

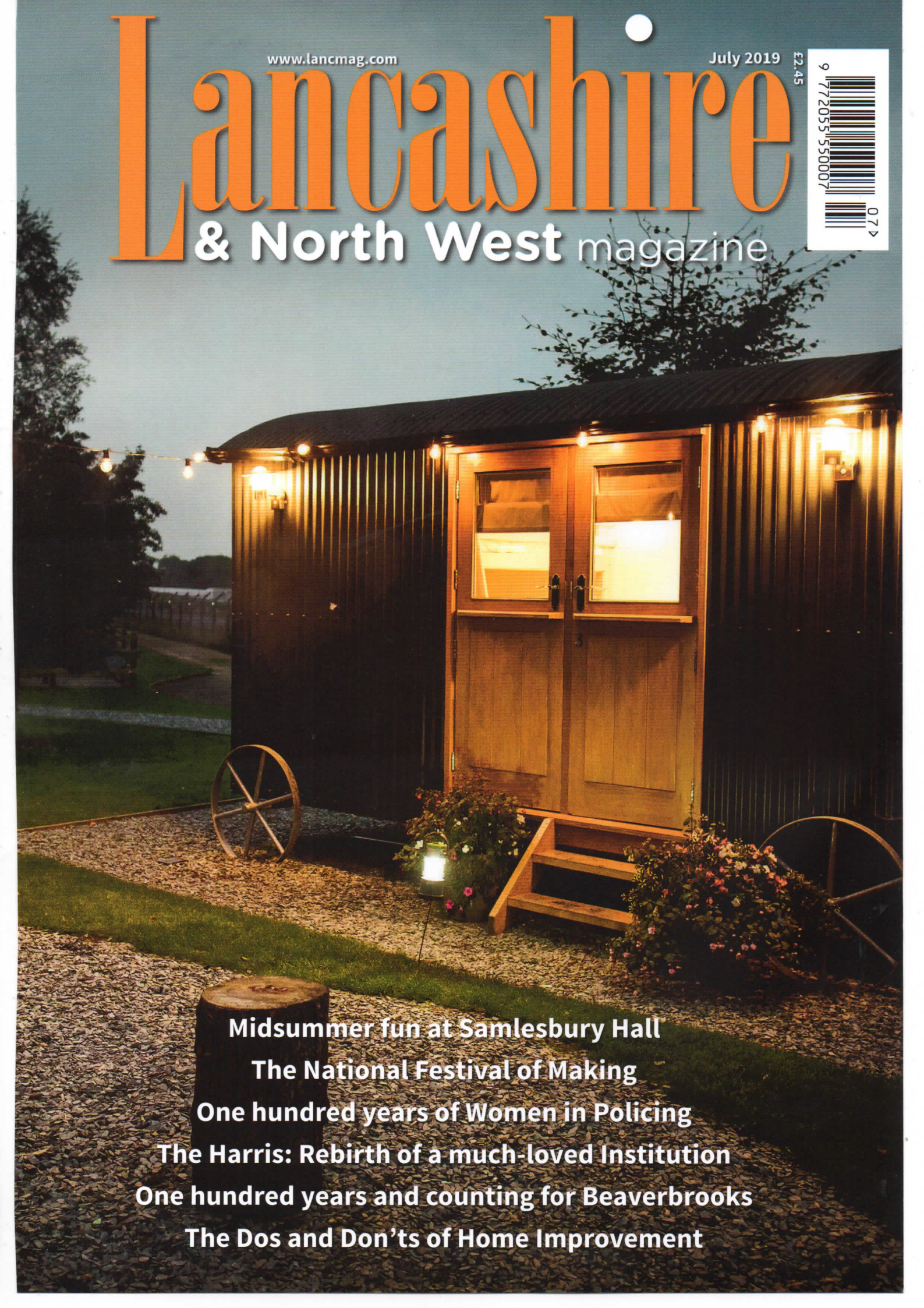
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The Dos and Don'ts of Home Improvement



The Dos and Don'ts of Home Improvement

by Andrew Harris



TOP: A major project can hugely enlarge and improve a bungalow. A dormer conversion and new roof by Trussty Loft Conversions at 07809 467644. ABOVE: Prepare for disruption but it can be worth it.

Home improvement takes many forms – ranging from large projects to enlarge a house or structural changes to revise the layout to lesser projects such as a new kitchen or bathroom, heating or air conditioning, roof or solar panels, new or existing driveway, facilities to help the disabled, new windows or redecorating.

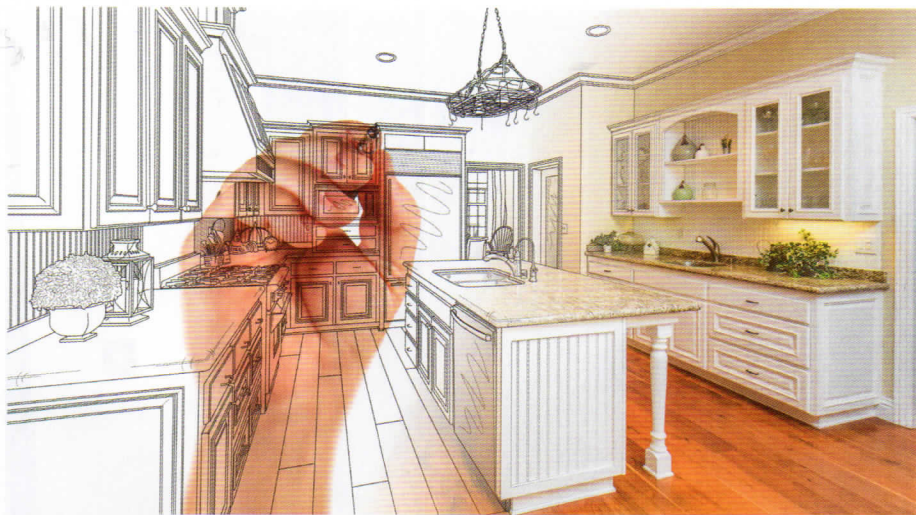
The experience can be exciting and worthwhile but bewildering, financially threatening and frightening all at the same time. It demands arrangements which match the needs of the project – whether large or small – and protect the homeowner. A large project with no clear brief or control is a recipe for disaster and many – usually involving rogue traders - are reported on consumer programmes. Homeowners need professional help as they may need planning approval although ‘permitted development rights’ may apply but these rights come with rules and limitations with which the project must comply. Such projects also need consent under

the building regulations whilst the building contractor needs a clear brief to give a quote or even an estimate of cost. Being committed to a single contractor after no competition, with no brief and no agreed price is the greatest recipe for disaster – and to be avoided at all costs.

A crucial point is that Registered Architects and Chartered Building Surveyors are required to have Professional Indemnity Insurance which enables their clients to sue for damages if the architect or surveyor is proven to be the cause of their loss. To find a suitable surveyor or architect visit www.rics.org/uk or www.architecture.com. The fee for such a professional adviser is a fraction of the cost of works. Not having one could be a false economy.

Smaller projects are less worrying but can also go wrong. It is impossible to explore every possible scenario but if homeowners adopt the following twelve Dos and Don'ts they are much less likely to be disappointed, frustrated, defrauded or waste their money.

DO specify what you want.



ABOVE: The top priority is to define what you want by one or more of a brief, specification, contract and drawing. BELOW: Whatever your project make sure that the structure is safeguarded.

Otherwise builders and tradespeople will decide for you and charge accordingly. Most builders and tradespeople are honest, competent and hard working but some will exploit the situation. A simple written brief can be adequate.

DO retain an architect or building

surveyor if you want to extend your property horizontally or into the roof space or build externally. You have defined 'permitted development rights' to do this but you must comply with them and building regulations which include rules about fire safety and escape.





ABOVE: Limited improvements can transform a bedroom. A fitted wardrobe by Rossall Joinery Services at 07949 358611. BELOW: The next three pictures are examples of attractive home improvements. A living room, dining space and kitchen courtesy of David Smith of Fletcher Smith, Architects based in Preston.

DO ask at least 3 builders or tradespeople for quotes or estimates unless the work is very specialised – which is unlikely - or you know and really trust one party. When your columnist was helping an elderly

neighbour, the cost of rebedding ridge tiles was nearly halved when other roofers were invited to bid.

DO prefer builders or tradespeople registered with organisations which

check and monitor their performance. Examples are Trustatrader, Rated People, My Builder and Checktrade. Local not-for-profit Home Improvement Agencies – aka Care & Repair organisations - include this service as they commend craftsmen or use them when helping older, disabled or vulnerable people. You can find your local HIA by visiting www.findmyhia.org.uk or calling 0300 124 0315.

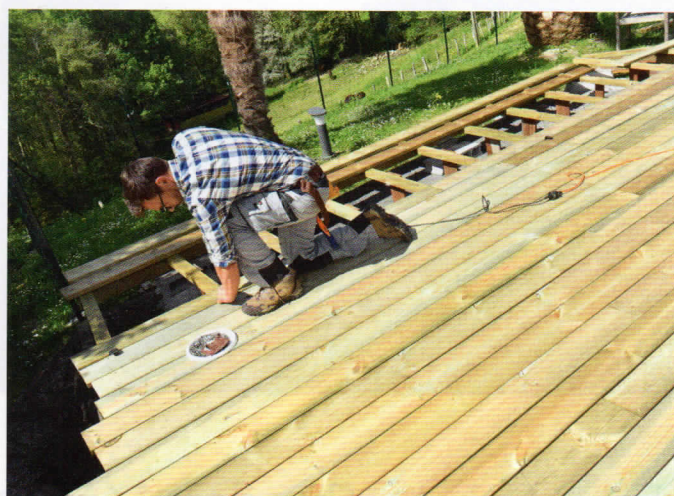
DO use – for small jobs - builders or tradespeople whose annual turnover is less than £85K and are not registered for VAT. This will save you 20% of the cost of labour although VAT on the cost of materials will be passed on.

DO ask any builder or tradesperson what other similar work they have done – preferably locally. You, a relative or friend can easily discover if such work was done properly and if the client was satisfied.

DO maintain a photographic record before, during and after the project.

DON'T ever pay the full cost of the work at the outset. No reputable builder or tradesperson will require this although it is reasonable for them to ask you to fund the cost of materials and/or pay a limited deposit. In such cases you should know where they work from in case they default.





DON'T ever believe a builder or tradesperson who cold calls and tells you that your roof, windows, drive or other part of your property desperately needs improvement, repair or maintenance. If in doubt consult a surveyor or architect or contact your local Care & Repair organisation for free advice. Any fee will be a fraction of what you could otherwise lose.

DON'T fall for the sales pitch 'We are working in your area and can give you a special price if you decide to proceed straight away.' They can be 'here today and gone tomorrow' and

the timing should suit you not them.

DON'T forget to obtain any consent you may need from the freehold owner of your site even though you have the long leasehold interest. Also check that your land title does not contain a restrictive covenant which precludes the change/s you plan.

DON'T be afraid to ask a builder or tradesperson what they are doing and seek advice if you are not satisfied. No honest contractor will mind and it will be a warning to a dishonest one.

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