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→ middle of your house, the openings for doors, windows and points where you have knocked through should be as high as possible. "Builders will often make their own lives easier by installing beams or lintels below the ceiling height," Tugman says, but these low "downstands" block daylight. "While it will cost a bit more to have your beams set within the depth of the floor or roof, it is generally worth it."

Locate roof lights as far back as possible, for example with a slim strip of horizontal glazing where the house meets the extension. Build Team, a London firm that specialises in side returns, often fits a vertical "inflected skylight" to the original rear wall directly above this point (buildteam.com).

Velux windows start at £286, but an all-glass system – such as the £20,000 glazed box used in a Hüt Architecture design for a Victorian terrace in Mile End, east London (hutarchitecture.com) – can be worth it if you plan to live in the house for years to come. Harder to clean (you can build a parapet nest to walk on), they are best suited to areas without trees and facing away from the sun.

SPEND ON THE STRUCTURE

"Max out on your construction cost and save on the fittings. It will pay dividends," says Resi's Alex Depledge. "People cheap out on the box and fill it with expensive stuff – it never looks right." In the Balham flat where she lives with her husband, John, 36, and daughter, Harper, 3, she spent £16,000 on aluminium-framed glass roof panels – £8,000 more than Velux skylights would have cost – but clawed back the cost by fitting an Ikea kitchen rather than a specialist firm's equivalent.

Don't be afraid of structural work, which is often no more than 10% of the total budget. Adding steel beams typically comes to £2,000-£4,000 per opening. To keep costs down, stick to standard sizes for doors, windows, staircases and even ceiling heights – at 2.4 metres, the builders won't have to cut the plasterboard, says Michael Holmes, property expert at the Southern Homebuilding & Renovating Show.

"A large rear opening is the current trend, but isn't always the best way to go," says Claire Holton, of Bradley Van Der Straeten architects (b-vds.co.uk). Last year she added a large kitchen extension to a two-storey Victorian terrace in Stoke Newington, north London, for newly married Sophia Spring and Ed Macdonald on a modest £80,000 budget. A glazed return roof and two sets of french doors let in natural light for Sophia, a portrait photographer, but they used lintels instead of steel. "This kept disruption to a minimum and saved on bespoke glazing and lead times," Holton says.

French doors are the cheapest type, from about £1,500 a set. Bifolds cost about £900 a metre, but a small courtyard may not have space to stack them, and they can be harder to use. Sliding doors, from £5,000 per four-metre opening, are now available with extremely thin aluminium or timber frames for uninterrupted views. Industrial steel-framed doors are on trend and, like french doors, give you the option of having a window open. But they tend to be the most expensive. At Clement Windows, which specialises in custom-made steel glazing, prices start at £1,200 a square metre, including installation (clementwindows.co.uk).

"Another question to ask is, 'What am I looking at?'" Jennifer Hamilton says. "Perhaps uninterrupted views are secondary to atmosphere if you have only seven metres of London garden to look at, not the Welsh mountains."



Build Team Feature

Blue-sky thinking Above, skylights and twin french doors let in the light for less in Stoke Newington; right, this glass box in Mile End is the blow-out option



NEXT WEEK PART TWO HOW TO EXTEND INTO THE LOFT AND THE BASEMENT

BETTER BY DESIGN

For more than 15 years, the Manser Medal has inspired architects to counter the blandness of most new homes. Who will be the 2018 winner?

The fact that only a fifth of new homes in Britain are designed by an architect helps to explain why, in too many cases, their most striking feature is cookie-cutter blandness. Michael Manser, the late modernist architect after whom Britain's most prestigious award for one-off homes was named, wanted to change that. And so do we, with The Sunday Times British Homes Awards, of which the Manser Medal now forms part.

It aims to show not only mass housebuilders but all of us "how much better the housing of today could be – the 80% that is not designed by architects", as Manser put it when launching the medal at the turn of the century. That still rings true today, as we try to build our way out of our housing crisis towards the government's target of 300,000 new homes a year by 2022.

Georgian architecture was "the best speculative mass housing ever known", Manser said, as it used the technology of the time in response to how people lived. Three centuries on, it is still buyers' most desired property. That is why, in the architect's words, the judges look for "an inspirational step forward in housing, an unequivocal 21st-century solution for 21st-century occupants".

Over the years, the award has been won by designs as



varied as Flint House, a pair of stone half-pyramids facing each other across the fields of Lord Rothschild's Buckinghamshire estate; Outhouse, a concrete modernist home buried invisibly in an hillside on the Welsh border; and Slip House, an eco-friendly stack of translucent cubes that seems as if it is about to topple over into a south London street.

The award has also helped to establish young designers such as Meredith Bowles, of Mole Architects, who won in 2004 with his first realised building – a low-energy black corrugated house on brick stilts overlooking the Fens. Manser himself had made his reputation with steel-framed glass houses that epitomised 1960s glamour. "He would be pleased to think that the medal bearing his name would help young architects build their careers," says his son, Jonathan Manser, who now chairs the award.

This year, designs shortlisted in the best large house and best small house categories in the British Homes Awards will be considered for the Manser Medal and visited by its judges. **Enter by May 10 at britishhomesawards.co.uk**



Outhouse, the 2016 winner, embedded in a hillside