

BUILDING A CONSERVATORY



How to Get it Right

First Time


CONSERVATORY
DESIGNS

@ JOHNSTOWN GARDEN CENTRE

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First Time



ISBN: 978-0-9571210-0-3

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Cover design by Donovan Printing Ltd.
Printed by Donovan Printing Ltd., Newbridge, Co. Kildare
www.donovanprinting.com

Published by Conservatory Designs Ltd.,
© Johnstown Garden Centre, Johnstown, Naas, Co. Kildare

FOREWORD

Imagine you are just blasting off on a twenty year round trip to Mars and the last thing you hear back at ground control is chitchat between the two senior controllers marvelling at how every part of the rocket was purchased on the basis of cheapest quote, best sales patter and built in zip time!

That's the problem with any home extension including a conservatory. Looks good on the brochure and, at first, when it's up, but what about the quality, the longevity, the light and especially what about the energy efficiency? As someone who follows oil reports like a hawk, believe me, we ain't seen nothing yet!

I'm genuinely convinced, not just as an observer but as someone who has got his own hands well and truly dirty in home development, the quality of smarts, that time and advice you put in now will pay you back tenfold. There's nothing worse than learning by poor experience, not only is it costly but it is deeply frustrating because you end up blaming yourself - "If only I'd known then what I know now!" Yep we've all been there, you, me and just about everyone else during the mad years!

This book is a darn good read from Peter Clarke whom I've known for many years. Any book or guide is only as valuable and authentic as its author and while, clearly a conservatory practitioner, Peter Clarke lays out in plain English the do's and don'ts about investing in one without pulling punches. Only a long term practitioner with a passion for the business could produce a book like this which beats the pants off anything you'll read from a journalist trying to get expert in time for next Sunday's column.

Peter is savvy and knowledgeable which comes across in spades. I highly recommend this book as a solid starting point. Money is very hard earned and kept these days, so study closely and learn before you leap. You'll be delighted you did.

All the best with your home improvement.

Eddie Hobbs





INTRODUCTION

We have written this book with one objective; to make sure that our readers are well informed and equipped to make the correct decisions when choosing a conservatory. Being in the business we also hope that you may consider using our services for the project. For those who do not decide to buy from us we still hope that this will be an aid to help you. Better buying decisions lead to greater customer satisfaction and gives our industry a better name.

Building any home extension involves a lot of decisions. Big decisions such as budget, design, selection of contractor and smaller decisions such as finishes and decor. For those not involved in the building industry this may seem like a daunting task but it doesn't have to be. Following a logical plan simplifies the process.



"Building any home extension involves a lot of decisions".

From our experience there tends to be two types of consumer. Firstly those that will stall nervously at every decision that has to be made, worrying themselves that they have made the right choices, then there are those who do not get involved in the decision process and leave it to the salesperson or contractor. Often neither may get it right, the worrier may miss the more important decisions while focusing on trivial issues while those who place their trust in others may be misled.

Having been involved in this industry for over 20 years we have developed a simple process to help make sure that every conservatory built suits the clients needs, tastes and budget. It is a matter of following a logical decision process which we suggest is aided by the help of experts who can guide you. While no two houses are alike, most share similar characteristics. An experienced designer will know what will work for you and your home.

We have laid out this book in a series of logical steps, as you follow each step the plan will come together culminating in the perfect design where everything that should be considered will have been considered. The single most important piece of advice we can offer is to only buy from a reputable company who have a showroom and an established track record for consistent customer satisfaction. For this level of investment you must be able to view the product, sit in it, get a feel for the size and materials so there are no surprises when the building commences.

We hope this book will help and guide you to invest your money wisely and enjoy the result for many years to come.



THE AUTHORS

Peter Clarke

Peter Clarke has been involved in the conservatory business since 1988 when he built one of the first conservatory display sites in Ireland at Johnstown on the M7. Like any small business owner Peter initially worked as the concrete base installer and conservatory fitter by day and salesman and administrator by night. The company grew over the years to the largest of its kind in the country completing over 3,000 installations at customers homes. Peter took a break to return to further education in 2004. He completed the prestigious MBA program at the Michael Smurfit school of business in 2005 specialising in project management and economics and this has equipped the company with the necessary skills to deliver even the most complicated projects on time and on budget for the growing client list.



Mark Quinn

Mark Quinn has been in the conservatory business since 1992. His keen eye for design has been instrumental in his success. Working alongside Peter for almost 20 years, Mark has helped design and project manage the companies complete portfolio of completed jobs. Known throughout the industry for his attention to detail and unrivalled customer service he has gained many friends in those clients whom he has worked with. Some customers have bought four conservatories, on different houses, from Mark over his 20 years in the business. This book is the result of Mark's dedication to ensuring that the client is 100% satisfied when the job has been completed and is another step on the road to greater standards within our industry.



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WHY A CONSERVATORY?

People extend their homes for many reasons, it may be for space, lifestyle or simply an extra room to enjoy the garden. The four basic options are a traditional extension, a sunroom, a conservatory or now the very fashionable orangery. It is not our intention here to suggest that a conservatory meets all requirements, it has a specific purpose and will suit many but not all situations.

A conservatory built today is very different from one built ten years ago. Like all construction methods the focus is now on insulation and energy efficiency. While older conservatories suffered from extremes of temperature, being too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, a modern well built

conservatory will have easily regulated temperatures, a modern heating system and will be usable all year round.

'For those who enjoy a warm room it is possible to bask in the sunshine with temperatures in the mid 20's on a January day.'

A conservatory is most suited to those who enjoy natural daylight and warmth and who are keen to preserve the natural light already enjoyed in the existing living spaces in the home. The conservatories we currently build are used for a variety of uses including dining rooms, sitting rooms, home offices, playrooms for children or just a nice retreat to enjoy the garden. For those who enjoy a warm room it is possible to bask in the sunshine with temperatures in the mid 20's on a January day.

Conservatories are also a very cost efficient way of extending your home, cheaper than the traditional building methods and with a normal on-site requirement of 10-15 working days, there is very little disruption to the home. A conservatory will also insulate your home and draw heat from the sun into your home making the inside rooms cosier and will reduce the heating costs.



When should a conservatory not be considered? There are certain situations where we would not recommend a conservatory; the most common is where the room is also required as a spare bedroom with pullout sofa and the reasons are obvious, too bright early in the morning and no privacy. Those who do not like sunlight or who have privacy issues should also consider a sunroom or extension. A conservatory will cost more to heat than a traditional extension so for those considering a large extension open plan to the house, it may be more practical to add an extension. For all other situations we feel there is no better solution to creating a bright, ambient, warm and cost effective extension to your home.



THE DESIGN PROCESS START WITH YOUR HOUSE

A common mistake is to choose the conservatory design without first considering the important aspects of your home that should influence your decision. Remember your home and conservatory must compliment each other so consider both at the design stage. Here are the key issues to look at.

Natural Light into Your Home

Is your living space currently bright enough and what direction does it face? These should be the first and most important considerations. You are planning to add a room over the source of natural light into your living room, it may be important that you do not impede the natural light from entering this space. The direction your living space faces, plays an important part in this consideration. South and west facing aspects generally benefit from more natural light, but this is not always the case due to shading from other buildings and trees. Consideration must also be given to the size of the windows/doors in this area. Some rooms may have a dual aspect where the living room benefits from light from both the front of the house and the rear. It may also be possible to increase the natural light to the living space by increasing the size of the openings.

To increase the natural light to your existing rooms consider creating a door to replace a window or increase the size of the opening by widening and installing a new concrete lintel or steel beam. Consider also whether the area is shaded by neighbouring extensions, trees etc. The key goal here is to make sure that once complete, your new room will not result in your existing living room becoming darker. A common mistake is to build a new room and then find that the existing living space is now too dark and requires artificial light during the day. In effect you will have created one new room and lost the use of an existing room, so there is no gain.

As a rule if you are facing north, any roof other than glass or clear polycarbonate will result in a reduction of too much light. For other aspects you should consult with your designer on the best solution. I would like to comment here on a misconception regarding sunrooms, if you are considering building a solid roof, a roof light will not replace any potential loss of light. A roof light will tunnel the light through to the area underneath it but will not direct it into the house, some light may be reflected if the floor covering is a bright colour, but a roof light will not direct

light into the inner rooms. Roof lights may result in a bright sunroom but the internal room will suffer from a loss of light. The only way to help alleviate this problem is to widen the opening between the sunroom and house.

The Perfect Location for the Conservatory on the House

The next step is to find the **perfect location for the conservatory on the house**. Our advice is to place the conservatory where it can be easily accessed from the kitchen and living area. If you have to travel to get to the room it is likely you won't get as much use from it. This is easier said than done in some cases but remember there is always a solution. Current home designs are now reverting back to open plan living spaces, so if you have a kitchen and dining room arrangement at the back of your home it is always possible to remove the internal wall between the two to make it into one large living space, which will then facilitate access to the conservatory if it is positioned over the dining room. The cost involved will depend on whether the internal wall is a supporting wall or just a partition wall which can be easily removed.

Existing Facilities

Most homes will have the facility pipes on the back wall, these may include pipes from the toilet, bath, shower, sinks, en-suite, dishwasher, washing machine and house gutters. Where these pipes are visible there will be the associated pipes underground to dispose of waste.

The first key issue to be looked at is to determine the location of the main sewer line. Older houses will have a common pipe which disposes of sewage and surface water while newer homes will have two separate lines; one for sewage and one for surface water. The location of these can be determined from the location of the manholes or AJ's (Armstrong Junctions) These pipelines will run parallel to the back wall of your home. So how does this affect your design? Well most of the pipes can be moved to facilitate your conservatory except for the main sewer and main surface water pipe. It is within building regulations to build over these pipes once properly bridged, however you cannot build a foundation on top of the pipeline, i.e. if the main sewer is running parallel to your home at a depth of 12ft then your conservatory must be less than or more than 12ft in depth, it cannot be 12ft. So check the location of these manholes before considering what size room you require. When these manholes and inspection chambers are within the floor area of the proposed conservatory they can be moved in most cases to outside the area. The cost of this work will depend on a number of issues such as the depth of the pipes, the number of pipes forming the junction, the type of pipes (older clay pipes are more difficult to move than the newer PVC type).

Access From The House

How will you access your new room? Do you have an existing door that can be used or perhaps a window which can be removed, the wall then knocked out and new doors fitted?

The following are the most common scenarios;

Conservatory To Be Built Over the Dining Room Window

The normal practice here is to remove the window and cut down the wall on each side, a door can then be made to suit this opening. By maintaining the same width doors as the window there will be no need for structural work to be carried out above such as a new lintel or steel beam.

So what are the issues that need to be considered here? Firstly you need to consider what design of doors you prefer. The opening size will play a big part in this decision. A small opening of up



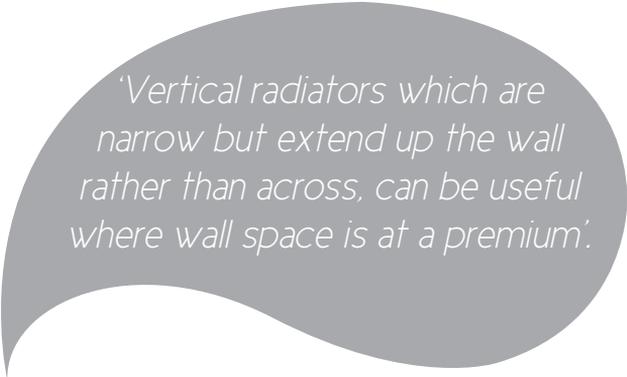
'Consider if you will still have enough wall space left in the room'.

Internal double doors and glass side screens

to 5ft will just accommodate a pair of french doors, an opening of 6ft will still accommodate a pair of double doors or a smaller pair of double doors with glass screens on each side. Any opening larger than 6ft will require extra side screens if using french doors or a sliding patio door could be made to fit the entire opening.

If you are considering opening the wall wider to let in more light then here are the key things you need to know.

- *If you knock out a large section of the wall then you will be losing usable space in that room, you may have been using this wall for a bookcase, settee, TV stand etc. Now there is a walkway through this space so consider if you will still have enough wall space left in the room.*
- *If you are knocking out the wall of the house, remember that your floor covering finishes at the inside of the wall now, but when the wall is gone your doors will be fitted to the middle or outer reveal of the wall so your floor covering will be short. This may mean re-covering the existing room floor as well as your new conservatory floor, although this may be part of your plan in any event. A door saddle can be made to fit the gap between the existing floor covering and the new doors/conservatory floor however if it needs to be very big this can be unsightly.*
- *Is there a radiator under the existing window? If so then this will need to be relocated, is there wall space elsewhere in the room that can be used without upsetting the furniture layout? If this is a problem there are vertical radiators which are narrow but extend up the wall rather than across, they are more expensive but can be useful where wall space is at a premium.*
- *Any sockets, TV points etc. will need to be moved to other walls*



'Vertical radiators which are narrow but extend up the wall rather than across, can be useful where wall space is at a premium.'

Conservatory to Be Built Over Existing Doors

If you already have doors leading to the garden then hopefully this will save you some money. There are a couple of points worth considering here. A lot of houses in the last 15 years were built with a sliding patio door from the dining room as standard. This served its purpose very well, however now you need to consider if it is appropriate to have these doors between two rooms. This situation is fine in many cases however it has been our experience that clients prefer to be able to open the two rooms as a large space for entertainment etc. which is not possible with patio doors as one half of the door unit does not move and so is permanently fixed in place. It is worth considering replacing these doors during the build while there will be plasterers on-site and while there will be a certain level of redecoration to be done anyway.

Where you have existing french doors opening from the house consider the following. Are these in good condition? The back wall of the house is going to be dry-lined when the conservatory is being built so if you think these doors need to be replaced then now is the time to do it, leaving until later will mean upsetting your new plasterwork in the conservatory to remove old frames.

Most doors will be in good condition though and when the new conservatory is built they will not get any further weathering and so should not deteriorate further. It may however be necessary to move existing doors within the opening to the outer reveal of the opening. Your french doors at present when opened will generally only open out 90 degrees, this will result in a lot of wasted space in the conservatory, by moving the existing doors to the outer reveal, it may be possible to arrange for the doors to open back on the house wall, leaving the floor area clear.

Two further points to consider here; if you plan to have your doors open back on the house wall then remember it may not be possible to have wall lights on the house wall as the doors would damage them when opening back, also if the doors are moved out on the wall to allow them to fold back then again your floor covering inside will be short of the new position of the frame which will require a door saddle or extending the existing floor.

Conservatory To Be Built Where There Are No Doors Or Window

In this situation you have a blank canvas to work with. You need to decide how big an opening you require, this will be determined by cost; the bigger the opening, the more work required and the more cost involved. Consider the internal room also, what way will you intend to layout the room? Where will the sofa fit now? Is there a suitable location for the television? Because the wall of the house is being knocked out there will be a requirement for a concrete lintel or a steel

beam to support the wall above the opening, the type of support should be calculated taking into account the width etc. of the opening.

It is important to remember that in situations where alterations are being carried out to an existing room in your home it is not always possible to get exact matches for the existing materials such as skirting boards, dado rails and architraves, the age of your home will often dictate how easy it will be to get matches, but these are small issues generally not noticed once the room has been decorated and dressed.

'Because the wall of the house is being knocked out, there will be a requirement for a concrete lintel or a steel beam'.



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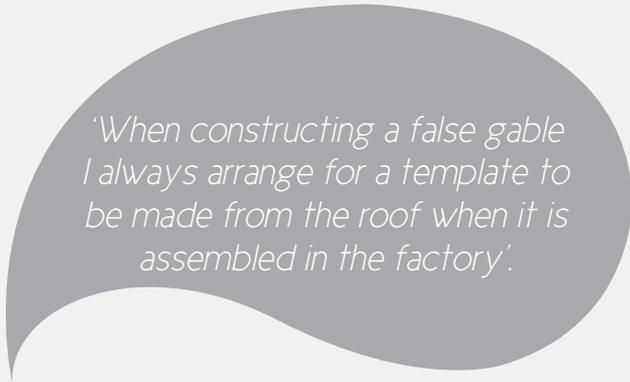
Planning Permission

We have included a separate chapter on planning in this book but for this section it is worth noting that in general you will not need planning permission for the conservatory to the rear of your home (subject to a number of conditions) while planning is required to the side or front of the house. The planning process should not deter you as I have yet to see an application turned down however there are financial and time implications. Your budget will need to cover the cost of drawing up the plans, submitting the application, an advertisement for the newspaper and any planning levy which your local authority may impose on the successful application. The planning process will also delay the start date by approximately 4 to 5 months so keep this in mind when deciding on a start date for the project.

House Design

The two common house types are bungalows and two storey houses. A two storey house normally presents no height restrictions and so the homeowner can choose from any of the designs, however bungalow roofs may present some limitations. When building onto the gable end we recommend having the pitch of the house roof measured and if possible have the pitch of the conservatory roof mimic that of the house roof. However conservatories on the side of the bungalow, where there are low eaves, have height restrictions and therefore limitations on designs. There are two simple and very effective solutions; construct a false dormer/gable in the house roof (see Figure 1, page 17) or create a conservatory design which will link to the bungalow roof using a boxgutter (see Figure 2, page 17).

Creating a false dormer in the roof conjures up images of stripping off the house roof, wet rainy days and hosts of structural issues, in fact it is a very simple job which can be completed in two days. The existing rafters do not need to be cut in the house roof, additional rafters are simply added to the roof. When constructing a false gable I always arrange for a template to be made from the roof when it is assembled in the factory, the gable can then be completed on-site before the conservatory arrives and ensures a snug fit. The conservatory is then just another straight forward installation with the house roof already sealed (see Figure 1, page 17).



'When constructing a false gable I always arrange for a template to be made from the roof when it is assembled in the factory'.



Figure 1
Gable front
Edwardian
with a false
gable

The second method (*Figure 2*) involves designing the conservatory so that the eave of the conservatory attaches to the eave of the house using a structural gutter. Depending on the measurements of the house the conservatory will either be joined to the fascia of the house or to the wall underneath the fascia board. Your designers will advise you on how the conservatory will be linked to the house.

So is there a "best" method? Not really, it is a matter of taste, structural and other limitations. Some conservatories are more suited to one design than others, for example if you aspire to a conservatory measuring say 20ft along the house wall then it will not be possible to construct a false dormer 20ft wide. Older houses may not be suitable for false dormers if for example the existing roof tiles/slates are no longer available or if the existing felt on the house roof is compromised.



Figure 2
A box
gutter
Edwardian
design
with angles

A simple solution for some bungalows is to construct a simple lean-to design with a low pitch to fit in under the house eave, however in most circumstances this will result in a very low ceiling height in the conservatory and aesthetically it may not be very pleasing. If you are contemplating such a design it is imperative that the minimum roof pitch should be no less than five degrees, any less than this and you will lose the manufacturers guarantee on both the polycarbonate and double glazing as a flat roof design will result in water lying on the roof compromising the seals.

Boundary Walls

Your house will be either detached, semi-detached or a terrace design and all arrangements have implications for the boundaries with neighbours. If your home is detached it should be possible to construct a conservatory with glass on all sides once the glass is not within one metre of the boundary line. However in the situation where the house is semi-detached or terraced, a solid wall to the boundary side must be considered. This may also have an impact on light for both you and your neighbour depending on the direction the house faces and also may assist with your decision on where to locate the conservatory. The new wall may block your light or block your neighbour's light depending on the direction it faces and also the time of the day, for example it may only block light to your home last thing in the evening. Don't be too concerned about your neighbours at this stage, they are probably planning the same type of project themselves for some time in the future.

Where a new wall is to be built on the boundary line there are two options to consider, the most common option is to build your new conservatory wall in your garden inside the existing garden wall, this is our preferred option where possible, as foundations do not have to be dug in your neighbours garden. If your neighbours have a favourite plant on the existing wall, a barbecue built up against the wall or a new deck extending to the boundary wall then we suggest taking our advice and stay in your own garden and build on your side of the boundary line. However if your neighbours are planning a conservatory at some stage it may be better to consider knocking the existing wall and replacing with a new wall which can be used by both parties, but remember it is going to cost more to knock the wall and remove the foundations so you will need to consider if they are prepared to pay towards the extra work now if they are not ready to build yet. The location and type of boundary wall will also affect the design. If you decide to build the new boundary wall in your own garden, then this wall will generally be about 2100mm (6ft 11") from house floor level, the conservatory roof then rests on the wall with the normal guttering arrangement (see Figure 3, page 20).

As the finished wall will be approximately 300mm (12 inches) thick, this allows for a shelf to be

fitted to the top of the wall inside the conservatory which can be a nice feature. Building a wall on the boundary line allows both parties to use the wall. In this instance the conservatory will be fitted to your side of the wall, allowing your neighbours to work on their side of the wall. This type of wall is called a parapet wall, it projects above the roof line and is finished on top with capping stones (see Figure 4, page 20).

The conservatory is fitted to the side of the wall using a box-gutter design. Please note that this type of wall will be higher and may block more light, it will also be more expensive to construct but the cost of the wall can be shared with neighbours.

Remember in all instances that the correct boundary line should be determined before any work commences, the existing garden walls or fences may not accurately reflect the true boundary line, your new room must be built within your correct boundaries.



Two examples of Edwardian designs with a side wall built inside the boundary wall

'Your house will be either detached, semi-detached or a terrace design and all arrangements have implications for the boundaries with neighbours.'





Figure 3

A conservatory side wall built inside the boundary wall.

'The most common option is to build your new conservatory wall in your garden inside the existing garden wall'



Figure 4

A conservatory side wall built as a boundary wall.



Heating

The most efficient way of heating your conservatory is to extend your home heating system. While the cheap and easier option of just adding an electric heater may appeal, this will cost a lot more to run over the life of the conservatory and is generally not as pleasant a form of heat as that from a radiator. It is important to consider whether your boiler can cope with the extra radiators required. If your boiler is very old then it may be necessary and prudent to include in your budget an upgrade to a more energy efficient boiler with a greater output. The modern condensing boilers are more energy efficient and will repay the investment over the long-term. Access points to the heating system need to be considered, it is rarely successful to plumb a new radiator from an existing one and in some cases it may be necessary to plumb back to the boiler or to the hot press where thicker $\frac{3}{4}$ " pipes will be available. This ensures adequate pressure to pump the hot water to the radiators in your new room.

It is normal practice to match the low wall of the conservatory to the finish of the main house wall so that it blends in and looks like it belongs. In other words if you have a brick house you should have brick walls, if you have a dashed house then you should have dashed walls, dry dash with dry dash etc. It is a common mistake when leafing through the home improvement magazines to think that maybe an old type brick wall would look best on your home, this can often result in what we call the 'pimple effect' where your new conservatory stands out like a pimple on your home. One other thing to watch out for here, if you are in receipt of a cheap quotation, look to make sure that the plaster finish is correct, as it is lot quicker, cheaper and easier to put a sand and cement finish on the wall and hoodwink the client by telling them that is how "they are all done". Applying a wet dash or dry dash finish will require the work of a skilled tradesman, which not all companies want to employ.

Other issues which need to be considered include whether there are any large trees which should be removed, is there a patio which will need to be lifted and relaid in a different place?. Are there structures in your garden such as garden sheds, outhouses which while not noticeable now will be very much a part of the new vista once the conservatory is complete. Our aim when we survey your home is to analyse all these issues and come up with a complete solution and costing for the project which when complete will be the very best possible solution for your home within your budget. I hope this section highlights the importance of having an expert design your conservatory to avoid cost overruns and disappointment at the end of the project.

Action steps:

- 1. Decide on a room over which you will build the conservatory*
- 2. Consider the light factor and how important this is to your living space currently **and** in the future*
- 3. Check for drains and manholes in the garden*
- 4. Consider access from the house*
- 5. Check if planning permission is required*
- 6. Consider whether the house type has implications for the conservatory roof design*
- 7. Consider any boundary issues with your neighbours*
- 8. If building a wall at the boundary line, consider whether to build in your own property or replace the existing boundary wall*
- 9. Determine the true boundary line before work commences*
- 10. Have a good look at your garden; are there any structures etc. which will now be part of the new vista, is there work which needs to be done here?.*





GETTING VALUE FOR MONEY

We all know that price plays a very important part in the decision process. But there is an old saying that 'a job worth doing, is worth doing well'. I am not advocating that you should consider the most expensive quotation in anticipation of getting the best job done but you should consider a few important points. Firstly you must make sure that you have an adequate budget to have the work carried out professionally, secondly you must ensure that there are no overruns or unanticipated extras and finally you must make sure that you are getting what you think you are getting and that it is of a high standard.

It is worth remembering that once the conservatory has been completed, there will be other expenses such as furniture, decorating and perhaps some gardening work as the new room may lead to changes in the layout of the garden. While there is no hurry in completing the finishing touches it is worth keeping in mind that these extra expenses may arise.

When a detailed quotation is presented it can be easily checked off to make sure that all the work required has been included or *if not*, that you know what *is not* included. However when the quotation is not detailed you need to start asking the questions. Don't presume that all companies are quoting for the same work. Having spent 20 years in the business I have seen all the tricks of the trade. Here are the common ones which may be omitted from your quotation but which you may not have thought of when comparing the prices.

1. Full foundations for the structure, this is a large portion of the cost, first there is the labour to dig out the ground, secondly the cost of disposing of waste soil in skips and thirdly the cost of concrete and labour to get back up to ground level where we started. You might be thinking "surely everyone puts in a foundation" and you would be right to think that but I have seen so many companies arrive with several lengths of timber to construct a frame and then a load of ready-mix concrete on top of the lawn to provide the base. This may cause three potential problems, firstly it may sink, secondly the damp course cannot be inserted correctly and thirdly the lack of insulation may mean cold feet for many winters to come.

2. A footpath around the conservatory, you need a footpath to give you access to clean the windows, it also stops the grass growing against the walls and leaves a proper finish to the job.
3. A gully trap. A gully should be provided to take away the rainwater from the gutters, leaving the down-pipe emptying into the garden will result in ponding if the area is paved or else a mucky garden in winter. There can often be quite a bit of work to excavate and lay pipes to connect into the existing drains at the house.
4. Lead flashing. The conservatory should be sealed to the house by cutting a groove 2 inches deep into the masonry of the house and then inserting lead into the wall and then sealing it. This lead is then turned onto the new roof to provide a tight weather seal. A cheaper alternative is to seal the roof using a tube of silicone or use a 'stick-on' type of flashing available from the D.I.Y. stores, these products have a very limited life span and will mean revisiting the job in the not too distant future.
5. I believe a fan should be fitted in all conservatories. I consider them more like furniture for dressing the room than functional but they are great for a hot day and more importantly you should insist that the fan kit has lights fitted to it which gives an excellent source of light in the roof. When fitting a fan, insist that it should be correctly wired with a double gang switch on the house wall. One switch will allow independent use of the light without having to use the fan and vice versa. The fans have pull cords as standard for switching, but these will not last and are difficult to replace, they can be discarded if proper wall switches are provided.
6. Hook locking on the doors. I can never understand how some companies do not offer this as standard, it is almost like saying "Would you like to risk getting your home burgled through your new doors or would you like to pay extra to prevent it?", everyone wants security and so it should be a standard item.
7. Internal glazing. You should insist that this should be standard as it prevents break-ins. In external glazed conservatories, the glazing beads can be removed and the glass simply lifted out of the frame allowing easy access to your home.
8. Ventilation is essential for the summer months in a conservatory, the oldest trick of the trade is to offer one or two opening windows in the quotation and then offer more as an extra at the time of signing the contract. We have always offered all sections opening and believe this should be an industry standard. While this involves more framing, welding, locks and hardware it means the client has the comfort of adequate ventilation even on the hottest day.

'Remember you will have this conservatory for 20-30 years.'

9. Check your glazing, remember double glazing is yesterdays news, now it is all about energy ratings and your glass should as a minimum have argon gas filling and a U value of 1.1.

There are numerous other tricks for manipulating the quotation and often you have to rely on trust; can you trust the company and the representatives you are dealing with to offer you the very best products, **not the cheapest products** and to offer you what is best for you and your home **OR** what is best for them to sell? Remember you will have a lifetime to regret dealing with the wrong company so take your time to make the right choices.

So what do you do if you have researched the cost of your conservatory and you have budgeted €15,000 for the job and now you find that you are €5,000 short for what you require. Well you have two options, use cheaper materials and cut corners or wait and do it right, we all know doing it right is the correct answer but not the one we want to hear. Remember you will have this conservatory for 20-30 years depending on how long you intend staying at your address, better to wait for a year and have a good conservatory for 19-29 years than speed ahead, compromise and regret it for 20 years. You might be lucky, you might find a company desperate for work who are prepared to do the job at cost or below cost but is it worth the gamble?

Action steps:

- 1. Decide on the budget*
- 2. Compile a requirement checklist for comparing quotations*
- 3. Consider an allocation of budget for decoration, furnishing and any garden work.*



A quality ceiling fan



CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONSERVATORY

Here are the key things you need to consider when choosing a conservatory

1. Size
2. Design
3. Colour
4. Glazing
5. Window design
6. Door location
7. Finishing touches

Size

The size of the conservatory can be determined by a number of issues, mainly price but also the size of the house wall where it is to be located, the size of the garden and importantly it's use. In most cases you will have limited options regarding the size of the conservatory as the location of the doors and windows on your back wall will determine this. The main decision will be how many doors or windows to cover on the back wall. I always suggest that clients consider that while they will only get one chance to get this right, big isn't always best. You should build a room to suit your requirements, if you need space for a dining table and chairs then decide how big a table you require and plan from there. Building a big room just for the sake of it has other implications, covering an additional window or door may result in other light or ventilation issues that need to be considered for the internal rooms. Remember also that you have to heat this room, so why heat a big room if you don't need to, especially with increasing carbon taxes.

The depth into the garden is normally the variable which you have full control over unless you have a very small garden. When deciding on the depth consider the location of the sun, what part of the garden gets sun at particular times of the day? Will building the conservatory deeper mean that you will have sun for longer? If so then this may be a good idea. Will a deeper conservatory have implications for your neighbours light? The depth of the conservatory will also be determined by the location of the sewer pipes underneath. Finally consider your garden

after the conservatory has been completed, where will your patio or deck fit. Have you still got a suntrap to enjoy the summer evenings, will you have adequate space for children to play?

The average conservatory that I have built over the years is about 13ft by 12ft or 3.9m by 3.6m but of course there have been many variants. This is an average size room suitable for a dining or sitting room. If you expect to have a table and a sitting room suite then you need to consider larger such as 20ft by 11ft. Your design team should be able to assist and advise on this. An important point to consider is that the price per square metre is inversely proportional to the size, the cost per square metre will decrease as the room size increases. While for smaller jobs the cost per square metre will increase as insurance costs etc. will remain the same.

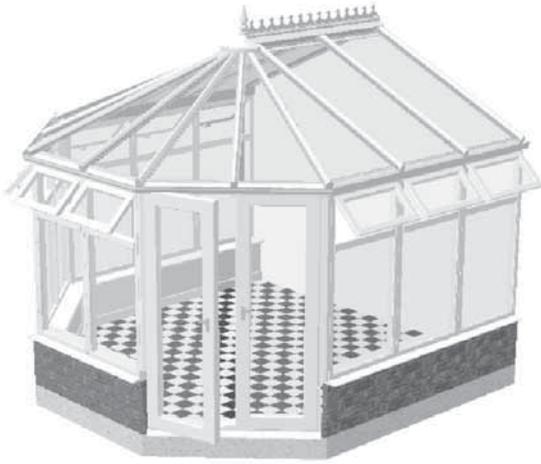
However when designing a small room remember there will be a minimum cost to build the room no matter what the size, this is to cover the design cost, the cost of labour and set up costs on-site etc. It has been my experience that once you go below 100 square feet the price remains virtually the same, as the transport, labour, insurance etc. will still apply no matter how much smaller the room is.

Design

It is not my intention to go into any great detail on the many different designs of conservatories as there is ample information available in brochures and websites. Rather I prefer to give a brief opinion on what design may be best to choose for your home.

Victorian

Victorian conservatories have always been a favourite with clients, but remember the ornate shape with its bay design can reduce the usable floor space inside. Remember also that planning restrictions apply when glass faces the neighbouring property which can be a problem when the bay window faces your neighbour (only applies to semi-detached and terraced houses). If you live in a bungalow then Victorian conservatories are most suited to the gable ends or if constructed into the house roof using a false gable (for an example of a false gable, see Figure 1, page 17). If considering putting a Victorian design onto a bungalow using a box gutter design, be careful that the dimensions suit the design, some of these designs result in a very small ridge at the apex which can look odd. With careful designing it can be possible to adjust the pitches on opposite sides of the roofs to elongate the ridge and cresting detail. A well experienced designer will be able to advise on this.



Victorian Design

Lean-to

Lean-to designs are a preferred option for conservatories which span across the house, however due to the lengths of glass available there are restrictions to the depth you can construct into the garden, typically 10ft will be the maximum with glass. I suggest two tips for lean-to's, first increase the pitch (roof height) as much as possible, it will look a lot better and secondly, where possible, create a design which has a bay at each end, this enhances the appearance. Lean-to's that require a solid wall on one end should have a hipped roof to reduce the wall height, otherwise a very imposing wall 11-12ft high would need to be constructed at the boundary line which is bound to irritate your neighbours.



*Hip End
Lean-to Design*

Edwardian

Edwardian designs are the most popular as they make the best use of space and can be the most economical to build on a square foot basis. The Edwardian is basically a square or rectangular shape and can be easily hipped to add to a bungalow. Where the design incorporates a boundary wall it complies with the planning requirement not to have glass facing the neighbouring property, the side of the conservatory has the solid wall while the front glazing faces down the garden not towards the neighbouring property.



Edwardian Design

Pavilion

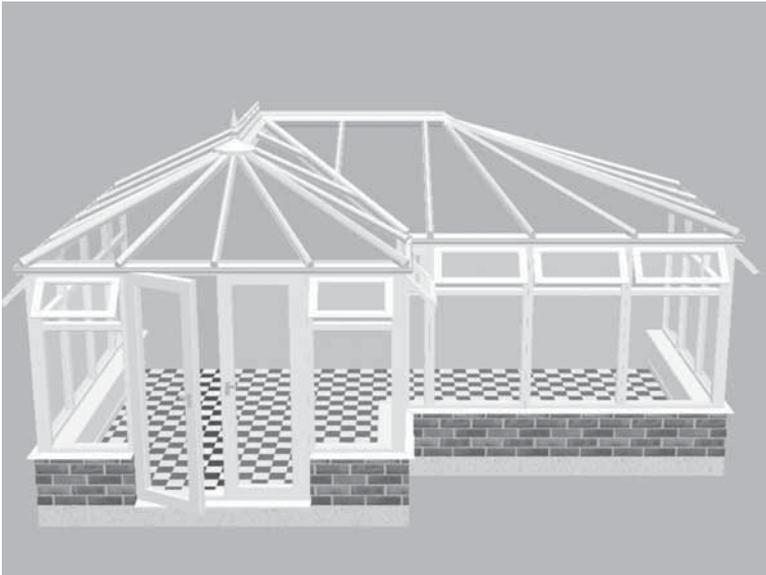
The Pavilion is basically an adaptation of the Edwardian. The high pitched gable front offers an additional sense of space and height. The Pavilion design is a useful design for those trying to maximise the light into the inner room. On the right house the Pavilion can create a stunning visual impact. For those living in a bungalow, this design is only suited for the gable end, if it is to be attached to the side of the bungalow, a false gable in the house roof must be considered (see Figure 1, page 17).



Pavilion Design

P-Shape

When considering a P-Shape conservatory be careful with the dimensions, this is one of the most expensive designs, yet the wing on the side of the P often results in a space which is just used as a corridor to access another room. There are limitations to these designs and often they do not make the best use of the space available, always consider if there is a better design which will give more usable space while retaining the ornate features.



*P-Shape
Conservatory*

Lantern Roofs

Lantern Roofs are a big no-no in my opinion for three reasons. Firstly the cost is normally prohibitive, secondly unless you live in a period house the lantern is likely to impose on your upstairs windows and lastly the lantern portion is inaccessible for cleaning. This design should definitely be reserved for the Lotto winners and only after they have bought their new home and hired the cleaning staff!

Wide Spanning Conservatories

If you plan a conservatory which is greater than 5.7m across the back wall of your home then there are structural issues which have to be taken into consideration. A typical “A roof” design has limits to the span it can stretch to due to snow, wind and glazing weights. These sizes lend themselves more to designs such as lean-to’s, P-Shape and Edwardians with a reverse hip. Your designer will be able to advise on this.

Remember where you are adjoining another property you will need to construct a new wall between you and your neighbour, this section will not have any glass, consider how this will affect your proposed design.



*Wide Spanning
Conservatory*

Colour

The most popular colour for conservatories is white followed by the light oak (also called cherrywood) and the darker rosewood (also known as woodgrain). So which to choose? Most people choose a conservatory colour to match their windows however I would stress that this does not need to be the case. I had a light oak conservatory on my last house with white windows and it blended in very well.

There are a few issues to consider, firstly cost, white will be cheaper as the wood effects have to have an aluminium foiling applied to the profile to give it a grained effect.

Secondly the wood grains are easier to keep clean and the dirt is not as visible due to the darker colour, they still need to be cleaned but not as often.

Thirdly I recommend if choosing a grained effect frame to have a white finish to the interior. The white will reflect light back into the house reducing any loss of natural light and also colour frames absorb heat and can be prone to expansion and contraction. A white finish to the interior where it will be hottest on a summer day will reduce this problem.

Crems, greens etc.? Basically with the processes now available it is possible to have a conservatory finished in any colour of the rainbow, the most common alternative colours are

cream, green and grey. Creating a conservatory in non standard colours does add significantly to the cost and is generally carried out to match specific colour schemes at the home, for example if you have cream windows on your home it may be difficult to have any other conservatory that will compliment this other than cream. A word of warning here, these coloured conservatories are a sprayed painted finish onto the white or foiled frame, it needs to be protected to prevent damage and certainly not be recommended for dog owners as scratching may damage the paint-work.

Glazing

Should I have polycarbonate or glass in my conservatory roof?

This is probably the most common question we are asked and a very valid one. The answer unfortunately is not so straight forward. Here are the most important aspects to consider:

- 1. If you are overlooked then polycarbonate should be considered, it will offer complete privacy from overlooking neighbours. The alternative is to consider a glass roof with blinds although this can add a significant sum to the budget.*
- 2. What direction is the conservatory facing? A south facing conservatory will have direct sun on it for most of the day and can be hot in the summer months, we would normally recommend a tinted roof for this application, either a tinted polycarbonate or a solar control glass such as "Activ Blue" glazing (see common terms explained, page 76) which we have on display at our showroom. North facing conservatories will have little sun and it is very important to maximise the light into the house, we would normally recommend an activ glass roof or clear polycarbonate, if the budget allows glass would be preferable. East and west facing conservatories benefit from sun at different times of the day and so a careful balance needs to be made between making the conservatory comfortable and maximising light into the house. Again a blue tinted glass or an opal polycarbonate may be suitable.*
- 3. What is your budget? Glass is a more expensive option with the typical glass roof adding €1,200 to €2,000 for an average size conservatory (150 square feet) to the overall price depending on the complexity of the shapes of the roof sections.*
- 4. Noise. Polycarbonate is a composite sheet of seven layers of plastic, it is therefore noisier than glass during heavy rain, many of our clients like to be able to sit in the conservatory and hear the rain while others cannot tolerate it. I suggest a visit to the showroom on a rainy day and you can make a decision very quickly.*
- 5. Aesthetics. Do you want to star gaze or do you prefer a ceiling, again this is a matter for the individual and again a visit to the showrooms should make the decision a lot easier.*

In essence there are a lot of things to consider to get the right type of roof glazing. We find most people find the decision easier by visiting a showroom and sitting under the roof, the gut feeling is normally right with a little help and opinion from the design team.

Window Design

The two most common window designs are the traditional top opening window which can be embellished with stained glass or the full size contemporary design frame with large openers and no top openings. There are just a few things to consider: if you like ornate windows with leaded, stained or bevelled designs, then you should choose the traditional design. If you like large plain windows and enjoy a view then choose the contemporary design. It is worth noting that with the traditional design there is a rail across the frame at eye level for the top opening window frame, this may be in your line of sight, a feature some people would prefer not to have. In terms of price there is very little in the difference and cost would not be a deciding factor.

Door Location

The conservatory doors generally can be located anywhere within the design. When deciding on the perfect location consider the following tips:

- *Try to locate the doors to minimise the trip from the house to the garden, remember the more walking space in the conservatory, the less seating space available.*
- *Try to locate the doors facing a feature in the garden, the doors are glazed to the floor while in most cases the rest of the glazing will rest on 18" high walls, this has a tendency to attract your attention through the full length glazing, so you don't want the doors facing that old shed or coal bunker.*
- *Consider where your patio or deck will be located and position your doors to make these areas accessible.*
- *Consider other house doors and make sure that these won't clash with the new door location of the conservatory.*
- *Finally consider the overall design of the room and ask for help from your design team, doors on a conservatory are often a feature and as such should be strategically placed to enhance the overall appearance.*

































Finishing Touches

The finer points of the design process involve the less important features which are often chosen to suit individual taste. These include whether to include the decorative cresting and finial on the roof, the colour of the handles, choice of stained glass etc. again I would suggest a visit to the showroom as these are often easier to choose in-situ than from a brochure. While they may seem trivial, changing them after the design has been signed off may incur additional cost if the conservatory has been manufactured.

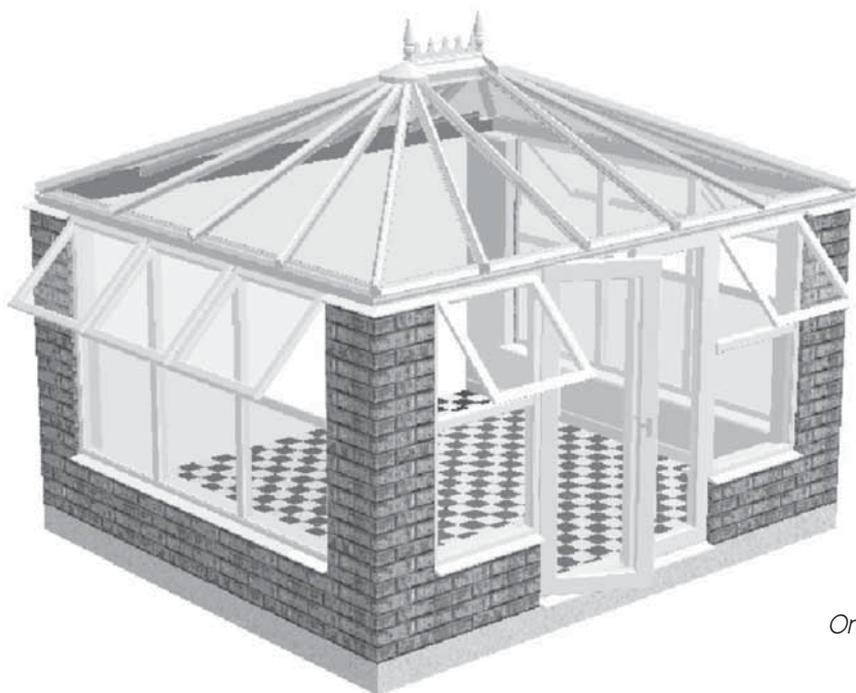
'There are a lot of things to consider to get the right roof glazing, most people find the decision easier by visiting a showroom and sitting under the roof.'

ORANGERIES: THE NEXT GENERATION OF HOME EXTENSIONS?

Getting the perfect solution for your home extension can always be a challenge. While most people understand the need and benefits of maximising the natural light, some may feel that the conservatory solution may not appear cosy enough during the winter. The modern orangery design may be the perfect compromise, maximising the light with a glass roof whilst giving a warmer feel with block pillars, ornate ceiling pelmets and sunken lights. These solid pillars will help blend the new room to the house, while the glass ceiling creates a fantastic sense of space.

The orangery design can be tailored to suit every application, such as incorporating full solid walls where a TV or desk is required, having full glass walls with solid pillars at the corners or walls with a combination of pillars and glass to reflect the clients taste and requirements.

Orangeries can provide a perfect solution to those who like the solid feel of an extension but value the natural light in their home.



Orangery



External view of an orangery



Internal view of an orangery



SUNROOMS

A sunroom is basically a conservatory with a conventional plastered ceiling or it could be called an extension with a lot of windows which ever way you look at it. The sunroom design may be a misnomer as the solid tile or slate actually blocks the sun rather than encouraging it into the home. So what are the advantages/disadvantages over a conventional conservatory ceiling of glass or polycarbonate? A sunroom is a very different room from a conservatory, it does not experience the same climate changes as a conservatory and is generally the same temperature all year around, this may be a good thing for some people but for others hoping for some summer madness in January this will not be possible with a sunroom. A sunroom is basically a house extension and performs like one, it will give you more space in your house, it will probably be warmer than your house if the most up to date insulating materials are used and it allows use in extreme weather conditions. The downsides should also be considered, the major one being light, this is so important as it not only affects your new room but also your existing home. A conventional ceiling will reduce the light in the inner rooms of your home. While roof lights help to increase light levels their benefit will generally only be enjoyed in the sunroom itself and not in the inner rooms of your home. So for those who do not enjoy artificial lighting in their living areas during the day, be very careful choosing between a sunroom and a conservatory. There are of course plenty of situations where the sunroom is a the perfect solution to extend your home.

- *If there are currently no doors or windows in the area where you plan to build your sunroom then the new roof will not reduce the light levels inside, in fact the new access opening created will increase the light into the inside rooms.*
- *If the inside room has windows facing several aspects, then it enjoys natural light from several sources and will not suffer the same effects as those with a single aspect window.*

There are two common methods of construction used; the traditional build using concrete or steel pillars and a tile or slate roof and the more modern building methods using an aluminium structure with a tile effect roof. We take a look at both methods here and consider the merits and drawbacks of each.

Traditional Build

The traditional build sunroom is constructed like any house extension but generally incorporates more windows than normal; several roof lights are normally added to increase the daylight

into the room to maximise the light. We normally recommend that a steel structure is used to support the weight of the concrete tiles; these steel columns are normally between 80mm and 100mm square and so are not obtrusive. We have included some photos of recent projects under construction below showing the main steel structure in place.

Alternatively concrete pillars can be used to carry the weight although these may obstruct the view to the garden in some instances.

The following is the normal sequence of construction of a sunroom.

- 1. Foundations excavated and poured
- 2. Steel structure bolted to foundations



Figure 1
Steel Structure complete

- 3. Rising walls constructed around steel columns
- 4. Windows measured to ensure tight fit to steel
- 5. Roof completed and tiled



Figure 2
Roof rafters attached onto steel frame

6. *Windows fitted and PVC cladding fitted to steel.*

7. *Plastering and finish of electrics and plumbing*

There are a couple of points to note here; this type of project involves substantially more work, and will normally take three weeks longer to construct than a traditional conservatory. The project costs are also higher due to the increased material and labour content of the job.



Figure 3 - A completed traditional sunroom

Modern Build

Like all building methods there have been huge advances in technologies to speed up construction times, and increased insulation values which deliver better value and less inconvenience to the client. At Conservatory Designs we have developed a sunroom construction method known as Ultra-warm. This system uses a lightweight but substantial aluminium structure to carry the weight of the roof, this reduces costs and decreases installation times substantially. The Ultra-warm roof delivers a U value of 0.16 which is difficult to match in traditional building methods. The Ultra-warm roof mimics that of a traditional concrete tile while its light weight composition allows maximum glass to the sides of the room.

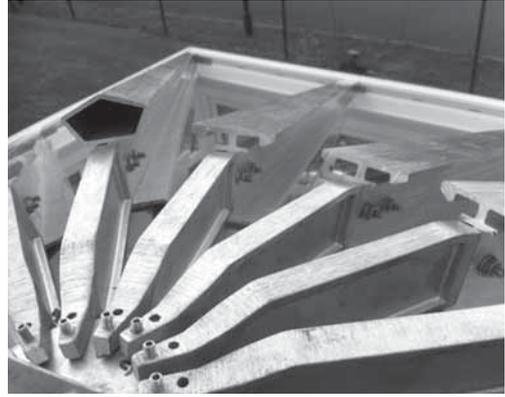


Figure 4 – Aluminium rafters of *Ultra-warm* roof Figure 5 – Rafter detail at roof apex

So which system is the best?

There are advantages and disadvantages to both systems, here are a few points to consider

1. An **Ultra-warm** roof will deliver significant savings to the client due to the rapid on-site build time, while the steel structure of the traditional build lengthens the build time and increases the cost. The **Ultra-warm** system will speed up construction time on site by a minimum of 2 weeks.
2. If the sunroom has to be tied into an existing roof then it is obviously important that the roof tiles/slates of the main building be matched in the sunroom, in this instance it may be more appropriate to consider the traditional build method, however in older properties there may be a difficulty in sourcing a matching roof tile, in this case either method can be considered.
3. There are limits to the size of the roof that can be constructed using an **Ultra-warm** roof while the traditional methods have little limitation as the steel sections can be increased in size and thickness to carry virtually any size roof.
4. The **Ultra-warm** system allows more glass to be used in the sides of the building as there is no requirement for steel uprights, this may be important for those who want to maximise the view to the garden. It also offers a more streamlined appearance.
5. If your sunroom is going to be built on a party wall with your neighbour it is important to remember that the fascia, soffit and gutter must remain on your side of the property, this is important as the room size may need to be reduced to facilitate this.

If considering a sunroom always remember to consider the light factor, the sunroom roof will block light from entering into the main house and **the inner rooms will be darker as a result**. While roof lights will help the situation they will not fully compensate for the loss of light. We advise to always seek the advice of an expert before making your final decision.



Figure 6 - Timber inserts in Ultra-warm roof to carry ceiling plasterboard



Figure 7 - A completed Ultra-warm roof



CONSIDER THE PEOPLE

When you choose the people you want to work with, you need to have a gut feeling that you are happy and can feel confident that these people have your best interests at heart and not their own. Yes we all have to make a profit from the job and this is the normal business process but you need to make sure that you are being sold what you need, not what the salespeople need to sell and that the tradesmen employed still maintain pride in their work. Remember you can buy the best product but it won't be the best unless it has been properly designed and properly fitted to your home.

Beware of the following

- 1. Salespeople who first offer a hugely inflated price but then surprise surprise have a “50% off” special offer if you sign on the evening. This is the high pressure sales technique used to fool people into thinking that they must make a quick decision in case they miss the once in a lifetime discount. Guess whose interests these guys have at heart, they want to make a quick buck regardless of whether you are getting the right product for your hard-earned money. Why the hurry in signing the deal? To make sure you do not have time to get other quotations and catch them out.*
- 2. Salespeople who do not turn up on time for their appointments or do not send their quotations out on time. You are about to buy a very expensive product and you have every right to expect an efficient after-sales customer care program. If the pre-sales customer care program is not up to your expectations then you can be certain that the aftercare will be worse or non-existent.*
- 3. Salespeople who seem hell-bent on selling you a product that you do not want e.g. a polycarbonate roof when you want a glass roof. Remember salespeople may have different motives for selling a particular product, these can be a different commission structure, maybe too much of one product in stock etc. You should be sold what is good for your requirements and your budget so remember only deal with those people who have your best interests at heart.*

4. Beware of the YES men! Every build will have its own technical challenges which need to be understood and explained to the client. Some issues may render some designs unworkable on a particular home or may involve some work not anticipated. The YES men will say "yes" and "no problem" to every issue to get the order. Once the order is signed these issues can then be presented to the client who is now tied into a contract. A good designer/salesperson will discuss all the technical issues of the job with the various members of their team before presenting solutions to the client and BEFORE signing an order.

Most of us rely on our gut feeling, we know when we are talking with an expert, as they will normally display a passion for their product and a genuine interest in the clients requirements. We can generally tell when we are being lied to and when we can trust the person. Probably the best piece of advice we can offer here is to rely on your gut and choose the people you are most comfortable dealing with, the price is important but is not THE most important issue when choosing your conservatory.



**CONSERVATORY
DESIGNS**

@ JOHNSTOWN GARDEN CENTRE



PLANNING PERMISSION

Small scale domestic extensions, including conservatories do not require planning permission if the extension is to the rear of the house and complies with the following:

- *The original floor area of the house is not increased by more than **40 square meters**. It is important to note that where the house has been extended before, the floor area of the extension you are now proposing and the floor area of any previous extension, including those for which you got planning permission, cannot exceed 40 square meters. (This applies to rear of house only), the side or front of house require planning permission.*
- *If you have **converted your garage** or your **attic** or added a **porch**, this all reduces the 40 square meter allowance.*
- *You cannot have any **glass within 1 meter of a boundary** wall facing a neighbouring property, the window can adjoin the neighbour but must face down the garden and not towards the neighbour.*
- *Some houses have a **clause in their deeds** which says that you need planning for any extension. In this case you do not have the normal 40 square meter allowance. In this instance, home owners will never be aware. Here you have to apply for full planning permission for even a standard conservatory to the rear of the property.*
- *You must have **25 square meters of space left** in your garden after the room has been built.*

If you are deemed to require planning permission then the following are the steps required.

A drawing of the house showing all elevations and floor plans is required with the proposed conservatory drawn onto the appropriate elevation. Existing drainage and sewage should be clearly marked on the drawing. Any pipes and drains which are to be relocated should also be clearly indicated. These drawings should be accompanied by an ordnance survey map showing the location-site of your home and the boundaries clearly marked in red. A planning permission notice should be placed in a national newspaper and a copy of this notice should accompany the application. The application form should be filled out and returned with the appropriate fee to the council. A site notice must be placed in a prominent position where it can be read from the public road. The location of this notice must be clearly marked on the plans. We recommend engaging a professional architect to prepare and lodge the plans.

You will receive an answer within 8 weeks of application. There are three possible outcomes; a grant of planning permission, a refusal or a request for further information. If further information is required then this will need to be submitted within a specific time period. In the event of a refusal you will have the right to appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Assuming that the grant of permission is received, as is the case in the vast majority of cases then there is a 4 week period for objections before a final grant of permission is issued. Once issued, a commencement notice must then be submitted to the council advising them when works will start. A notice must be submitted not less than 14 days and not more than 28 days before works commence. Any fees applied to the development should be paid at this stage.

Whether or not you require planning permission you should consider obtaining an architects certificate for the works carried out, there are two kinds; a certificate of compliance and a certificate of exemption.

Compliance Certificate

The Compliance Certificate is issued by a qualified architect when planning permission was deemed necessary and granted for an extension to a dwelling to legally confirm that the extension has been constructed in accordance with the planning permission granted by the Local Authority, the Certificate will also confirm that the extension is in compliance with the Building Regulations. It is optional but you will require one if you decide to sell your home.

Exemption Certificate

The Exemption Certificate is issued by a qualified architect when an extension to a dwelling meets the criteria for a planning exemption and does not require planning permission. The Certificate will legally confirm that the subject extension is exempt planning and will also confirm that the extension has been constructed in compliance with the Building Regulations.

Important Note

These Certificates are a legal requirement and must be attached to the Title Documents of the property for future reference should the property be the subject of a mortgage or future sale.

These Certificates require to be prepared and endorsed following an inspection by a "qualified architect", (i.e. a member of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and State Registered in the European Community and should be covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance) this is a legal requirement of the Law Society of Ireland.



SIGNING THE DEAL, WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

Payment Terms

Make sure you understand exactly what deposit and stage payments you have to pay before agreeing the deal. These should be clearly indicated on the quotation and not be hidden in the small print. If a deal looks too good to be true then it probably is.

Large Deposits

Large deposits are a thing of the past. A deposit should be a commitment of behalf of the client, not payment in full for the goods. Handing over a deposit of anything more than €1,000 in these times is not advisable. In our business we have only ever looked for a deposit of €500. Our business is based on trust, we trust you and we take the risk. We don't pass the risk to the customer. In some circumstances where the conservatory is being customised for the clients home, a larger deposit may be justified.

Quotations and Drawings

To ensure you know exactly what you are signing up for, you should have a proper and detailed quotation and drawing. **The golden rule when it comes to quotations is 'if it's not written down it's not included'.**

Don't make the mistake of assuming that you are getting electrics and plumbing if it doesn't say so on the quote! Most client/company disputes come after the job is finished where the client is faced with a bill for hidden extras which they thought were included but the contractor billed them as extra. This is simply avoided by ensuring thorough paperwork spelling out clearly what is included and excluded. Imagine budgeting for a € 20,000 job and finding out that you have to spend €3,000 more to get it finished the way you thought it was meant to be finished.

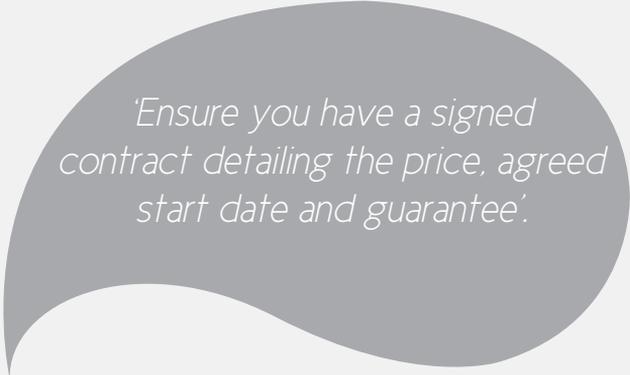
So to recap the important points you need to be aware of when signing the deal.

- 1. Check out the deposit and stage payment terms.*
- 2. Ensure you get an informative (type written) quotation and quality drawings, these should be provided free of charge.*

3. *Inspect what you are buying by visiting the company showrooms. I cannot over-emphasise how important it is that you can view the conservatory before you buy it. If the company does not have a showroom then what come back have you if you don't receive what you had expected? Look to see if the showroom is in good shape and look at the condition of the display conservatories. Remember if the products at the showroom are not looking at their best then it is unlikely yours will look any better.*
4. *Ensure you have a signed contract detailing the price, agreed start date, payment terms and guarantee. It is too late to discuss these after a project has started. Never rely on verbal contracts, agreements are easily forgotten.*
5. *Make sure the company and their builders have up to date public liability insurance. In these times this insurance is very costly and could be a cost that a company cannot afford leaving you the client with the exposure if an accident happens on-site.*

Action list

1. *Check the deposit required*
2. *Check the stage payments*
3. *Make sure all your requirements are detailed in the quotation*
4. *Visit the companies showroom*
5. *Check for insurance*



'Ensure you have a signed contract detailing the price, agreed start date and guarantee.'



BEFORE THE PROJECT STARTS

Garden: The first priority is the garden. Any trees or shrubs in the way should be removed or replanted before the work commences. If there are manholes in the way that need to be moved, lift the lids to see if there are any blockages, these will need to be cleared before the work starts.

House: The next important thing to do is to contact your alarm company to arrange to disconnect and reconnect your alarm wiring (this only applies if you are removing doors and windows). However if you want to alarm your conservatory your alarm company should leave out cable which can be hidden behind the plasterwork, these wires can then be connected when the job is finished.

If there are any blinds on the window or doors that are to be moved, take these down before the work starts to prevent damage or dust.

Neighbours: We all like to have good neighbour relations. We recommend that you discuss the upcoming project with your neighbour and make sure they understand what height and length the new wall will be (only applicable if you are terraced or semi detached and you need a sidewall in your conservatory.) Access will also be required to the neighbours garden to plaster the sidewall on their side. There generally is no problem with these issues providing you talk to your neighbour before the job starts. Neighbours appreciate this courtesy and are generally more than happy to oblige.

Pets: If you have a dog that normally spends time in the garden, will he or she need to be put into kennels?

Extra Work: As there will probably be a plumber and electrician on-site consider if there is any extra work to be done. This is an ideal opportunity to take care of any of those outstanding little jobs around the house! An outdoor socket and tap can be easily installed and are very useful!

Heating: Are all of your radiators working? Have you serviced the boiler recently? You will be adding one or two radiators to the boiler during construction, if there are any problems with the heating system these may show up when the new radiators are added. We recommend getting your boiler serviced before we start. Consider whether your old boiler has capacity for an extra radiator or radiators? Maybe now is the ideal time to upgrade to a new energy efficient boiler.

Maintenance: If your house needs to be painted regularly we recommend that you get the back of the house painted before the job commences as it will be easier for the painter to access the house at this stage. It is a good idea to get the fascias and soffits on the rear of the house changed to PVC as this will eliminate any future need for painting.

Time: Generally the duration of a conservatory project is approximately 4 weeks, weather permitting. Check the duration with the company you are employing and also if they intend working weekends.

With all of the above in place you are ready to go!





DURING THE PROJECT

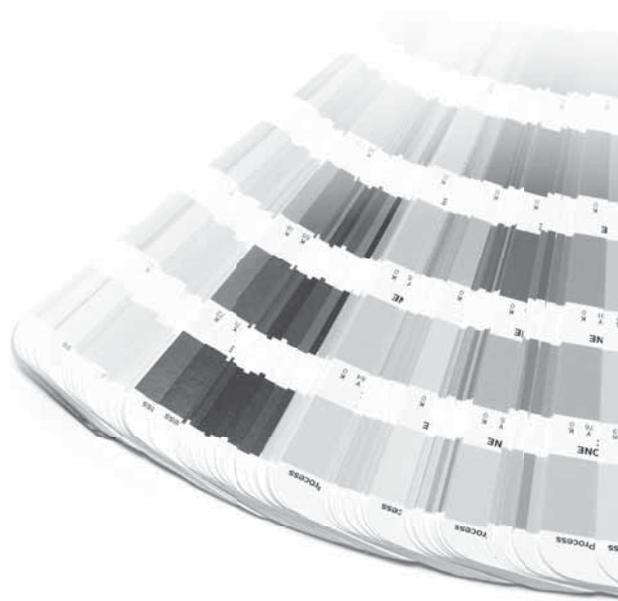
Ensure the company have access to your fuse board and alarm. If the fuse board trips access is required to reset it. Access will also be required to the alarm panel as hammers or drills may set this off.

The company will probably require access to water and toilets during the job. Once you trust the company it should be possible to leave a key and an alarm code and carry on with your business.

A good project manager should contact you regularly during the project. Make sure you voice any concerns during the project as it can sometimes be too late to fix a problem after the job is finished.

Don't be alarmed when the base is finished and ready for the conservatory, it can often appear a lot smaller than expected. Don't worry it is a very common concern but your conservatory will start to "grow" once the window and roof frame has been added and when finished it will be the size you had expected.

Now is the best time to book your tiler or painter!



AFTER THE PROJECT

You will experience condensation for several weeks following the completion of the conservatory. The water used in the floor and plastering has to dry out and during this time will appear as condensation on the glass and frames. This is only temporary and will reduce in time.

You will need to wait eight weeks after the conservatory is finished before you can tile it and twelve weeks before you can put down a wooden floor. You should also wait 4 weeks before you start to paint.

We cannot over emphasise the importance of waiting until the floor is well dried out before putting down flooring. If the flooring is put down too early, the tiles could lift or in the case of wood or laminate it will absorb the moisture and could warp. A good timber flooring contractor will measure the moisture in the floor before committing to lay the floor.

The drying out process: To assist the drying out process it is recommended to leave the windows open as often as possible along with some low background heat. Obviously in warm weather the conservatory will dry out faster than in cold weather. It is not recommended to use a dehumidifier in the early stages to speed up the drying out process as it may crack the plaster. Also remember not to have the radiator temperature too high as this may also dry the plaster out too quickly and cause cracks.

At this stage you should also contact your alarm company to reconnect alarms and where applicable alarm the conservatory. Your tilers and painters should be notified and booked once the floor and walls are dry.





HOW TO DECORATE AND FURNISH

Once the build has been completed it is natural to want to get the room furnished and finished as soon as possible but as previously mentioned it is essential that you wait until both the floor and walls have properly dried out.

The most common types of flooring are tiles, natural timber and laminate flooring. Tiles have been the traditional flooring in conservatories and these are still the most commonly used. When considering tiles there are a few important tips; if you have opted for a bright roof, i.e. a clear polycarbonate or glass roof then it may be prudent to choose a darker floor covering to absorb the strong light on a bright day, options may include slate, or clay coloured tiles. If you have opted for a tinted or obscure roof then it may be better to choose a lighter tile which will brighten the room and reflect some light back into the room inside, creams and beiges would be advised. Avoid any tiles which have a shiny surface as these may be a source of glare on a sunny day. For smaller rooms choose a large tile as these will give the effect of a larger room, also consider laying the tiles diagonally to give a greater feeling of space. Avoid tile centre pieces in smaller rooms as they tend to make the room appear smaller.

Timber floors are popular in conservatories for those who prefer a warmer floor, however remember that timber will fade in any room that has direct sunlight so consider the lighter maple and oak colours and avoid the darker walnut colours. Be aware that areas hidden from the sun such as under a coffee table will appear as a different colour over time. While most timber floors are now laid on an underlay or sponge matting there is also the option of laying it on batons to give more of a spring. In this instance you should make your contractor aware of this BEFORE work starts so allowances can be made for the extra height of the batons when pouring the concrete floor and also at the conservatory doors so that the timber floor will finish flush with the conservatory door threshold. Always get the floor moisture content checked before laying a timber floor, the surface of the floor may appear to be dry but two inches below the surface the concrete may still be damp.

Laminate flooring is very suitable for conservatories as it is hard wearing and will not fade. There are a variety of colours and types available and they are reasonably priced. Again remember to check the moisture content of the floor before laying the floor.

Decorating and furnishing: We recommend painting the room before you tile it as you will not have to protect a new floor from getting paint spills!

The colour scheme of the conservatory will be down to personal taste but as with tiles it is important to consider whether you are trying to encourage more light into the room or reflect it back out. If you have a bright room consider toning down the room with a darker colour or use bright colours to entice more light into the room. We have selected seven suitable colour schemes in our showrooms and are happy to advise on these and other colours.

When choosing furniture remember the sun will fade the fabrics so choose light colours where you won't notice the fading. Cane and Rattan is the traditional choice of furniture as it is hard-wearing and the main frames do not have fabric, this allows the cushion covers to be easily cleaned or replaced in time. Traditional soft furnishings are now becoming popular but remember these suites are larger in size and may not be suitable for the smaller conservatory. Avoid leather furnishing as the sun may cause the leather to dry out.

All that is left to do is sit back and relax, have a conservatory warming party with a bottle of wine and a few friends and ENJOY!!

When you get it right first time there is nothing more satisfying than experiencing a well constructed project, carried out by professionals with no disruption, built on time and within budget.





WE ASKED SOME OF OUR CLIENTS TO LET US KNOW WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF THEIR NEW CONSERVATORY

“The conservatory is everything I'd hoped it would be – beautifully designed, light, bright, very comfortable and warm in summer and winter. I can rest and read as I choose, look at the blue sky through the glass ceiling or sit warm reading with gentle lights when it's dark outside – Sooo comfortable. Two '*Stressless*' chairs were an inspired investment which have increased the conservatory enjoyment. The effect is one of lightness and freshness and pure enjoyable relaxation. When I look out from the dining room the conservatory is waiting to be enjoyed – workless – just sit into the cream cotton covered '*Stressless*' and relax. Avoca blanket if I wish, then read a book or listen to music or just enjoy the varied scenery of the modest south facing back garden.

The little birds, gold finches and blue tits particularly, visit to feed from the suspended nut feeders on the bird table one at a time, similar small birds, hoping to share the food, hover for a brief while near the feeder, then fly back to a nearby tree, then try again – it's a very pretty effect, hypnotic and relaxing. Sometimes a pair of local ring necked doves fly down and try to sit together on the roof of the bird table, beautifully made by my son's friend, the roof is just a little too small for both of them to perch together. Sometimes they manage to perch side by side, other times one stays on the roof, the other flies to the ground... then the robins may visit, one a fat little ball and his female companion hopping nearby...The local pair of blackbirds – the male the fattest blackbird I've ever seen – there are slugs in this Howth garden at dusk and dawn. They search for grubs by energetically lifting and turning the grounded leaves with their beaks, they mean business... the conservatory adds to the enjoyment of the scene...

The best bit is when the sun shines – and it really shone last summer... the effect is just so enjoyable... the bright sun through the glass is warm, very warm at times and very therapeutic. Sitting in the '*Stressless*' looking up at the blue sky is just the most de-stressing experience. I've maximised the effect by adding good quality white conservatory furniture from Arnotts – reading the paper at coffee time in the sunshine is also a great pleasure. The Umbrella tree—a gift – nearly reaches the roof now. The canvas picture on the

wall facing west is of an enlarged orchid – green and purple – took a photo of the orchid, another gift – and made it ‘grow’ and got the canvas done in Reads. It looks great... the effect of the sunlit glass roof and walls, giant flower canvas and the Umbrella plant is a hint of a Kew glass house in miniature... and when it’s warm this zings... the lovely light peach coloured Italian porcelain floor and lightly painted wood work enhancing this brightness.

The health benefits of the new conservatory will be the payoff for this investment – already an increase in quality of life and daily enjoyment – very likely a long term boost to my immune system. I look forward to spending many hours over many years enjoying this sunny, happy space. Thank you so much to Peter, Mark and Conservatory Design team.”

SW, Howth

“My wife and I took a long time to decide on the Conservatory. We initially had the idea of a sunroom. For us it was a big enough decision, we didn’t like to lose a part of our garden, which isn’t that big. However, having a smaller garden (and subsequently making it maintenance free) has it’s advantage as you get on.

Our compelling drive was to have some more living space, so we decided to get a Conservatory that was as big as was practicable without the need for planning permission, and still leave a decent but smaller garden area.

I had always admired Conservatories down the years as they appeared to me an elegant addition to any home. That we eventually made the right decision I am in no doubt. Visually, I love it, from a space gain aspect it’s given us a lovely extra living area, it’s like having a new house! It’s already altered the way we use our living space.

Because we chose high quality materials, roof etc, and technology has moved on with respect to glass thermal capabilities, our initial concern about keeping heat in proved unfounded, unlike some older or lower specification designs. I would say there is about a 3 degrees centigrade difference between the main house and the Conservatory, but also the kitchen/dining room at the rear of the house certainly needs less heating, and its cold outside.

In this day and age, security is of course an issue and the Conservatory gives a nice extra buffer to the rear of the house in this regard.

The Conservatory will I am sure add considerable value to the house also.

You know, at the end of the day, all the words in the world cannot convey the visual enhancement that a nice Conservatory adds, inside and out, to your living experience.”

John Norton, 21st January, 2011

Dublin

“When my husband and I decided to add a conservatory to our home, we went to Conservatory Designs in Johnstown. We discussed our plans and specific needs with Mark Quinn. It was immediately obvious that we were dealing with a professional, experienced and customer friendly company. As our conservatory would be North facing we had concerns regarding the warmth factor. We were reassured by Mark and the very capable team at Conservatory Designs that we would be able to enjoy our conservatory all year round. We were most impressed at the level of commitment from the initial planning stage to completion. Each person involved in the construction of our conservatory worked with enthusiasm, efficiency, and pride. We are delighted with this conservatory, which we have been enjoying all year round, for us, a haven of peace and tranquillity. We are very happy to recommend this wonderful company. Well done guys, and thanks!”

John & Maria Belton

Ashbourne

‘It was immediately obvious that we were dealing with a professional, experienced and customer friendly company.’

“In April 2010 after a long and dismal winter we decided it was time to add some extra space to our home. After debating whether we convert our garage or add on to our dining room my husband and I decided on the latter. Then having browsed the internet we decided a conservatory was our best option due the fact we get sunshine from midday in our back garden.

Next port of call a visit to Conservatory Designs at Johnstown Garden Centre. We then visited there in early April and as we were very impressed with display we booked our site visit the following week and commencement of work was agreed for May 17. Work commenced on due day and everything was complete within two weeks all due to the skills of an excellent team.

To say how impressed we were is an understatement. We now had a beautiful extra room in time for some great summer weather. By early August we were using it everyday and have done so since.

It was by far the best money spent on our home in many years. It is a pleasure to sit and relax in anytime of the year. The whole family really enjoyed it all over the Christmas period when the snow was inches deep and we were all snug inside.

I consider it a beautiful extra room and my dining room is a pleasure to use due to all the light coming through from the conservatory. We cannot thank the whole team at Conservatory Designs enough for their excellent work and would highly recommend this Company to anyone contemplating adding on to their home.”

Margaret McEntee
Mullingar

“You have asked me how I feel about my new conservatory. Where do I start? First of all, I have a lovely new extension to my kitchen area where it was badly needed. It has brought warmth and insulation to this area.

Apart from the added space, I have a wonderful view of my back garden. I can now enjoy all that is taking place throughout the four seasons, spring, summer autumn and winter.

The view of the sky and the constant light can only be good for one's physical and mental health. I was delighted to be able to sit in it through all the weeks of snow, etc. Now I'm looking forward to the longer days of spring and summer and enjoying every minute of daylight there is to be had.

My only regret, if I have one, is I would go for more space in my conservatory. However it is only left for me to thank you and your staff for the excellent work, kindness and courtesy shown us while you were here in our home. May I wish you all a very successful and "Happy New Year".

Many Thanks”

Ann Patel

Dublin 15





SOME COMMON TERMS EXPLAINED

This chapter is written to be as short as possible and as simple as possible. This is the boring stuff but some of it is important to know and for the inquisitive out there the internet will give you hours of happy technical reading on any of the items listed below.

- *What is the difference between PVCu, uPVC and Upvc? There is no difference and I have no idea why there are different and confusing terms used. The window frame is made from unplasticised polyvinyl chloride, for those of you who are interested this is basically the chemical make up of the plastic.*
- **Activ Glass:** *Pilkington Activ glass is a self cleaning glass used for conservatory roofs. The unique dual-action of the Pilkington Activ™ coating uses the forces of nature to help keep the glass free from dirt, first it uses daylight to break down organic dirt on the glass..then rainwater washes the loosened dirt away. We have used this glass extensively in both our showrooms and on clients conservatories. It is certainly a lot cleaner than normal glass however it will still need a good cleaning twice a year.*
- **U value:** *This is a term being used more and more now in the age of increased awareness of energy costs. I use a very simple definition which is that the U value calculates the speed that heat moves through a material, the higher the U value the faster the heat moves and the worse the level of insulation. So when constructing a room you should be looking for as low a U value as possible, meaning that the heat is moving slowly and therefore is not being lost to the outside. There has been tremendous progress in recent years achieving lower U values, the normal double glazing in your home probably has a U value of 2.5 while we currently offer glazing as standard with a U value of 1.1 and we were even reluctant to include this value in the book for fear that it would be outdated information by the time the book was published. To minimise the U value of your conservatory you should consider the following steps; maximise the insulation in the floor and walls, remember a cold floor will act like a fridge sucking the heat from the room and your toes. Use highly insulated glass in the sides and roof of the conservatory and if using Polycarbonate roofing then accept nothing less than 35mm with a minimum of seven layers through the sheet.*

· **Self Cleaning Glass:** This shouldn't need an explanation but this glass does not actually clean itself, it does however reduce the need for you to clean the glass. The coating on the glass reduces the ability for dirt to adhere to the glass, when it rains or you hose the roof, the dirt is simply washed away. It is important to know that there are two types of self cleaning glass. The first and cheapest type has a coating applied to the outside of the glass, like any coating this will have a limited life and would need to be re-applied at a later stage, something which most people will not want either the expense or the hassle. The second type is built into the glass manufacturing process and is called Pyrolytic. You may be familiar with Pyrolytic glass as it is used in self cleaning ovens. As this is an integral part of the glass it will last a lifetime.



Box Gutter

· **Box Gutter:** A box-gutter is a structural gutter used to attach a conservatory roof to a building such as a bungalow wall where height is restricted or to a shared boundary wall. These gutters are larger than a normal gutter and usually made of a heavy duty aluminium. The more advanced roofing systems will have special moulded fittings to connect the box gutter to the plastic guttering on the conservatory.

· **K Glass:** K glass is a branded glass manufactured by Pilkington. The K glass has a coating which serves two purposes, firstly it reduces the emissivity of the glass or in simple terms reflects

the radiant heat back into the room while secondly letting the heat in from the sun known as solar passive gain. The K glass is fitted as the inner pane of glass of a double glazed unit. In technical terms it is known as a hard coated glass which can deliver a U value of 1.9, it has since been passed out my the many 'soft coat' glasses offering better insulation.

- **Low E Glass:** The E in Low E is the products Emissivity, its ability to reflect heat. The lower the emissivity the higher the reflectant value of the material, so by having a glass with a low E value means it is highly reflective. This reflective value works in both directions in Low E glass, it reflects the radiant heat back into the room but it also keeps the room cooler by reflecting radiant heat from sun.
- **Argon Gas:** Argon gas is an inert gas which can be injected into the airspace between the two panes in a double glazed unit. The gas slows the movement of heat from inside to outside and thus reduces the U value, increasing the insulating characteristics of the window which is good news. However the gas is invisible so how will you know it is there and that you haven't been conned? Very simple, the gas is added after the unit is made, you should be able to see an small hole with a plug in the spacer bar of the unit where the gas has been injected into the unit.
- **Espagnolette lock:** A very fancy name for a window lock. These are multi point locks which are fitted within the window frame and generally will have a minimum of two sliding cams which increase the security of the window, in contrast to the basic window handle which just closes onto the window frame. These are known as espags in the trade. A simpler term would be a shoot bolt lock.



Espagnolette Lock

- **Hook lock:** *This does what it says on the tin, the lock hooks into the frame and prevents the door from being jemmied. Once there is adequate steel in the frame the door should be impenetrable.*
- **Jack Rafter:** *These are small rafters which instead of extending from the wall plate to the ridge of the roof, just extend at 90 degrees and are attached to hip rafters.*



Jack Rafter

- **Splayed Rafter:** *Splayed rafters extend from the windows of the conservatory to one point in the roof and can resemble a fan, hence they are also often referred to as fanned rafters.*



Splayed Rafter

- **Cresting:** *This is the decorative detail seen on the top of the roof, it is purely decorative and does not have to be fitted.*



Cresting

- **Tie bar:** *This is a structural bar which is required in larger roofs to prevent the roof from spreading due to the weight of the roof glazing itself and also loading from wind and snow. It does the same job as those timber beams that you bang your head off in your attic.*



Tie Bar

If you have enjoyed reading this book and would like regular news and information regarding conservatories, sunrooms, orangeries and general home improvements just email info@conservatorydesigns.ie and please put "further info" in the subject line.



Alternatively join our growing list of friends on our facebook page, find us under Conservatory Designs.

ABOUT US

Conservatory Designs award winning showroom is based at Johnstown Garden Centre at Exit 8 off the M7 at Naas. The showrooms have a fantastic array of conservatories on display in four different colours and seven different designs, each tastefully decorated and furnished in traditional Cane and Rattan furnishings. The showroom is open 7 days a week including bank holidays and offers a design while you wait service where we can draw up your design and price the work while you wait.

"I have been involved in various projects on behalf of clients with Mark Quinn and Peter Clarke of Conservatory Designs Ltd. over the past 18 years inspecting their work regularly. I have no hesitation in confirming that the workmanship and adherence to the Building Regulations has been excellent. The team at Conservatory Designs consists of highly skilled and qualified tradesmen who show great respect for the clients home while working there which I feel is very important and they show pride in their work which is a rarity nowadays. I would recommend this company for any Conservatory, Sunroom, Renovations or Home Improvement project".

Vincent Bacon MRIAI, BGDA Architects, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

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ISBN: 978-0-9571210-0-3



€9.99