

Sunday Independent

How do I extend my kitchen?

ARCHITECT'S CLINIC

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Q I'M renovating my house which includes making my kitchen bigger. I want to know if it is possible to remove the interior wall which is 10m-long and replace it with a steel beam to make the kitchen/sitting room open plan. It is a two-storey house and this is not a load-bearing wall but supports the ceiling joists.

A To answer your question correctly I'd need to visit your home to see the existing layout, etc. But, as a guide, here are some things to consider:

1 Removing a 10m-long wall is possible and ambitious and a new steel beam and frame will need to be designed by a suitably qualified engineer. It's important that any structural alterations are designed and signed off by an engineer otherwise you can have a real issue when you go to sell your home at a future date. The correct paperwork needs to be in place and equally you need to be safe in the knowledge your home is not going to develop any structural defects.

2 As you say, the wall is supporting the ceiling and this in turn supports the first floor and perhaps the roof and, it's safe to assume, it's a structural wall. When removing such an extent of wall, there will need to be a frame provided with vertical posts at either end, like a goalpost frame. A midpoint post might even be required. This will provide stability to the existing house and perhaps any adjoining house. It's worth noting that loading comes not only from above but that side forces need to be considered — hence the 'goalpost frame'. Think of a deck of cards. Again an engineer is best placed to design this.

3 On the design side, there are other ways

5 to provide open space without the need of taking so much wall away and also to allow you to close rooms off when required for kids or to watch TV. Simple ways to do this are by using large single or double doors that fold back on to walls via parliament hinges so the doors are out of the way when open. Equally, sliding doors can achieve the same result and can create dynamic spaces.

4 Assuming that some form of steel beams is required — and to avoid the typical extension look — consider where the new steel beams are located within the ceiling. The cheaper way is to place the beam below the floor/ceiling but you will end up with a down-stand beam. An alternative, but more expensive solution, is to place the beam within the ceiling zone, creating flush ceilings with spaces flowing seamlessly, rooms feeling bigger. It also helps blur the line between the new and old.

5 One other small but typical issue with opening up rooms into one space is that there can be different floor levels between the rooms, particularly in older properties. It can usually be resolved but is worth noting as it may add to your costs and will affect design.

6 In terms of layouts, it's also worth considering different locations for the main fixed object, the kitchen. Placing things in the right spot can free up more space, bring more light in and give the impression of a larger space, so explore all possible locations.

7 It's always worth considering that you may not need to extend and this is where the skills of an architect can come in to advise on what can be achieved with and without extending. It's cheaper to explore ideas on paper rather than

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when you get to site.

8 If a decision is made to extend, consider where you will put your roof lights. Place them as close to the existing back wall as possible to allow the middle areas to be brighter. Placing your roof lights butting up against walls will allow light to bounce off the walls and illuminate the rooms better than a central rooflight which creates a shaft of light like in a Gothic cathedral. Equally consider the location of an extension, where does the sun come from, can you bring the light in, create a courtyard, is there something to focus on, a tree, etc?

9 Lastly, to be able to provide specific advice to your project, consult a registered architect and, in turn, an engineer to make sure your home is safe and sound, during and after the works. An architect can develop good layouts to maximise the space within the available budget.

If you are considering changes to your home, work with a registered architect. Check riai.ie, the registration body for architects in Ireland.

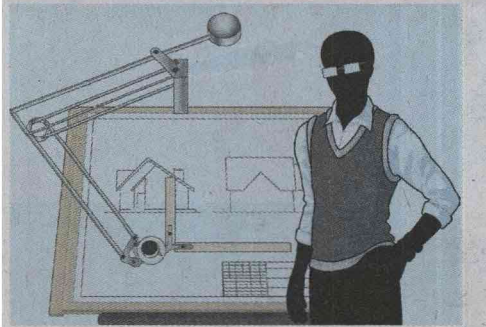
Gary Mongey is a registered architect and a director of Box Architecture (which celebrates 20 years in business this year) and has worked on many domestic projects over this time; box.ie.

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Clockwise from right, courtyard ideas from the Pastoral Centre in Ballyroan; sliding doors to partition an open plan living space; rooflights by the wall bounce light back into a room



Do you have a design dilemma we can help you with? Email your problem to designclinic@independent.ie. Advice provided is for guidance only and readers are advised to seek professional assistance for any proposed project.