

## Build Up? Build Out?

Contributed by C. Mason Hearn  
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Dear Mason,

Seriously ready and eager to put a large addition onto our late 1970's rancher. Should we build up or build out? Is a second story addition far more expensive to engineer and build than a first floor expansion? Does building up add more value in the long run or is every house different?

Tracy B, Ashland, VA

Tracy,

When it comes to the expected magnitude of investment for remodeling and additions, it most often holds true that simpler = less costly. In that regard, you should know that the conditions of an existing house, and how those might work with the requirements of a particular expansion are different in every case.

We recently considered adding an in-law suite above an existing ranch house garage. Upon review of this particular condition, the existing structure would have required nearly-complete removal and replacement. As well, there would be a stair added (difficulty of access; expensive useless space), the space would likely be restricted in size, and light / views would not be great. The result? This homeowner is breaking ground on a first floor addition in very short order.

On the flip side, many "stick-framed", high-pitch existing attics offer the potential to easily and economically convert to wonderfully usable space.

Tracy, take a look at my post entitled "What is the Value?"; There are numerous factors other than cost to consider as you ultimately design your addition. What else is important to you — architectural appearance, light, certain special functions or accommodations? Will it be important that the renovation process be less invasive? You might imagine that living under and amidst a remodel is more disruptive to your life, than having an addition constructed in your backyard.

These might just be the tip of the iceberg of considerations (along with cost) that you'll need to prioritize and juggle in order to achieve the highest and best value in your project. Good luck!

Mason