



The Right Fit

A building separate from the existing residence can present better design solutions to homeowners who covet more living and entertainment space.

By Kyle Clapham

When one of his clients wanted to work from home but maintain the quietude of an office, Paul Gordon proposed building a detached structure on the property. The 10- by 14-foot cabana, which sits only 7 feet from the house, provides a seemingly remote sanctuary with custom-built cabinets, bookshelves, drawers and a desk that maximize the utility of the small, intimate space.

“It almost looked like a pool house,” says Gordon, president of Stone Pillar Remodeling in Medina, Washington. “[The homeowner] was in the financial industry and used it for an office, but [he] also [used the space] for entertaining because [we incorporated] a wet bar and a barbecue in it.”

This type of project highlights an expansion of the covered outdoor living area that has trended among remodeling customers in recent years. As the economy improves and home prices climb, consumers have been willing to invest more in exceptional design ideas to increase living space and enhance their quality of life. Detached structures offer one such project opportunity to homeowners.



Photos: Gregg Kroogstad/Kroogstad Photography

Stone Pillar Remodeling integrated a wet bar and a barbecue into this detached office, so the client could entertain friends and family when he was not working.

Lundberg Builders mixed a stone facade and vinyl siding to match this four-season, 500-square-foot pool house with the original home in Queenstown, Maryland.



MINDFUL PLAN

Remodelers need to consider many factors before they suggest constructing a detached structure for their clients. Obviously, the lot must be large enough to accommodate a building completely separate from the existing house. Each site has its own characteristics and limitations, which can determine whether the additional living space should be attached to the residence or stand alone.

“If there’s not a need for access from the home, that would be the first [prerequisite],” says Chris Stebnitz, owner of Stebnitz Builders in Elkhorn, Wisconsin. “Sometimes it makes sense from a design standpoint. [It could cost more] to integrate that additional space into the home than it is to build a stand-alone structure.”

Most homeowners know the goals they seek to accomplish with a remodeling project but cannot envision the scope and form of a realistic solution. They might have thoughts about how to do it, and they will likely share those ideas with a remodeler. The designer on the project, nevertheless, ought to draw up different scenarios to stimulate their imagination and arrive at the best recourse.

“It’s all about what the property is—if you’ve got room to spread things out or if you really want them to be in close together,” says Brad Lundberg, owner and founder of Lundberg Builders in Stevensville, Maryland. “Every client is different; every site is different. We never really look at it as going in and saying, ‘We’d rather do something detached or attached.’ It’s just, ‘What does this project really need?’”

The budget also comes into play when discussing the viability of a detached structure. “The age-old problem for any project is budget. Right now [the price for] lumber is up incredibly high, and it really affects projects,” adds



When clients in Bellevue, Washington, wanted a space on the water where they could relax but also host their guests, Stone Pillar built this scenic lake cabana.

Lundberg, whose customers usually pull back on features before adding in those same upgrades again later. “It ends up going right back to where we originally started.”

DUE DILIGENCE

If a detached structure becomes the desired option, remodelers should approach the municipality early on with a lot plan and their proposal. Lundberg works primarily around the Chesapeake Bay, where changes in building codes have aimed to push structures back farther from the waterfront; therefore, he needs to validate how much of the impervious surface can be covered on a property.

“Sometimes you can’t do a detached structure. It’s [either] got to stay close to the house and [be] attached or pushed to the street side instead of the water side,” he explains. “The environmental regulations have gotten much, much tougher around here, and that plays one of the biggest roles in what we do.”

Often contractors must apply for a variance when zoning ordinances prohibit the construction of additional

Photos: Craig Davenport/ABC Imaging



Home Enhancements, the remodel division of Wayne Harbin Builder, constructed this two-story detached garage with a small living area to host guests and entertain people.

will not adversely affect the neighborhood. Whereas the county focuses on setbacks and use, subdivisions care more about appearance. “They want it to conform, and they want it to look a certain way,” Stebnitz says. “If you have a homeowners’ association, then you’re going [to have to go] through both processes.”

CONSISTENT THEME

Some customers fancy a detached structure that looks totally different from their house, although the new living space should always acknowledge the existing residence. If the home incorporates brick on its exterior, for example, a contractor could use brick for the foundation of the detached structure with fiber cement siding. The architectural design of a house needs to be heeded as well.

“We don’t want it to look like an afterthought,” says Scott Maynor, general manager of Home Enhancements, the remodel division of Wayne Harbin Builder, in Yorktown, Virginia. “A lot of times you’re building it to match a lot of the details on the home, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be exact.” Maynor has constructed a number of detached two-story garages with living space.

“If the house has cedar shake shingles, typically we’re going to do cedar shake shingles. If it has a metal roof, we’ll do a metal roof,” he adds. “We’re matching a lot of the same detail so it ties into the home; because a lot of times, they’re sitting right beside each other. They’re so visible.”

“You want the new space to be really cool but also blend in, and make sure it [pays] homage to the existing design of the house—so it doesn’t look like it’s something completely different than what’s going on,” says Gordon, whose clients tend to be mindful of the design. “I’ve been doing this long enough that I can suggest it won’t be a net benefit most likely in the long run for them.”

When mapping out a detached structure, contractors must verify the location of existing utilities to ensure they integrate seamlessly. “In a remodel application you’re going in where the home is already built. You’re seeing where there are underground utilities, septic systems, propane tanks [and] irrigation systems,” Maynor explains. “If there are elevation changes, you bring in backfill.”

“We’re looking at clearing; we’re looking at grading. If there are any issues that are already out there, we’re going to fix those issues or identify potential issues in the future, so the homeowner is aware we’re not going to create a problem,” he adds. “There might be additional work that we have to do [too] with swells or berms to divert water away from the home, not back towards it.” | QR



living space on the lot. “For the most part, the municipalities are helpful. There’s very little leeway though. Sometimes you can get a variance, but more and more there’s a thick black line—and there’s no gray area,” Gordon notes. “If you have a standard lot, it’s pretty black and white. There seems to be a little more leeway if you propose it as an [accessory dwelling unit]. But still, I’ve found that lot coverage is becoming a massive emphasis, and they’re not giving you much leeway there.”

“The process is always the same,” Stebnitz explains. “For a variance, we have to explain why there’s a hardship and why we need to build outside the limitations that the county has created. It’s up to us to relay the client’s wishes to the county in a way [that confirms] it’s a hardship. Just wanting more space typically isn’t a hardship. We have to relay that message and make it loud and clear.”

Remodelers also may have to submit their proposal to a homeowners’ association and show their changes

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