

**W**hy turn the loft into a spare room or home office with a couple of skylights when it could become a fabulous master bedroom, with a lavish bathroom, a dressing room and a wall of sliding glass offering the best views in the house?

Loft conversions are heading to the next level. Carving out more living space in the attic has long added value to a property over and above the build cost, but the latest trend is to create a top floor devoted to luxurious "me" space, with loft companies and architects shown photos of top-flight hotels around the world by aspirational homeowners. On the list are statement baths, expansive glazing, dressing rooms and even bifold doors. James Gold, director of Landmark Lofts, a London-based firm, has been revamping people's outdated attics as well as designing new ones for the unconverted. "We regularly get called in to refurbish lofts that were completed as recently as 10 years ago," he says. "We see what scope there is to overhaul the design, and replace windows with large folding glass panels that open up the rear of the property."

"As well as great views, this can transform it from the darkest to the lightest room in the house. I'm not surprised many clients reclaim the loft from being a guest room and turn it into a luxury master suite."

Lauren and Philippe Langham decided to go for a "me" master suite when they upgraded a loft that had been converted into a makeshift office by the previous owners of their house. They have created a fabulously light master bedroom with bifolds and a glazed Juliet balcony, a desk space and dressing area behind a half wall, and an ensuite bathroom with a vast walk-in shower. The house in East Finchley, north London, now has five bedrooms instead of four, so they've been able to use one of the rooms below as an Xbox hang-out for their two sons, aged 8 and 11, and their mates.

"The rest of the house gets overrun by the kids and their friends, but this is our space now – we love it," Lauren says. "We read the papers up here on a Sunday morning, and Phil can use the desk undisturbed if he needs to work. The views are great. You can't see any roads, just green trees and gardens."

The work was done by Abbey Lofts under permitted development – so they didn't need to involve the planners. It cost about £60,000, but Lauren has no doubt that's easily been added to the value of the house. "Some of our friends decided to do the same thing after seeing ours."

Rising house prices, the expense of moving and the comparatively low cost of even the swankiest loft conversion (from about £40,000), mean it could well be worth investing in a luxurious top floor. The higher the spec, the more it will cost, but the more value it could add to the house – and if yours is a contemporary style statement when all the others on the street are standard skylight versions, then



Jim Simpson, Francesco Suddick, Im Mitchell

**View from the top** Lauren and Philippe Langham transformed their loft, above, into a light, airy space with bifold doors and a glazed Juliet balcony

your home should attract more buyers. There also comes a point when parents are sorely tempted by the idea of indulging a floor to themselves, with an indulgent bathroom, away from the kids.

If your house has a standard gabled roof, the way to get maximum internal space in the loft and have those sliding glass windows is to extend the roof with a well-designed box dormer at the back. (This wouldn't be allowed at the front.) Unless you're in a conservation area, permitted development rights – what you can do without planning permission – allow a generous 50 cubic metres of extra roof space for semis

and detached houses or 40 cubic metres for terraced homes.

With a gabled roof, a box dormer can extend the full width of the house at the back, giving you plenty of vertical space for floor-to-ceiling windows. And you don't need planning consent for the glazing if the extension comes under permitted development.

"People didn't use loft conversions as master bedrooms when inferior insulation made them cold in the winter and too hot in the summer," says Hugo Tugman, co-founder of Architect Your Home. "Now we find the most frequent use is as a new master bedroom."

Upgrading an old or bad loft conversion gives you the chance to bring the insulation up to current building regs and to install thermally efficient glazing that keeps the warmth in during winter, but prevents overheating in warmer weather. The result is a low-energy second floor and a warmer house overall.

"Where the loft height is restricted, we suggest lowering the ceiling in the room below by 20cm–30cm to give the loft the height it needs," Tugman says. "People are aghast, convinced that it would be too much work and expense. But with an unconverted loft, you have to put in a new floor structure anyway, so lowering the ceiling isn't that much more work. And it has the desired effect."

A sub-trend when there's not much height in a loft is to take most of the ceiling out of the bedroom below and create a mezzanine floor in the loft for a luxurious bathroom and dressing room, perhaps reached by a spiral staircase. "A lot of ideas have been generated by places like Babington House, in Somerset, where they put mezzanines in the attic space," Tugman says. "It gives the main bedroom the great luxury of height."

If you've got the right type of house, you can max out the top floor by adding a "pod" – the buzzword du jour in the loft world. A classic Victorian or Edwardian terrace or semi often has a section sticking out at the back with a flat roof, known as an outrigger. On top of this, you can add a pod to create an extra room, usually about 3 metres x 3.5 metres in size, prices start at about £27,500.

# Height of fashion

Never mind a dingy office – the latest loft conversions are seriously luxe. If yours isn't up to scratch, you can have the whole space revamped. **By Cherry Maslen**

## Lofty ambitions

■ Under permitted development rights, you can extend the roof to allow 50 cubic metres of extra loft space for semis and detached houses, or 40 cubic metres for terraced homes, though not at the front of the property. This does not apply if you live in a conservation area.

■ Building regulations need to be followed if you want to convert a loft into livable space. They cover the strength of the floor, fire safety and insulation.

■ You need a minimum 190cm height above the staircase.

■ A fire door is essential, but this can be at the bottom of the stairs, creating a greater feeling of space in the loft room.

■ Safety glazing, which is less likely to break, is needed for any window less than 80cm from floor level, and for any glazed doors up to 150cm from floor level.

■ If you're putting in bifolds or sliding glass doors, you have to have a Juliet balcony for safety (understandably).

■ For more information, check out [planningportal.gov.uk](http://planningportal.gov.uk)

Lofts can be turned into light master bedrooms, far right, or roof terraces such as the one converted by Simply Loft, right



Marianne Atherton and David Aitman's bedroom, far left, was developed by Knox Bhavan Architects. Left, a modern attic bathroom by Architect Your Home

The pod can be linked to a loft conversion, put in when you're doing the work (which will be more cost-effective) or added to an existing loft.

"We're getting a lot of requests for pods," says Robert Wood, founder of the specialist firm Simply Loft. "For those who've extended the ground floor and the loft, it might seem as if there's nowhere left to go, so this is a bonus. People use them to add a bedroom, a baby's room, a study with a sofa bed or sometimes a bathroom."

Marianne Atherton and David Aitman got fed up with the gloomy top floor in their Victorian house in south London. "We'd consigned it to use as a spare bedroom, because none of the family could face spending time up there," Aitman says. "You had to lower your head to walk round in some places." So, once their children had left home, they decided to rethink the house.

They talked to Simon Knox, of Knox Bhavan Architects, about what could be done with the loft, as well as opening up the ground-floor rooms. His plans involved raising the ceiling height and remodelling to make maximum use of the space. Floor-to-ceiling glazing was put in along the full width of the bedroom on the south side, flooding the room with warmth and light, and beautifully crafted his n'ers bathrooms were added, one with a shower, the other with a bath.

"There was a metre and a half of roof space at the back of the house that hadn't been used, so we were able to increase the floor space," Knox says. The bedroom is lined with ash veneered panelling concealing wardrobe space behind. A horseshoe staircase to the master suite opens up the landing below and is lit by a large coloured glass window.

"The top floor has been transformed," Aitman says. "The enormous sliding glass doors give us views. The bathrooms were the final touch that enticed us up there."