

Second-floor additions for a ranch house

During the 1940s and '50s, countless ranch houses were built throughout the country. Efficient and inexpensive to build, these houses generally were designed to accommodate folks looking to settle in the suburbs as quickly and as inexpensively as possible. The resulting single-story ranch-style homes had small kitchens, small bathrooms (often only one), and small bedrooms. Built before the television era, they had no family rooms or large gathering spaces. While these houses were perfect starter homes for many, they were

left wanting as families grew and lifestyles changed. The small and modest ranch just didn't work after the kitchen had become the primary gathering and entertaining room and now that couples wanted their master bedroom to become a retreat.

The good news is that ranches are adaptable and expandable. Over the years, many of them have been remodeled to accommodate the needs of a new generation. Basements have been finished, and first-floor additions have been used to create larger kitchens and great rooms as well

as first-floor master suites. Where the property is too small to allow for a first-floor expansion or where the homeowners just don't want to reduce their yard space, a ranch can be expanded upward with a new second floor.

While designing a first-floor addition that looks like it has always been there is often straightforward, designing a second-floor addition can present a host of design hurdles. This is especially true if the existing house will continue to be occupied while the new second floor is being built. Because



READY FOR A REMODEL

Most 1950s-era ranches were about 40 ft. long and 30 ft. wide. These houses typically had 8-ft.-high ceilings and a simple gable roof. A common exterior finish was brick, especially in the upper Midwest and the Mid-Atlantic states. In some areas, these houses had full basements, many of which were finished into recreation rooms that provided casual gathering areas that the houses lacked. To expand such houses, first-floor additions are possible. But for many of them, the only way to add space is to go up.



THE POTENTIAL FOR BLAND

Any time you make a house taller, it's important to consider how the additional height will affect the proportions of the exterior elevations. A ranch remodeled with a new flooring system built over the existing ceiling structure takes on the height of the new second floor and then some. Without a good design, the exterior can easily become disproportionate, bland, and unappealing.

A PORCH ADDS INTEREST AND OUTDOOR SPACE

One way to avoid a bland exterior is to disguise the extra height created by the second-floor addition with a front porch. The roof of the porch can be designed to fill the space between the top of the first-floor windows and the sill of the second-floor windows. The addition of a porch also creates a place to transition siding types and possibly allow flexibility in window size and location. With an existing brick base, there isn't much likelihood of finding new brick that matches, so using a different siding material on the addition makes sense. In effect, the new porch gives order and rhythm to the overall exterior while also creating a nice outdoor space and a lot of curb appeal. Here, shutters and muntins are used to bring additional visual interest to the tall elevation.



A SIMPLE BAND OF TRIM BALANCES A TALL EXTERIOR



Another good option is to acknowledge the extra height of the exterior by turning it into an asset. This can be done by breaking the exterior design into two masses that are biased to create a taller base. A simple band of trim at the second-floor windowsills does the trick. Here, the entire exterior is re-sided with stucco, but this approach also can be done by switching siding types. The new roof has deep and extensive overhangs at the eaves and rakes to counterbalance the emphasis on height with a strong horizontal element. Lastly, adding a small front-entry porch is a useful design idea that makes sure that the front door doesn't get lost under all of the extra height and the big roof.

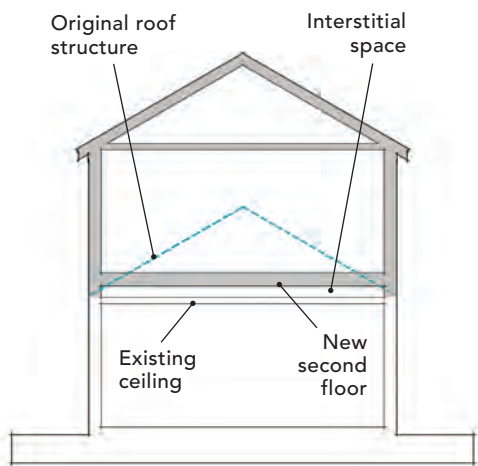
A FITTING STYLE THAT'S A BIT MORE MODERN

While the first two solutions take the overall design of the expanded ranch to a decidedly traditional aesthetic, here is an idea that brings the ranch house in a different direction. In a take on the prairie style, the new second floor is designed to stress the horizontal nature common to ranches. Just above the first-floor windows, the second-floor walls overhang the original footprint to create a shadow line that lightens the look of the tall addition and deemphasizes the extra height of the new house. To break up the field of stucco siding, a band of trim is used at the second-floor windowsills. Another band of trim is used to transition between the two siding types. A hip roof with deep overhangs is quintessential prairie style and grounds the design. Here, the windows on the first floor have also been replaced.



the existing ceiling joists are usually too small to be used as floor joists for the addition above, either they need to be removed or a new floor system needs to be installed above them. Moreover, ripping off the entire roof and ceiling system just can't be done without exposing the family and their belongings to weather, water, discomfort, and annoyance.

The result is that many second-floor additions are built above the existing ceiling structure, creating a larger interstitial space between the first and second floors. This space makes it simple for mechanical contractors to run wiring and piping headed to the addition. But this foot or more added to the overall height of the house can be



New floor over old ceiling

The floor framing for the new second story is often added above the existing ceiling joists, leaving the finished ceiling in place and creating a natural chase for running mechanicals. This means, however, that the designer must figure out how to proportionately detail the extratall exterior.

tricky for designers. While not evident on the inside, the extra height at the exterior can mean that there will be larger fields of siding, making for a bland elevation and awkward proportions.

Fortunately, there are design solutions for adding a second floor to a ranch without resulting in an awkward and less than appealing exterior. Most of them have to do with breaking up the exterior with architectural elements.

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