

Remodeling Rural Homes

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BUILDING a new home is a little bit like buying a new car. At the outset, at least, there are no wornout or broken parts to replace. Everything looks shiny and fresh. But maybe the second-hand car was still the best buy, or the old rural home was still the best investment.

Remodeling or rebuilding an existing rural home can be a real challenge. It often takes exceptional foresight and imagination. The basic reason for going ahead with a remodeling job is to add to the "livability" of the home, to make it a safe, more comfortable, more enjoyable, and more modern place to live in.

If modernizing can be done at reasonable cost, a strong case for major remodeling can be made. Experts say that if the cost of remodeling is more than half to two-thirds of the cost of building a new home, remodeling might not be wise.

In the United States, substandard housing is a serious problem. Only about a third of our population now live in rural areas but half of our substandard housing is located there. Many rural families cannot afford to build a new home to correct their housing problems. Remodeling or repairing the old house is often their only solution.

There are many aspects to remodeling, ranging all the way from a simple paint job to adding rooms, stairways, hallways, or a garage. But whether they involve major or only minor structural changes or just a general face lifting, they all help to enhance America's rural landscape by contributing toward the gradual elimi-

nation of our substandard housing problem. It is important that the remodeled house retain the dignity of good architecture.

Should I go ahead with the remodeling job? This is an early question which must be answered. Every situation is different but there are some basic points which seem to have general application.

Location of the structure to be remodeled should be considered first and foremost. A location too close to a public road, for example, can be a definite disadvantage. A setback of at least 40 feet has been recommended. Good drainage away from the building is a requirement. Winds blowing in a direction to make livestock odors a nuisance are an undesirable factor.

Maybe some of these location elements can be solved without moving the house. If the house has to be moved, investment in remodeling is seldom justified.

If the location is acceptable, then the next important point to consider is the soundness of the structure to be remodeled. This can be a difficult decision. There may be deteriorated parts that are not noticeable. Most important is the condition of the foundation and the framing. If these are sound, it probably pays to go ahead.

A cracked foundation or one that is badly eroded or out of square could be a bad risk and major remodeling may not be justified. If the rest of the structure is in good shape, however, moving the building might be a possibility. Relocation is practical only when the basic structure is sound.

Framing defects such as a lopsided, sagging roof, walls that are out of line, shaking floors, or a bad infestation of termites should discourage a

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remodeling project. However, if the building has remodeling possibilities, a specialist ought to be called in to make the final decision.

Of course the general layout of the living space, besides location and structure, is of vital importance. Many rural homes, particularly old farm houses, have plenty of space but should be reorganized and updated. Ten-foot ceilings often need to be dropped to eight. Many rooms are large enough to provide adequate built-in space for storage and clothes closets, perhaps a bath, or even a modern kitchen.

Now take a step back and visualize how the remodeled home will look compared with a new one. Will it serve the family's needs 10, 20, or even 30 years from now? If the decision is still "go", the time has arrived to consider plans, specifications, and cost estimates.

A detailed plan will help to assemble all the remodeling and repairing ideas in one place. It is less expensive to erase lines on a plan than to tear out partitions after construction has started. Your own thoughts plus suggestions from others will provide a picture of the whole job. It will help to establish priorities and will assist in determining the cost. The planning steps should involve the following:

First of all—make a complete list of all exterior and interior alterations to be considered. Included will be all major and minor structural changes plus all nonstructural changes.

Major structural remodeling could include such things as changing the front or rear entrance, repairing part of the foundation, removing supporting walls, adding a fireplace, dividing or combining rooms, modernizing a kitchen, or adding a bath.

Minor structural changes might involve adding or changing windows, adding storage space, supporting a sagging door frame, finishing off an unimproved room, or leveling a floor.

Nonstructural changes could include finishing or refinishing floors, walls, or doors; improving storage; modernizing or changing or adding a

heating system, air conditioning, electric wiring, lighting, plumbing, sewage disposal, and water supply.

After examining the prepared list carefully and if remodeling still appears the most feasible and practical thing to do, then you should have some rough sketches or preliminary plans drawn up.

Decide what outside help is needed. It is important to obtain the services of the right man. He should be experienced in remodeling.

Read all the reference material available from businessmen and lumber dealers, libraries and magazines. Discuss your problems and plans with the County Extension Service, the home economist, the Farmers Home Administration county and home supervisors, and the FHA engineers.

Talk about your water and sewer systems with your local sanitary officer. Obtain the latest information on local building codes or regulatory legislation. Secure all necessary permits in advance.

Decide now if the planned improvements are actually worth all the additional investment and if they will add sufficiently to the house's resale value. Ask this question of some qualified person such as a realtor or assessor, or some other disinterested, qualified person.

Next, check on the availability of credit. Determine the terms available such as interest rates and amortization periods.

You are now ready to have an experienced person prepare a set of specifications and a working plan.

After the detailed plan has been completed, get several cost estimates. If work is to be contracted, bids should be obtained.

Before making the final decision to go ahead, review the list, the detailed plans, and the cost estimates or bids. Is this what you and your family want? Will the remodeled home provide safe, comfortable living quarters in future years?

Finally, are the cost estimates reasonable? If so, you're ready to roll.

According to one farm family from southeastern Wisconsin, remodeling their old farm home was a lot of fun but mixed in were hours of hard work. It was back in 1963 that the 10-member family, consisting of both parents and eight children, decided to go ahead with major remodeling.

Before spending large sums, this family figured long and hard deciding if the old house was worth it. A careful check was made of the foundation, the basic framing, the chimney—all seemed to have stood the test of time. In addition, the house was located on well drained soil with good air circulation and good accessibility.

Equipped with a list of things they wanted done, plus some rough sketches, the family contacted several local lumber yards and builders. The modernizing would cost about \$10,000, plus lots of family labor.

Final plans drawn up by one of the local building suppliers considered the following major remodeling items:

A new entrance and door plus a concrete floor in the basement.

A new hot air oil furnace to provide automatic and even heat throughout the house.

Installing a complete bath in the room originally used as a pantry.

Removing the wall between the old kitchen and the small living room or parlor to create a larger combination kitchen and dining room.

Providing a new septic system complete with seepage bed.

Installing 18 feet of new kitchen cupboards including necessary storage and work space.

Removing old and installing new insulated siding for the entire house. Also replacing the old roof with new fireproof shingles and insulating the attic.

Removing the entire open porch on the south and east sides, and insulating the exterior walls.

Replacing all rotted window sashes and frames with new modern windows.

Installing new outside doors and frames. Leveling floors and putting down new underlay where necessary.

Constructing a new family or TV room utilizing the old open porch space on the south side.

Besides the major work just listed, countless other jobs were performed either by members of the family or hired workers. This was truly a major remodeling and renovating. Every room from basement to attic was affected in either a major or minor way. But from an architectural standpoint, the appearance of the 65-year-old home was not materially changed.

The old, open porch is gone. In its place are neat, small steps and a porch leading to the front door. Light, which heretofore was blocked by the overhanging porch, can now pass unobstructed into living areas of the home. This helps provide a pleasant space where family life can thrive.

The remodeling and general renovating of this rural home adds to the beauty of the American rural landscape. The large, spacious, well-kept yard with its majestic trees provides an excellent background for the recently dressed-up rural home.

Industrialized Housing May Hold the Key

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WHEN INDUSTRY made the change to mass production, housing was left far, far behind. Nearly everything you buy today has come off a precisely engineered production line, but probably not the house you live in. It was put together stick by stick or brick by brick, in a process that was at the mercy of the weather and the outmoded handicraft