

The Daily Telegraph

May 5, 2012

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Flip side

The ins and outs of an open-plan design **10**

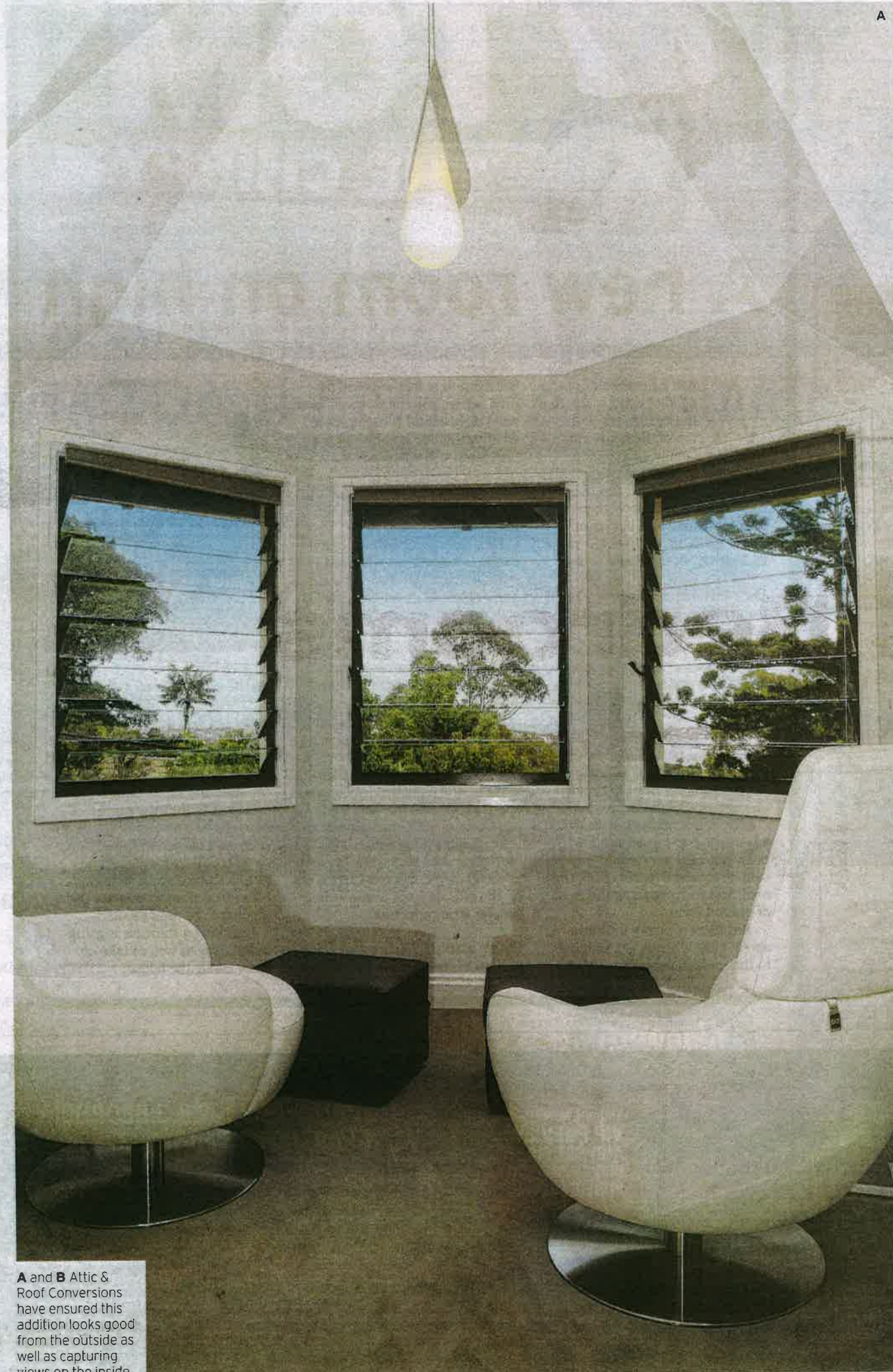
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Pitching for your garret

Unlocking that empty space between ceiling and roof could be the answer to all your storage woes, writes **Robyn Willis**



A s anyone who has ever renovated a house can testify, building in Sydney is a daunting task. Apart from the high costs of adding on to the house, there is the time and money required to find someone to design the space – and then jumping through council hoops to gain approval for your development application.

Most experts agree you should allow a minimum of two years for design, approval and building.

But what if you can create more space while avoiding the angst associated with a traditional building project? For those with the right kind of house, an attic conversion could be just the thing.

On the rise

Once confined mostly to owners of terrace houses with high-pitched roofs, attic conversions are becoming increasingly popular with owners of all sorts of homes, looking for a more affordable solution with less hassle.

The founder and owner of Attic & Roof Conversions, Patrick Houston, says that council restrictions in some parts of Sydney have driven owners to scale down larger renovations.

"From a heritage perspective, some councils prefer the roof-space manipulation rather than a first-floor addition," Patrick says. "The major reason for attic conversions, if you look at some of the inner-city suburbs, is the council is trying to keep the single-storey appearance of the area intact."

"If you cannot go out the back because you don't have the land and you cannot go up because of height restrictions, you do what you can do."

And depending on the pitch of your roof and the size of your house, you can do quite a lot, creating up to 30 per cent more space in your house.

Space invaders

Patrick says client requests range from basic storage spaces with pull-down ladders through to playrooms, bedrooms, home offices and ensuites.

The first step is to assess the condition of

A and **B** Attic & Roof Conversions have ensured this addition looks good from the outside as well as capturing views on the inside



C Absolute Attics have added both sleeping and storage space **D** A narrow space is put to good use in a conversion in Darlington

your roof and the clearances available in your roof spaces.

Older houses typically have higher pitches and are able to meet the 2.1m council clearance requirements necessary for staircase or ladder access, as well as the desired height for a habitable space.

However, unless they have been well maintained, older houses often have roofs that will require repair before they become candidates for conversion.

"When you get houses about 100 years old, it is common sense that you will get a bit of sag (in the roof)," Patrick says. "A lot of people contact us when their slate or terracotta tiles have turned to powder and they need to replace their roof anyway."

As part of its quoting process, he says, his company will have an engineer inspect the space to assess the state of roof joists and what reinforcement they may require.

Those living in top-floor units can also take advantage of attic space, Patrick says, with written permission from their body corporate.

"Top-floor units are coming to the fore now and we are helping clients to get the roof space," he says.

"We have finished one in Bondi Beach where we helped our client get that space.

"We wrote to the body corporate and they created a by-law so he could use it."

Additional cost for the space will vary from body corporate to body corporate.

Keeping council

Although attic conversions often do not require an external change to a house, Patrick says the need for a development application varies from council to council.

For more intrusive work, including external dormer windows or a lifted roof line, a development application will need to be submitted. Most reputable attic-conversion companies will submit this on behalf of their clients.



"The major reason for attic conversions is ... to keep the single-storey appearance intact"

GOOD LADDER LEADS TO EXTRA STORAGE



There's no doubt that everyone has more stuff these days.

Whether it is a mark of greater affluence or more couples marrying later, many of us end up with more than we really need.

Traditionally, the garage has taken up the slack when the house has become too cluttered but, when there's no longer room to park the car, something has to give.

For those with a traditional high-pitched roof, the attic can be an excellent solution.

The Attic Group's marketing manager, Cameron Elkins, says the key to a serviceable attic storage space is good access.

And a strong, easy-to-use ladder makes all the difference.

"People often find they use the ladder more often than they thought they would, so we recommend a heavy-duty ladder for safety and durability so that it will last as long as the house," Cameron says.

"Usually for storage, you will be accessing the attic once a week, carrying things up and down the ladder."

He says that a good ladder should not only be strong but it should also have a deep enough tread to be comfortable.

And it should not have an incline so steep as to make climbing the steps dangerous.

"A lot of the cheaper ladders have a steeper incline because it uses less wood," Cameron says.

He adds that "the height of your ceiling does not change the angle of your ladder".

Ideally, he says, you should look for a load rating of at least 150kg to 400kg to allow for a person carrying goods.

"You get what you pay for," he says. "If you put in a quality ladder, made from quality components, it will do the job well."

He says people often find they have more to store in a well-lit, secure attic than they thought.

"Everyone thinks they have less stuff than they do but having a roof space storage area is a great way to have easy access to all your items and belongings," he says.

» There are provisions for attic conversions under the recently introduced Complying Development changes that allow for a 10-day approval process.

However, Patrick says it can be tricky to meet the requirements, especially for those on small blocks or in heritage areas, which are exempt from the fast-approval process.

Fast and functional

Absolute Attics' sales and construction manager, Wayne Love, says that attic conversions can be attractive for those in need of a quick solution which is easy on the bank balance and the stress levels.

"I have a client with three young children and another on the way and she is looking at this option to get some more space quickly," Wayne says.

"The cost of an upper floor is in excess of \$100,000, compared with \$35,000 for a full attic conversion."

A basic attic storage conversion, with reinforced battening and pull-down ladder, can start at as little as \$4000. A "safe" floor with good lighting and basic structural changes will set you back about \$12,000 to \$13,000, while a fully functional room with good natural light, lined ceilings and floor coverings costs about \$40,000.

Wayne says some people start out installing a basic storage area and then build on it over time.

Step up

Once an attic becomes more than a basic storage space, Wayne says, it needs a fixed staircase rather than a ladder.

"I very rarely put in pull-down ladders because they can be a bit dangerous when they are used a lot," he says.

"Roughly 95 per cent of the time, we put in staircases. It costs a little more but it is better value."

The Attic Group's marketing manager, Cameron Elkins, says that attic storage is a great solution for those looking to clear their house of clutter without getting rid of all their old treasures.

"Attic storage space is more a US or European idea but it is catching on as a safe and clean use of the space and is easily accessible," Cameron says. willisr@daillytelegraph.com.au

MORE INFORMATION

Absolute Attics absoluteattics.com.au

Attic & Roof Conversions atticandroofconversions.com.au

Attic Group atticladders.com.au



A and B This conversion by Absolute Attics has added space without changing the facade greatly **C** An imaginative window and skylight brighten up an extra bedroom



"Attic storage space ... is catching on as a safe and clean use of the space"

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT WITH AN ATTIC ADDITION

When North Bondi residents Jack Tanner and his partner Kay decided they wanted more space, they thought their options were limited.

Their two-bedroom apartment in a 1930s building could not be extended but they didn't want to move.

Given they were on the top floor, they opted to investigate moving into their roof space, just as another neighbour in their block had done.

The result is a new study plus a bedroom with ensuite.

Jack says they were initially tentative about plunging into the building work.

"This was the first time we'd done a renovation of this scale so we were not sure what to expect," he says.

"Lots of people we spoke to (about renovating) had delays and problems with getting the result they wanted."

However, Jack and Kay describe

the process and the finished product as "excellent".

"We used the Attic Group and they handled the entire project, from drawing initial plans and dealing with council over the DA, to organising the tradesmen on site," Kay says.

Council approval was the most drawn out part of the 12-month process, taking about four months, with construction finished in three months.

A fixed staircase was designed to fit into one of the bedrooms below while two dormer windows were built to pull natural light into the roof space.

A common wall between them and their neighbour modified to meet fire and acoustic regulations was the only unexpected cost.

The final cost came in at about \$200,000 and their title will be adjusted to include the new space.

