



YOU CAN MAKE A SILK PURSE FROM A SOW'S EAR!

Do you live in, or are you thinking of buying, the house not quite of your dreams, but on a beautiful plot? Such a situation is common in Guernsey, where we have a limited housing stock, but with many stunning sites with wonderful views.

Many of our Open Market houses, such as those in Fort George and the Village de Putron were built in the 1950s, 60s or early 70s, and are now beginning to show their age, and the limitations of their original designs. Whilst 19th Century and later houses seem to grow more beautiful with the passage of time, those of the mid-20th Century seem to become ever more tired and dated - or perhaps we have just been made more aware of such things by TV programmes such as Grand Designs!

By their nature, Open Market houses of the 60s and 70s were often built in excellent locations, and many owners are understandably reluctant to move from their large sites with beautiful views. Of course one option is to consider the demolition and reconstruction of your house in a different style to suit current architectural fashions and standards. However, such an approach, whilst becoming quite common over the last decade, requires deep pockets and can only be justified in truly remarkable locations. In such cases the increase in value of a property can be very substantial, despite the cost and challenges of a complete rebuild.



A less expensive, but frequently very worthwhile option, is the 'architectural makeover' of an existing mediocre dwelling to transform it from a 'bit of an eyesore' into an attractive gem. This has been carried out to a number of properties in the last few years and has resulted in updated and improved buildings of higher value and with greater resale potential. Such transformations can range from merely replacing superficial finishes such as roof materials, fenestration and guttering to extensions, new roofs and even re-cladding the external walls. At the same time internal modifications such as new kitchens, bathrooms and decor are often undertaken.

Another advantage of a makeover, is the opportunity to add or upgrade insulation and other energy-conserving elements which are becoming increasingly important to today's home-owner.

Subject to planning controls, and assuming that the house is not a scheduled historic building (which it will not be if constructed since 1950) there is considerable flexibility in the architectural approach that may be adopted in a makeover; although it is of course dictated by the size and form of the existing house and the extent to which the owner wishes the alterations to go.

The first step is to make an appointment with a suitably experienced Chartered Architect, in order to discuss your hopes and aspirations for your house. He or she will then draw up initial concepts which can show how the changes can best be achieved. If appropriate, the Architect may also visit the Planning Department with you in order to ascertain if the Planning Officer is likely to agree

to the proposed changes; however in general terms, providing that there is not a great increase in the size or height of the building and assuming that the changes represent an improvement, there are unlikely to be serious objections. Formal plans can then be submitted and, once the necessary approvals have been gained, work can start on site.

Sometimes people have a very clear idea how they would like their house to look; whether that may be a cool, uncluttered contemporary style, or perhaps something more traditional such as the 'Arts and Crafts' style that is found in many properties around the Village de Putron. However, it is important to consider the setting and the surrounding buildings in order to avoid creating a building which is completely out of context with its neighbours. This may not be such a problem in an isolated location. One of our most challenging commissions was for Clients who had purchased a 1960s dormer bungalow on a large plot in the country, and who wanted us to turn it into a traditional Guernsey farmhouse. We realised that the building had potential, and swapped the concrete roof tiles for weathered clay pantiles. We reduced the width of the dormers and put in timber windows and doors. We even clad the external walls in second-hand granite masonry and built a traditional tourelle. The result, although strictly speaking a pastiche to an architectural purist, was extremely effective; so much so that it actually won the Guernsey Design Award for that year!

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