the property is a house, flat or maisonette.
- Test every limit and condition.
- Consider a lawful development certificate where appropriate.

DAVID'S RULE

Never assume a neighbour's extension proves that yours is permitted.



Loft permitted development

Volume, position and detail all matter.

The national Planning Portal identifies roof-space volume limits of 40 cubic metres for terraced houses and 50 cubic metres for detached and semi-detached houses, subject to all relevant limits and conditions. Previous roof additions count toward the allowance.

- No enlargement beyond the principal roof slope fronting a highway under the usual Class B route.
- Materials should be similar in appearance where required.
- Setbacks, eaves and side-window conditions must be checked.
- A full planning application may still be the better design route.

DAVID'S RULE

Measure the proposed volume; do not estimate it by eye.

Extension permitted development

Depth is only one part of the test.

Single-storey rear and side additions may be permitted development when all limits and conditions are met. Side additions are tightly controlled; designated land can restrict rights. Larger rear extensions may require prior approval through the neighbour consultation route.

- Check height, eaves, depth, width and boundary position.
- Confirm the original house and cumulative additions.
- Review materials and roof form.
- Keep written evidence of the route used.

DAVID'S RULE

Planning permission and Building Regulations approval are different obligations.

Planning risk

Good applications explain impact, not only appearance.

Where permission is needed, design around local character, neighbour daylight, privacy, garden retention and heritage. Accurate existing and proposed drawings matter. A concise design statement should show why the scale and materials belong to the house.

- Use verified context drawings.
- Show neighbouring windows and rooflines.
- Explain massing and material choices.
- Allow time for revisions and conditions.

DAVID'S RULE

A strong planning set is accurate before it is persuasive.



Conservation and heritage

Quiet design can still be contemporary.

In sensitive streets, rear work may accept modern language while roof alterations require restraint. Use genuine materials, disciplined proportions and carefully concealed services. Listed buildings require a separate and more demanding consent strategy.

- Study local conservation guidance.
- Retain hierarchy between original house and addition.
- Coordinate vents, flues, solar equipment and rainwater.
- Do not order windows before consent conditions are discharged.

DAVID'S RULE

The best heritage addition is legible as new without shouting.

Party Wall Act

Serve notices early enough to protect the programme.

The Party Wall etc. Act 1996 provides a framework for work to party structures, boundary walls and certain excavations near neighbouring buildings. It is a civil process separate from planning and building control. Obtain project-specific advice from a competent surveyor.

- Identify adjoining owners correctly.
- Issue drawings with notices.
- Allow for access, schedules of condition and awards.
- Do not let the construction start date outrun the process.

DAVID'S RULE

Neighbour communication supports the legal process; it does not replace it.

Building Regulations

Approval follows the technical design.

Lofts and extensions normally engage structure, fire safety, drainage, ventilation, energy, stairs, electrics and glazing. The Approved Documents provide guidance, while project professionals must demonstrate compliance for the actual building.

- Choose a building control route before work starts.
- Coordinate structural drawings and calculations.
- Book inspections at the required stages.
- Keep test certificates and product data for handover.

DAVID'S RULE

Do not cover work until the required inspection and photographic record are complete.

The professional team

Clear responsibility prevents gaps.

A typical project may need an architect or architectural designer, structural engineer, party wall surveyor, building control body, principal designer roles, energy assessor and specialist consultants. The contractor coordinates production information into buildable work.

- Define who leads design.
- Define who checks design changes.
- Name who issues instructions and values changes.
- Keep one controlled drawing register.

DAVID'S RULE

A famous title matters less than a clear scope, relevant experience and accountability.

Choose a procurement route

The contract should match the information available.

A fully designed competitive tender can improve comparison but takes longer before site. Design-and-build can create a single point of responsibility, but employer requirements must still be clear. A negotiated route can move faster when trust and cost transparency are strong.

- Do not compare totals without comparing exclusions.
- Confirm design responsibility.
- Agree how provisional sums are adjusted.
- Use a written building contract.

DAVID'S RULE

Price certainty comes from information certainty.

Preliminaries are real work

The project starts before the first brick.

Scaffold, welfare, protection, skips, licences, hoarding, temporary power, security, supervision and cleaning are part of delivery. Restricted parking and long carry routes can materially increase labour. Allow for them explicitly.

- Site setup and welfare.
- Protection to occupied areas.
- Scaffold and temporary roof.
- Waste, permits and logistics.
- Management and quality records.

DAVID'S RULE

A low preliminaries allowance usually reappears later as delay or variation.



Buildability review

Design the construction sequence before tender.

Large steel, glass and roof components must physically reach the work area. Check crane need, pavement licences, scaffold loading, temporary support and storage. Resolve how the house stays weather-tight and secure at every stage.

- Map access from road to garden and roof.
- Confirm maximum component sizes.
- Plan temporary drainage and weathering.
- Sequence structural openings with fabrication.

DAVID'S RULE

If the drawing cannot be built safely in sequence, it is not finished.

Programme anatomy

A programme is a network of decisions, not just dates.

Planning, party wall, technical design and procurement may run in parallel, but construction has hard dependencies. Steel cannot be ordered before dimensions are confirmed. Glazing lead time may control the weather-tight date. Finishes depend on drying and stable services.

- Approvals and neighbour process.
- Detailed design and selections.
- Long-lead orders.
- Structure and weather-tight envelope.
- Services, finishes, testing and snagging.

DAVID'S RULE

Track decisions with the same discipline as site activities.

Cost anatomy

A disciplined budget separates construction, risk and client choices.

CATEGORY	WHAT IT COVERS	TYPICAL CONTROL
Base build	Labour, materials, plant	Detailed scope
Preliminaries	Site, scaffold, welfare	Programme + logistics
Specialists	Glazing, joinery, MEP	Early quotations
Provisional	Unresolved defined work	Investigation
Contingency	Unknown existing risk	Owner reserve
Fees + approvals	Design and statutory	Separate schedule

Cost certainty ladder

Certainty rises as unknowns are removed.

A feasibility allowance tests affordability. A concept estimate compares options. A pre-tender cost plan uses coordinated drawings and specifications. A contract sum becomes meaningful only when exclusions, provisional sums, programme and change rules are understood.

- Stage 1: broad range.
- Stage 2: elemental cost plan.
- Stage 3: measured tender comparison.
- Stage 4: controlled contract sum and change log.

DAVID'S RULE

Ask what is excluded before asking whether the total is cheap.

Contingency

Contingency is not spare money.

Existing buildings contain uncertainty. Early budgets should carry design development and construction risk allowances. As surveys, opening-up and technical design remove risk, the allowance can reduce. Client upgrades need a separate reserve.

- Existing structure and concealed defects.
- Drainage and ground conditions.
- Utility capacity and diversions.
- Planning or building control changes.
- Client-requested enhancements.

DAVID'S RULE

Protect the contingency until the building is closed, dry and structurally complete.

Loft typologies

Choose form through space, context and planning.

Rooflight conversions preserve the roof shape. Rear dormers create full-height floor area. Hip-to-gable works can unlock stairs and bedrooms in hipped roofs. Mansards provide a more architectural top storey but usually need planning permission.

- Rooflight conversion.
- Rear dormer.
- Hip-to-gable plus dormer.
- L-shaped dormer over outrigger.
- Mansard or full roof reconstruction.



DAVID'S RULE

Start with the stair and headroom; the roof shape comes second.

Rooflight conversion

The lightest-touch option.

Where headroom and floor area already exist, rooflights can create a calm studio or bedroom without a large dormer. The technical challenge is continuous insulation, airtightness and clean reveals around the windows.

- Best where ridge height is generous.
- Lower external visual impact.
- Less full-height perimeter storage.
- Coordinate blinds, overheating control and maintenance access.

DAVID'S RULE

A simple rooflight room still needs a new structural floor and compliant escape strategy.

Rear dormer

The London workhorse.

A well-proportioned rear dormer creates usable headroom while preserving the principal roof slope. Zinc or high-quality tile hanging can make the volume feel deliberate. Windows should align with the interior, the rear elevation and privacy needs.

- Keep the form visually subordinate to the roof.
- Resolve cheeks, eaves and gutters in section.
- Use joinery to absorb low eaves.
- Control summer heat at large glazing.

DAVID'S RULE

The dormer should look composed from the garden, not merely maximised from inside.

Hip-to-gable

Recover the volume lost to a sloping end roof.

Semi-detached and end-terrace houses may benefit from replacing the hip with a gable, often combined with a rear dormer. The change affects street and roofscape character, so planning status and materials need careful checking.

- Survey ridge, party wall and existing rafters.
- Coordinate gable masonry or lightweight build-up.
- Check wind restraint and roof geometry.
- Match or deliberately complement existing materials.

DAVID'S RULE

Do not let the external gable decision be driven only by internal floor area.

Mansard

A complete upper-storey composition.

A mansard replaces much of the roof with a steep rear slope and a flatter top. It can deliver excellent space and elegant dormer windows, particularly where local precedent exists. It generally demands fuller planning and structural coordination.

- Strong relationship to terrace roofscape.
- Complex waterproofing and junctions.
- Potential party wall and chimney work.
- Higher design and construction cost.

DAVID'S RULE

A mansard succeeds through proportion and craftsmanship, not volume alone.

L-shaped dormer

Extend over the rear outrigger when policy and structure allow.

An L-shaped dormer can create a principal suite plus bathroom or two compact rooms. The valley, outrigger roof and party-wall junctions are technically sensitive. Drainage routes and rear elevation composition need early resolution.

- Check cumulative roof volume.
- Coordinate valley support.
- Avoid awkward internal steps.
- Keep bathroom soil and waste routes practical.

DAVID'S RULE

Plan the bathroom around drainage reality before finalising the suite.



The stairs are the project

A legal, comfortable stair consumes real space below.

The best position often continues the existing stair rhythm. Test headroom, pitch, landings, guarding and fire strategy together. A beautiful stair can bring daylight through the house; a forced stair can damage two floors.

- Start section drawings early.
- Use full-size rise-and-going checks.
- Protect furniture routes.
- Integrate storage below low flights.

DAVID'S RULE

Never approve a loft plan without reading the stair in section.

Headroom and usable area

Floor area is not the same as comfortable area.

Map ceiling heights across the proposed plan after allowing for the new structural floor and insulated roof build-up. Place circulation and standing functions at full height; use low zones for beds, baths, drawers and eaves storage.

- Draw height contours.
- Allow for finishes, not only structure.
- Check door swings under slopes.
- Keep the stair arrival generous.

DAVID'S RULE

Design every low zone deliberately so it feels useful, not leftover.



Loft structure

The new room needs an independent load path.

A loft conversion usually introduces new floor members supported by loadbearing walls or steel beams. Existing ceiling joists are rarely the new floor. Altered rafters, dormer openings and purlins require an engineer-designed system tied safely into the existing house.

- Verify bearing points.
- Avoid loading unsupported partitions.
- Coordinate steel with stair and services.
- Record fire protection and connections.

DAVID'S RULE

Structure must be designed to the actual surveyed building, never copied from a typical detail.

New floor construction

Strength, vibration and acoustics meet here.

The new floor must carry room loads without relying on the fragile ceiling below. Depth affects headroom and stair geometry. Acoustic insulation, resilient layers and careful service penetrations improve comfort between floors.

- Confirm joist or engineered member depth.
- Detail perimeter restraint and blocking.
- Separate new floor from old ceiling where designed.
- Seal acoustic and fire penetrations.

DAVID'S RULE

A quiet floor is a designed assembly, not just thick boards.

Altering the roof

Every cut member needs a new structural story.

Dormers interrupt rafters and may change purlin support. Temporary works hold the roof while new beams, trimmers and walls are installed. The final build-up must resist weather, movement and condensation.

- Engineer trimmed openings.
- Plan temporary propping.
- Maintain ventilation or warm-roof continuity.
- Inspect hidden structure before closing.

DAVID'S RULE

Temporary stability deserves the same attention as permanent structure.

Fire strategy

A loft changes the escape route through the whole house.

Protected stairs, doors, alarms, separation and window provisions depend on the building and design. Open-plan ground floors can complicate the route. Develop the strategy before ordering doors or removing walls.

- Coordinate with Building Regulations guidance.
- Survey existing doors and linings.
- Integrate detection and alarm coverage.
- Keep service penetrations properly fire-stopped.

DAVID'S RULE

Fire design is a whole-house exercise, not a loft-only note.

Warm roof, airtight room

Comfort depends on continuity.

Insulation thickness reduces space unless integrated early. Thermal bridges around dormer cheeks, steel, eaves and rooflights can create cold surfaces. A continuous air barrier and carefully taped junctions reduce uncontrolled leakage.

- Choose build-up with hygrothermal logic.
- Maintain ventilation where required.
- Seal junctions before finishes.
- Photograph continuity before boarding.

DAVID'S RULE

The unseen junctions decide whether the loft feels luxurious in February and August.

Acoustic comfort

Protect sleep from the rest of the house.

Use mineral wool, dense layers, resilient separation and sealed perimeters to control sound. Plumbing should not run loose through bedroom voids. Plant and pumps need isolation from lightweight structure.

- Wrap noisy pipes.
- Avoid back-to-back sockets where possible.
- Use solid doors where privacy matters.
- Isolate mechanical equipment.

DAVID'S RULE

Luxury is often the absence of noise.

Services in the roof

Plan the hidden routes before the floor closes.

Check electrical capacity, heating load, water pressure, hot-water recovery and waste falls. A loft shower may need pump or cylinder strategy. Keep valves, traps and equipment accessible.

- Route wastes with gravity where possible.
- Avoid excessive notching and drilling.
- Provide ventilation to wet rooms.
- Coordinate lighting with rafters and insulation.

DAVID'S RULE

A beautiful ceiling is easier when every cable, duct and light is coordinated in advance.

The loft bathroom

Compact does not mean compromised.

Place the shower at full height, use low eaves for bath or storage and keep sanitaryware close to viable drainage. Continuous waterproofing, ventilation and access panels matter more than decorative stone.

- Set falls before tile setting.
- Use large mirrors to borrow light.
- Keep niches out of critical structural zones.
- Specify slip resistance and maintainable grout.

DAVID'S RULE

Resolve soil, waste and extract routes before choosing the vanity.

Model loft cost plan

Rear dormer principal suite - August 2026 London basis.

ELEMENT	ALLOWANCE	NOTES
Preliminaries	£14,500	Scaffold, protection, welfare
Structure + roof	£32,000	Steel, timber, dormer, covering
Stair + fire work	£14,000	Stair, doors, alarms allowance
Windows + envelope	£11,500	Rooflights, dormer windows
Services + bathroom	£18,500	Heating, electrics, shower room
Finishes + joinery	£19,500	Mid-high specification
Subtotal	£110,000	Before fees and client risk

Model premium loft

Mansard-style suite with bespoke detail.

ELEMENT	ALLOWANCE	RISK DRIVER
Preliminaries	£20,000	Longer scaffold / temporary roof
Roof + structure	£47,000	Complex reconstruction
Envelope + windows	£18,000	Zinc, dormers, rooflights
Stair + fire	£16,000	Whole-house measures
Services + bathroom	£24,000	Premium fittings
Joinery + finishes	£30,000	Bespoke eaves storage
Subtotal	£155,000	Before fees / contingency

Twelve-week loft programme

Example after approvals, design and procurement.

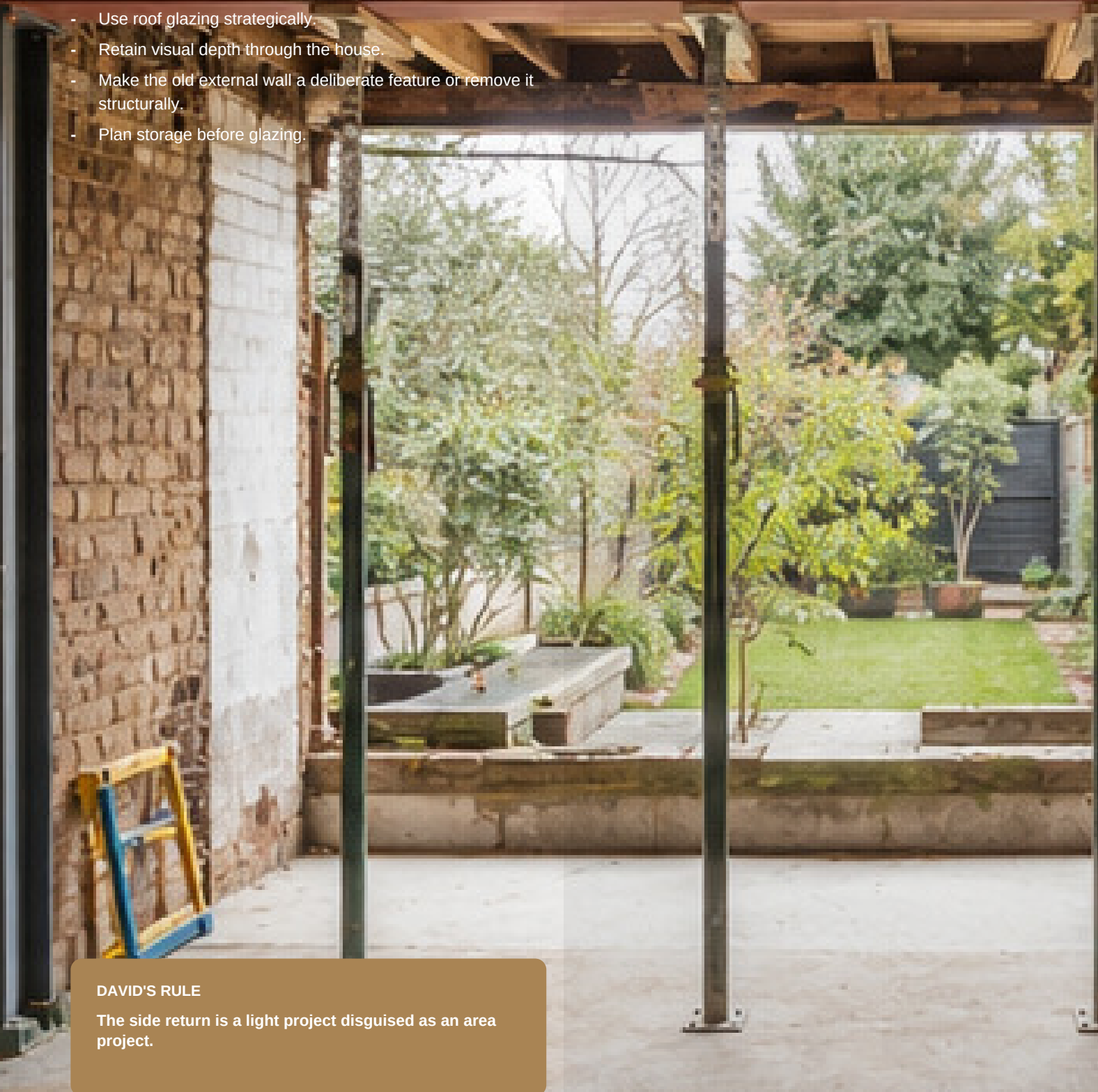
WEEKS	MAIN ACTIVITY	CONTROL POINT
1-2	Setup, scaffold, opening-up	Survey confirmation
3-4	Steel + new floor	Engineer inspection
5-6	Roof alterations + dormer	Weather-tight target
7	Windows + external finish	Envelope check
8-9	First fix, insulation, fire work	Pre-close inspection
10	Plaster + stair	Drying / protection
11	Bathroom, second fix, joinery	Commissioning
12	Decorate, snag, handover	Completion records

The side return

A narrow strip can transform the entire ground floor.

Filling the side return aligns the kitchen with the outrigger and creates width for a proper dining zone. The design challenge is to bring daylight into the middle of the plan while controlling views, drainage and neighbour impact.

- Use roof glazing strategically.
- Retain visual depth through the house.
- Make the old external wall a deliberate feature or remove it structurally.
- Plan storage before glazing.



DAVID'S RULE

The side return is a light project disguised as an area project.

Designing with light

Not every roof surface should be glass.

A rooflight over circulation can wash the old brick wall and pull daylight deep inside. Too much overhead glass can overheat, increase glare and remove useful ceiling zones. Balance solid, glazed and shaded surfaces.

- Model summer sun.
- Choose solar-control performance.
- Provide opening ventilation where useful.
- Keep pendant and extractor locations coordinated.

DAVID'S RULE

Place glass where it changes the experience, not wherever structure leaves a hole.

Drainage in a narrow site

The side return often contains existing drains.

CCTV survey and level information should inform foundations and internal layout. Manholes may need diversion or approved access. New roofs, terraces and kitchens add rainwater and waste connections that must be coordinated.

- Survey before final design.
- Protect shared or public sewers.
- Avoid inaccessible internal chambers.
- Test runs before covering.

DAVID'S RULE

A drain discovered during excavation is no longer a design choice; it is a delay.



Side-return structure

Support old walls while creating new openness.

Removing the original flank or rear wall can require steel beams, columns and pad foundations. The rooflight grid, gutter and structure should be designed together. Slender details still need movement, drainage and fire protection.

- Coordinate beam depth with ceiling lines.
- Check bearings and party-wall conditions.
- Plan temporary works and sequence.
- Detail thermal breaks at external steel.

DAVID'S RULE

The cleanest ceiling usually comes from the earliest structural coordination.

Model side-return cost

26 m² infill and reconfiguration.

ELEMENT	ALLOWANCE	NOTES
Preliminaries	£20,000	Protection and logistics
Ground + drainage	£20,000	Foundations, slab, alterations
Steel + masonry	£25,000	Wide opening / support
Roof + glazing	£23,000	Rooflights and envelope
Services	£16,000	Heating, electrical, plumbing
Kitchen + finishes	£31,000	Mid-high allowance
Subtotal	£135,000	Before fees / contingency

Rear extension types

Flat roof, pitched roof, pavilion or restrained masonry box.

Choose form by daylight, planning context, garden proportion and interior character. A flat roof can hide behind parapets and accept rooflights. A pitched roof adds height and rhythm. A pavilion can feel lighter but demands precise glazing and overheating control.

- Test from neighbouring windows.
- Draw internal ceiling heights.
- Resolve drainage at concept stage.
- Let materials connect old and new.

DAVID'S RULE

Form follows context, daylight and water management.

Depth and proportion

More depth is not always more value.

An extension that consumes too much garden can weaken the house. Test furniture, circulation and long views before setting the rear line. Sometimes a shallower addition plus internal reconfiguration performs better.

- Keep a useful garden room outside.
- Avoid a dark middle zone.
- Plan thresholds and steps.
- Consider future maintenance access.

DAVID'S RULE

Stop extending when the plan becomes generous, not when the rule reaches its limit.



The garden relationship

Design one continuous living landscape.

Floor levels, drainage, planting and privacy should be designed with the building. Flush thresholds require careful waterproofing and external falls. Lighting should reveal texture and depth rather than flood the garden.

- Coordinate internal and external datum levels.
- Create positive drainage away from doors.
- Protect planting during construction.
- Use layered, low-glare lighting.

DAVID'S RULE

The view from the kitchen is part of the room.

Foundations

Ground conditions decide the unseen cost.

Foundation type and depth depend on soil, nearby trees, drains, existing foundations and loads. London clay can be sensitive to vegetation and moisture. Trial holes and engineer input can turn assumptions into a buildable design.

- Locate services before digging.
- Record soil and groundwater.
- Coordinate party-wall excavation notices.
- Inspect reinforcement and bearing before concrete.

DAVID'S RULE

Never price foundations as a fixed depth without evidence and a risk allowance.

Drainage and external levels

Water needs a complete route.

Map existing foul and surface-water systems. Design gutters, outlets, overflows, gullies, thresholds and garden falls together. Keep maintainable access and test every section before closing the floor.

- CCTV and level survey.
- Separate foul and rainwater where required.
- Provide accessible rodding points.
- Photograph and record final routes.

DAVID'S RULE

The most elegant extension still fails if water has nowhere dependable to go.

Wide structural openings

Open plan needs controlled structure.

A large opening may use beams, columns, box frames or goalpost frames depending on loads and stability. Deflection matters to brittle finishes and sliding doors. Connections, bearings and temporary works must follow the engineer's design.

- Confirm load paths above.
- Coordinate column positions with cabinetry.
- Allow fire protection and finishes.
- Measure before fabrication.

DAVID'S RULE

A hidden steel frame should still be treated as precision architecture.



Roof options

The roof controls light, heat, water and ceiling character.

Warm flat roofs can provide clean ceilings and robust thermal continuity. Pitched roofs can create volume. Lanterns and rooflights bring light but add junctions. Sedum can improve outlook and biodiversity when structure and maintenance allow.

- Set falls clearly.
- Provide safe overflow paths.
- Coordinate rooflight upstands.
- Keep outlets accessible.

DAVID'S RULE

Design the roof from above as carefully as the ceiling below.



Glazing strategy

Large glass should perform, not merely impress.

Frame size, opening pattern, solar gain, safety, ventilation and cleaning access all affect the choice. The widest opening is not always the best. A well-positioned picture window may create more character than a wall of identical panels.

- Compare sliding, folding and pivot systems.
- Check glass weight and access.
- Specify thermal and solar performance.
- Coordinate drainage channels and thresholds.

DAVID'S RULE

Use glass to frame London light and garden life, not to erase every wall.



Thermal comfort

A bright room must also work in winter and summer.

Continuous insulation, airtightness, controlled ventilation, solar shading and appropriate emitters work together. Underfloor heating is slow and comfortable but must be sized to actual heat loss. Large rooflights can dominate summer load.

- Calculate heat loss.
- Reduce thermal bridges.
- Commission heating controls.
- Plan purge ventilation and shading.

DAVID'S RULE

Comfort is designed as a system; no single product fixes it.



Kitchen planning

The kitchen is architecture, storage and workflow.

Set the room around clear working zones, landing space and circulation. Integrate structural columns and services into cabinetry. Keep the island proportionate and protect the route to the garden.

- Freeze appliance schedule early.
- Coordinate power, water and extraction.
- Use full-height storage strategically.
- Test stools, doors and dishwasher conflicts.

DAVID'S RULE

A luxury kitchen feels calm because every movement has been anticipated.

Model rear-extension cost

38 m², major opening and premium glazing.

ELEMENT	ALLOWANCE	NOTES
Preliminaries	£25,000	18-24 week site setup
Groundworks	£27,000	Foundations, drainage, slab
Structure + shell	£38,000	Frame, walls and roof
Glazing + envelope	£30,000	Premium door system
Services	£20,000	MEP and heating
Kitchen + finishes	£45,000	Joinery and surfaces
Subtotal	£185,000	Before fees / contingency

One house, one strategy

Coordinate loft and rear work before either starts.

A combined scheme can align structural load paths, electrical upgrades, heating, drainage, fire strategy and finishes. It also concentrates disruption and cash flow. The design team should issue a single coordinated set, even if construction is phased.

- Map vertical services.
- Coordinate whole-house fire strategy.
- Design steel positions together.
- Decide whether to occupy or move out.

DAVID'S RULE

One coordinated design can prevent two rounds of demolition.

Sequencing the combined build

Keep structure, weather and access under control.

A common route establishes scaffold and loft structure while ground works progress, then closes the roof and extension envelope before intensive finishes. Actual sequencing depends on temporary works, access and contractor resources.

- Protect escape and security.
- Separate dusty and clean phases.
- Lock long-lead glazing and stair dates.
- Do not overload the house with simultaneous trades.

DAVID'S RULE

Parallel work saves time only when supervision and access can support it.



Combined structure

New loads travel through old fabric.

Loft beams, removed ground-floor walls and extension frames may interact through the same masonry. The engineer should assess the house globally, including stability and foundations. Avoid independently designed packages that meet on site.

- Share one accurate survey.
- Coordinate bearing and column positions.
- Review cumulative load increases.
- Agree temporary works responsibility.

DAVID'S RULE

The structure does not know which drawing package a load came from.

Model combined project

Loft, side return and rear extension.

ELEMENT	ALLOWANCE	NOTES
Preliminaries	£42,000	Scaffold, logistics, 34 weeks
Loft package	£92,000	Rear dormer and suite
Ground + drainage	£30,000	Extension groundworks
Ground structure	£40,000	Steel frame and shell
Glazing + envelope	£31,000	Rooflights and rear doors
Services + fire	£24,000	Whole-house coordination
Finishes + kitchen	£56,000	Mid-high specification
Subtotal	£315,000	Before fees / contingency

Elemental cost allowances

Use allowances to focus design decisions.

ELEMENT	LOWER MODEL	UPPER MODEL
Loft conversion	£85k	£155k
Side return	£110k	£165k
Rear extension	£145k	£240k
Kitchen package	£25k	£70k+
Glazing package	£18k	£55k+
Professional / statutory	8-18%	Project dependent
Construction risk reserve	8-15%	Risk dependent

Fees, VAT and client costs

Build the all-in number, not only the contractor sum.

Professional fees, surveys, approvals, party wall, temporary accommodation, finance, storage, utility upgrades, loose furniture and garden reinstatement may sit outside the building contract. VAT treatment depends on the work and supplier; obtain current tax advice.

- Record VAT assumptions.
- Separate construction contingency from client upgrades.
- Include rent or accommodation overlap.
- Keep funds for furniture and window treatments.

DAVID'S RULE

The project is affordable only when every category is visible.

Tender comparison

Normalise before choosing.

Put each tender against the same scope. Identify omissions, qualifications, provisional sums, programme differences and design responsibilities. Meet the shortlisted contractor and test understanding of structure, access and quality expectations.

- Compare inclusions line by line.
- Check insurance and references.
- Review proposed team and supervision.
- Clarify payment and retention terms.

DAVID'S RULE

The clearest tender is often safer than the lowest tender.

Contract and administration

Written rules protect the relationship.

Use an appropriate building contract that identifies documents, price basis, start and completion, payment, variations, insurance, delay, defects and dispute routes. Keep instructions and approvals in writing.

- One contract drawing register.
- One change log.
- Regular progress records.
- Valuations linked to completed work.

DAVID'S RULE

Good administration is not distrust; it is shared memory.

Site setup in London

Logistics can control the programme.

Agree working hours, parking, skips, pavement licences, scaffold, deliveries, neighbour protection and welfare. Plan how occupants, children and pets are separated from work. Maintain fire escape and security.

- Book licences and parking suspensions.
- Protect common or shared access.
- Schedule just-in-time deliveries.
- Keep the site clean and locked.

DAVID'S RULE

A tidy site is usually a better managed site.

Neighbours

Reduce surprise before reducing noise.

Introduce the team, share realistic milestones and give one contact for concerns. Record pre-existing conditions where appropriate. Keep promises about working hours, dust and access.

- Issue advance notice of disruptive stages.
- Protect shared routes.
- Respond to concerns factually.
- Keep statutory notices separate and complete.

DAVID'S RULE

Professional neighbour management protects both goodwill and progress.

Change control

Every change has four consequences.

Before approving a variation, record design impact, cost, programme and knock-on work. A late tile change may affect only supply; a late rooflight change can affect structure, waterproofing and planning appearance.

- Describe the change.
- Price additions and omissions.
- State programme effect.
- Obtain written approval before proceeding.

DAVID'S RULE

No verbal change is small once several trades depend on it.

Quality control

Inspect the work that will disappear.

Hold points should cover foundations, reinforcement, drainage, structure, fire protection, insulation, airtightness, waterproofing and first-fix services. Use photographs tied to locations and drawings.

- Agree sample standards.
- Record inspections.
- Test before concealment.
- Reject defects early.

DAVID'S RULE

Finishes cannot correct a hidden technical failure.



Snagging

Start before practical completion.

Each trade should self-check, then the contractor should inspect, then the client team completes a structured review. Separate incomplete work from defects. Test doors, water, heating, ventilation, lighting and controls.

- Room-by-room schedule.
- Photograph and number items.
- Set responsibility and due date.
- Reinspect closed items.

DAVID'S RULE

A short snag list comes from continuous quality control, not a relaxed final inspection.

Handover

A finished home includes information.

Collect approvals, certificates, commissioning records, warranties, product data, paint references, spare materials and as-built service routes. Demonstrate controls and maintenance. Keep a digital folder and one concise home manual.

- Building control completion documentation.
- Electrical and gas certificates where applicable.
- Roof, glazing and product warranties.
- Drainage and valve locations.

DAVID'S RULE

If the owner cannot operate or maintain it, the project is not fully handed over.

Master construction programmes

Model durations after approvals and procurement.

PROJECT	STRUCTURE + SHELL	FIT-OUT	OVERALL MODEL
Rear dormer loft	6-7 weeks	4-6 weeks	10-14 weeks
Side return	8-10 weeks	6-8 weeks	14-18 weeks
Rear extension	10-13 weeks	8-11 weeks	18-24 weeks
Loft + rear combined	16-22 weeks	12-18 weeks	28-40 weeks

The owner's final checklist

Close these decisions before the first major order.

AREA	READY WHEN	STATUS
Legal route	Planning / PD evidence recorded	[]
Technical design	Structure, fire, drainage coordinated	[]
Cost	Scope, exclusions and reserve agreed	[]
Contract	Documents and payment terms signed	[]
Neighbours	Notices and communication complete	[]
Selections	Long-lead glazing, stair, kitchen frozen	[]
Site logistics	Access, welfare and protection agreed	[]
Handover	Certificates and manual schedule agreed	[]

IMPORTANT

Do not begin because the calendar says start. Begin when the design, obligations, money and critical orders are ready.

Official guidance

Planning Portal - Loft conversions

planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/loft-conversion

Planning Portal - Extensions

planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/extensions

GOV.UK - Party Wall Act explanatory booklet

gov.uk/party-wall-etc-act-1996-guidance

GOV.UK - Approved Document A: Structure

gov.uk/government/publications/structure-approved-document-a

GOV.UK - Approved Documents collection

gov.uk/government/collections/approved-documents

GOV.UK - Approved Document L, Volume 1

gov.uk/government/publications/conservation-of-fuel-and-power-approved-document-l

Rules and guidance change. Check the live source, local planning authority requirements and project-specific professional advice before relying on any route described in this book.

AUTHOR

DAVID DELAVEGA

THE REAL LUXURY

PROPERTY DESIGN

CONSTRUCTION

PRACTICAL ELEGANCE



Property design, construction and practical luxury.

David Delavega brings 25 years of experience across property design, renovation and the delivery of London homes. His approach connects elegant interiors with the realities of structure, sequencing, budget and site workmanship.

LOFTS, EXTENSIONS & BEYOND is written to help homeowners ask better questions, protect the essentials and create space that feels as though it always belonged.

- Founder, Foxter.
- London residential renovation and refurbishment.
- Design-led, buildable and commercially aware.

DAVID DELAVEGA

The real luxury is a home that looks calm because the hard decisions were made early.