



# Neighbourly extension

After a chat over the garden fence, two women decided to team up to expand their homes and saved a fortune

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One design, two extensions and a reduced bill. Elizabeth sits in her half of the project, which is so exciting it won an award in New London Architecture's Don't Move, Improve! competition

Elizabeth used her space to create three areas – a dining room, galley kitchen and snug



Elizabeth needed more space for her growing children

Everybody needs good neighbours, so the TV theme tune goes, and Leslie Hoover, 58, and Elizabeth Biggart, 51, have discovered that getting on can even reap financial rewards.

The two women live next door to each other in Hammersmith, west London, and while chatting in their back gardens one summer evening, bemoaning the state of the 1970s conservatories clinging to the rear of their homes, Leslie had a light bulb moment. Why not knock them down and build extensions, using the same architect?

Elizabeth, who works as a clinical nurse manager, immediately saw the sense of sharing the costs and stresses. Like Leslie, she loved the area but, with two growing children, she was finding their three-bedroom Victorian terraced home increasingly cramped. She discussed the idea with her husband, James, 47, a banker, who wasn't sure at first but eventually agreed, and so they all decided together to extend into



The snug runs alongside the galley kitchen and is a perfect hideaway for her children, Hamish and Iona

their gardens, getting rid of the old conservatories in the process. Leslie, who's single and works as a nurse in general practice, suggested using architect Matt Keeler, founder of locally based company KSKa. She had admired his work since a visit to

a house during the Open House London weekend, where the public can visit architecturally interesting properties, so they commissioned him to design and oversee the project. They also agreed to use just one builder, bought many identical

furnishings, split tile and paint samples, used the same storage space to house furniture during the build and hired the same removal men to transport it. This meant they were able to secure heavy discounts for placing twice the amount of business. Although

Leslie went for a single room and an open-plan layout



Leslie wanted lots of room to entertain

their homes are identical, they each wanted different things from their similarly sized extensions. Leslie's measures 38 square metres and the Biggarts' space is 35 square metres.

'They have different lifestyles, so had very different briefs,' says architect Matt, adding that, individually, each project would have been too small for him to consider, but doing both made it worthwhile. 'Leslie is an extrovert who loves to entertain, while Elizabeth and James have a young, spirited family, with two children and a menagerie of pets.'

The extensions were commissioned in 2007 and completed in March 2009. Comprising glass and wood, they exude Nordic chic and inside, both spaces are modern, light and design conscious without being sterile.

Leslie, who loves having friends round and hosting parties, has a living area with

no internal walls. It was designed to accommodate lots of people in one place, and feels very spacious as a result.

The Biggarts, on the other hand, have created three separate areas in the same space: a galley kitchen with marble worktops and double-height glass roof; a dining area overlooking the garden; and a snug, which has been decorated in green. Running parallel to the kitchen, the snug has a custom-made sofa desk and soundproofed walls that cocoon the children – Iona, 12, and Hamish, nine – from the rest of the house. It's a space that has to work hard, but manages not to feel cramped.

So, after two years of working together – including the time it took to get planning permission, which, fortunately, presented no problems – are they still chatting amiably over the garden fence? 'Bizarrely, there weren't any issues,' says Elizabeth. She puts this down to good communication, their ability

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Leslie's one room is big enough to accommodate a host of friends and family – and Iona from next door!

Elizabeth's galley kitchen leads into the dining area



Elizabeth's elegant kitchen makes great use of the space

to listen, be considerate and have mutual respect.

'We're bossy nurses and we know what we want,' adds Leslie. 'At the same time, we all want to stay where we are, so we're not going to fall out with each other. In fact, we propped each other up emotionally throughout.'

They certainly seem to have been the most considerate of neighbours. Leslie, for example, allowed the workmen to use her house as the site entrance for both homes, leaving the Biggarts' house relatively undisturbed. As a thank you, the Biggarts paid for the new adjoining wall separating their gardens and arranged for a tree that was getting too big to be removed from Leslie's garden.

'I really appreciated Leslie's generosity,' says Elizabeth, 'and when someone is generous,

you want to reciprocate if you can.' Money could have been a sticking point, although the neighbours say it was never a problem, and the two households were billed separately.

Leslie did go over her £50,000 budget, though. Her total costs, including moving the kitchen to another part of the house, ended up at about £70,000. The Biggarts spent £100,000, including a build cost of £50,000, furniture, computers and the multicoloured chandelier in the kitchen.

Leslie estimates that the collaboration has saved them at least £10,000 each, while Matt puts the total saving far higher, at as much as 25 per cent. This includes a saving of £1000 each on two identical sets of bi-folding doors – which link the extensions to the gardens – as well as the same slate-effect porcelain tiles, bought for £4 a square foot rather than the

Leslie went over her budget by £20,000 but still saved at least £10,000



**'There weren't any issues. We all want to stay where we are, so we're not going to fall out. In fact, we propped each other up emotionally throughout,' says Elizabeth**

£6.50 it would have cost had they been buying solo.

The Biggarts also saved money when Leslie allowed the builders to use her home as a base: this kept disruption in their household to a minimum and allowed the family to stay put instead of having to move into rented accommodation.

'I knew we wouldn't fall out, because I'm used to how people work under stress,' says Elizabeth. 'I knew Leslie wouldn't suddenly turn awkward, and she's remained true to her character.'

Not everyone was convinced the partnership was a good idea. Elizabeth's husband, James,

certainly had his reservations. 'He was circumspect because he is very sensible,' says Elizabeth. 'But he was very glad to be proved wrong.' In fact, it's all been such a success that Leslie and Elizabeth have now embarked on another neighbourly project together: adopting a pair of cats from a local rescue home.

● **For information on KSKa architects, visit [kska.co.uk](http://kska.co.uk)**  
 ● **See how more neighbours are working together on What the Neighbours Did, on Home, weeknights at 10pm from 18 July. For a full interview with presenter Amanda Lamb, visit [housebeautiful.co.uk](http://housebeautiful.co.uk)**

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## More ideas for teaming up

Save money by working with the neighbours – but first think about the potential pros and cons



**CONSTRUCTING A CONSERVATORY** Decide on the size and shape together and your gardens won't be overlooked. Mark Hanson, marketing manager at conservatory systems manufacturer Ultraframe, also believes, 'You're looking at 10 to 15 per cent potential savings on a starting budget of £10,000 for a fully fitted conservatory. One of the major savings would be on building a shared party wall, which would also allow you to install additional thermal and noise insulation.'



**RENDERING THE EXTERIOR** 'If you double up, there would be a typical saving of around 30 per cent on the cost of £800 for painting the window frames and rendering the outside of a single average three-bed semi,' says Neil Ogilvie, vice president of the Painting and Decorating Association.



**LANDSCAPING YOUR GARDEN** 'Two neighbours deciding to have their gardens landscaped at the same time could try for a 10 to 15 per cent discount, based on shared labour,' says Tim Briercliffe, director of business development at The Association of Professional Landscapers.



**LAYING A DECK** Creating a pair of timber decks would make an ideal DIY project for neighbours to share, says Steve Young, director of the Timber Decking Association. But remember to check whether planning permission is required as new legislation is in force – see [tda.org.uk](http://tda.org.uk) for information. 'You could save up to 50 per cent on the cost of tool hire,' he explains. 'You could also split the cost of materials delivery and may be able to negotiate bulk buy discounts.'



**ADDING A PORCH** Sharing this job with your neighbour could save as much as 25 per cent, says House Beautiful's building expert Gary Webb. 'Small jobs like this can be uneconomical with all the different trades involved, but if two porches are being done together, the tradesmen can do both at once to save labour costs.'



**CONVERTING YOUR LOFT** 'A joint loft conversion will result in easier maintenance later on,' says Gary Webb. 'New roof tiles, gutters, fascias and lead work across both roofs will make for a neater, more watertight finish.' The biggest saving is likely to be made on shared scaffolding hire of between 10 and 15 per cent.



**BUILDING A DRIVEWAY** Between 10 and 20 per cent was knocked off the price when John McGinlay of Paramount Paving installed a driveway for neighbours in a pair of semi-detached bungalows in Gravesend, Kent, at a cost of £14,000. 'You save on labour doing one large space all at the same time,' he says. **FB**

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