

# Good Homes Interior-design course

## PART 17: CREATING YOUR IDEAL CONSERVATORY



'Adding this feature to your home will provide extra living space, allow you to enjoy your garden all year long and let in natural light. Shop around to find the right style – traditional conservatories are still very popular, but if you want something different, consider investing in a bespoke option. Plan your layout and research the market to find the perfect design for your needs.'

*Deborah Drew*



Deborah Drew (above), presenter of BBC TV's *DIY SOS*



Make sure the design suits your home's style. Bespoke conservatory, from £25,000, Glass Houses



Compact options are available if you have a small garden. Lean-to conservatory, from £25,000, David Salisbury



Pale blinds will allow light to filter gently into your room. Acacia Aqua roller blind, from £31 for W61 x D76cm, Hillarys

## ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES

★ **If your conservatory will face south, good shading and ventilation are important to prevent it from overheating in the summer. North-facing conservatories will need additional heating in winter.**

★ **Make sure you tell your conservatory designer about any potential obstructions on the site, such as**

drainpipes, manhole covers, trees or sloping lawns. With early planning, these can easily be overcome.

★ **Plan your furniture layout to scale on graph paper, to help you decide what sizes will suit your needs. Include radiators, shelves and integrated storage, as well as tables, chairs and sofas.**

★ **If you're going to include mature plants in large pots, plan where they will be positioned. You'll also need to remember to allocate a wall or trellis for any climbing plants.**

★ **Research any company before you commission it to install your conservatory. Ask for references and look at its previous jobs.**

### Plan your layout

Think about how the room will be used. Do you see it as an extension to a key room like your kitchen, or as an extra space for occasional entertaining? You will also need to decide on a budget – this should be determined by the amount of time you'll be spending in the room and an assessment of the potential return on your investment should you sell your home in the next few years.

As with any extension, ensure the design blends with the architectural style of your home and is of an appropriate scale. For example, if your garden becomes too small in proportion to the house, this could have a detrimental effect on your home's value.

### Check regulations

Always contact your local authority's planning office to determine whether permission will be required. Regulations vary between counties and if your house is listed, your local council will want to check that your plans won't alter its character as a building of special architectural or historical interest. Building regulations also need to be adhered to – these include ensuring the conservatory is properly ventilated and meets new environmental standards, like providing minimum insulation requirements to limit energy wastage. Most conservatory companies will deal with the red tape for you and ensure that the design fits within the terms and conditions of regulations and consent.

### Choose a design

Some suppliers offer pre-designed conservatories that are made to fit the plot you want to build on, which is usually the cheapest option. However, if you have an awkward-shaped space and are looking for a more unusual design or want to create an extension for an existing room, a bespoke-design service may be a better option. For an elegant addition to older properties, try a gable-fronted conservatory – these are generally rectangular, ➔

Tiles are a practical flooring choice. Byzantine Bronze (top), £59.95 per sq m. Ancient Ligurian, £89.95 per sq m. Original Style



◀ **Fit a ceiling fan with built-in lights.**  
Argos ceiling fan, £54.99

with a pitched roof to provide extra height. Classic Victorian designs have angled roofs and multi-faceted fronts, which often create a curved appearance that complements both Victorian and modern homes.

## UPVC or hardwood?

The material your conservatory is made from will depend on your budget and planning restrictions. Options range from easy-to-maintain UPVC to authentic but pricier hardwood, which will need to be weather protected and well maintained to keep it looking its best. The material that's right for your property will depend on your budget, the amount of maintenance you are prepared for and, in some cases, planning regulations. For instance, if you have a listed building, you're required to make alterations in keeping with the existing structure, so your choice may be limited to painted or stained hardwood.

## Remember ventilation

An adequate air flow is essential, so make sure you have a sufficient number of opening windows and doors that can be hooked back to allow a breeze to blow through in the summer months. You could also have air conditioning or a ventilator built into the roof, or a fan fitted to the ceiling – a particularly good idea to disperse fumes in a conservatory kitchen.

## Have blinds fitted

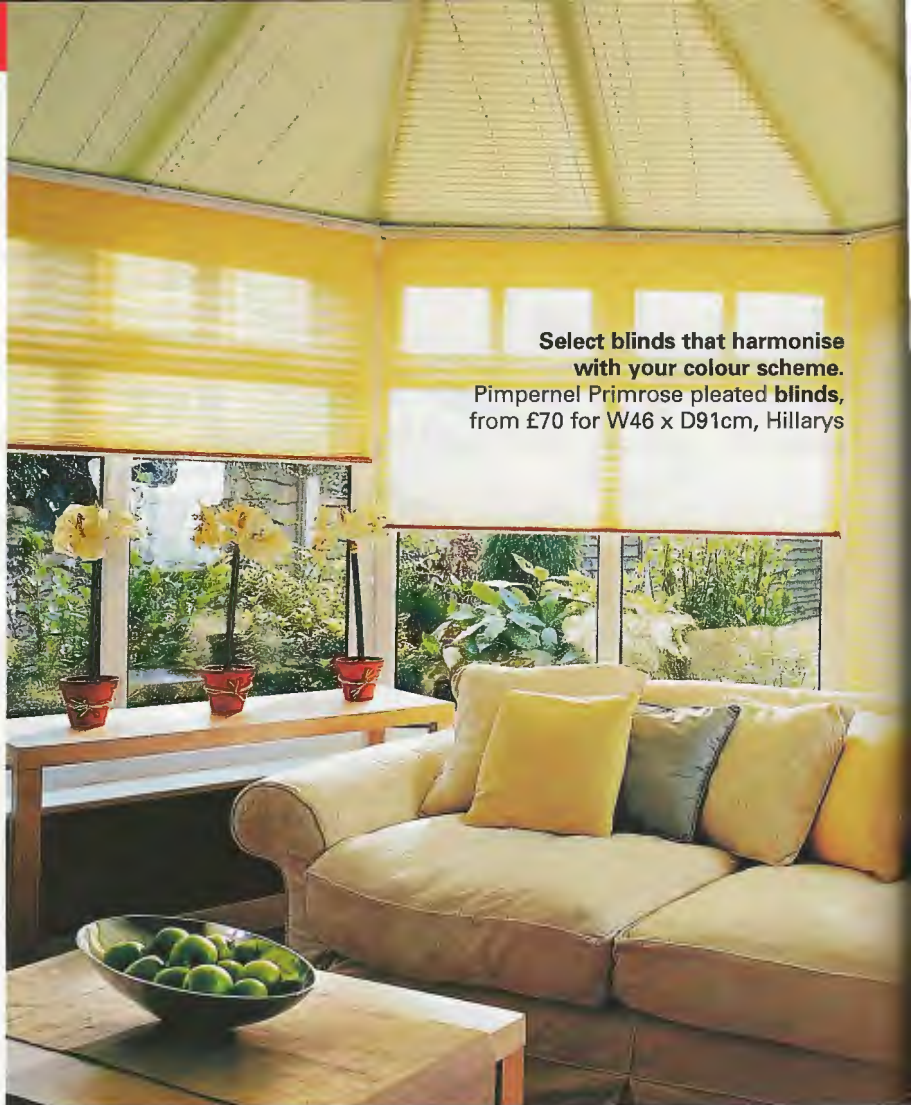
These are a better option than curtains as they can be designed to fit awkward shapes and look neat. Specialist conservatory blinds are available with sun-reflective backings to keep heat out during summer and help stop it escaping in winter.

Vertical blinds provide privacy when fully closed and shade the room without blocking out light completely. The slats can be angled to let in as little or as much light as is required, or can be pulled back when more daylight is required.

For an unfussy look, use horizontally slatted Venetian blinds. Wood or wood-effect aluminium designs add warmth to the overall feel of a conservatory. Like vertical blinds, the slats can be angled to control the amount of light that filters through. Remote-controlled blinds are ideal for roof windows, especially where your room will be overlooked from above.

## Plan a family room

A large conservatory makes a great location for a multi-functional space that benefits the whole family. You can create a low-maintenance area for children to play in, allocate a quiet corner for teenagers to do homework, or set up a hobby table for writing, sewing or other tasks that benefit from good lighting.



**Select blinds that harmonise with your colour scheme.**  
Pimpernel Primrose pleated blinds, from £70 for W46 x D91cm, Hillarys



‘There are a number of glazing products available with varying U-values – the higher the value, the less well it insulates. Polycarbonate has good insulating properties and is available in a range of thicknesses and tints. Pilkington K glass is more costly but has a lower U-value.’

## THE RIGHT HEATING

Thermally efficient glazing and adjustable heating will make your conservatory comfortable all year round. Radiators are most effective when positioned on walls under windows, but they can also be hidden behind decorative gridded panels. Underfloor heating is another option – either an electric, under-tile system that warms tiles directly, or pipes fitted under the floor that filter warm air upwards through brass or iron grilles (right).



Use an underfloor heating system where space for radiators is limited. Bespoke central heating, varying prices. Marston & Langford

## Extend your kitchen

The trend for combined kitchen/dining areas continues, and a conservatory can make a stunning extension to a kitchen that overlooks the garden. With a glass roof and walls, you will be guaranteed a light, airy space to cook and eat in. If your kitchen faces south, bear in mind that the combination of sun and heat from the oven could become stifling in summer – good-quality blinds, an extractor above the hob and either a ceiling fan or air-conditioning unit would all be good investments.

## Create a dining room

Take advantage of the views over your garden to create a colourful backdrop for a dining room. Bear in mind, however, that the temperature in a glass building drops more quickly at night than it does in a room with solid walls. If you plan to entertain in the evenings, good heating will be a priority. Soft lighting and insulating blinds will also help make the room feel warmer.

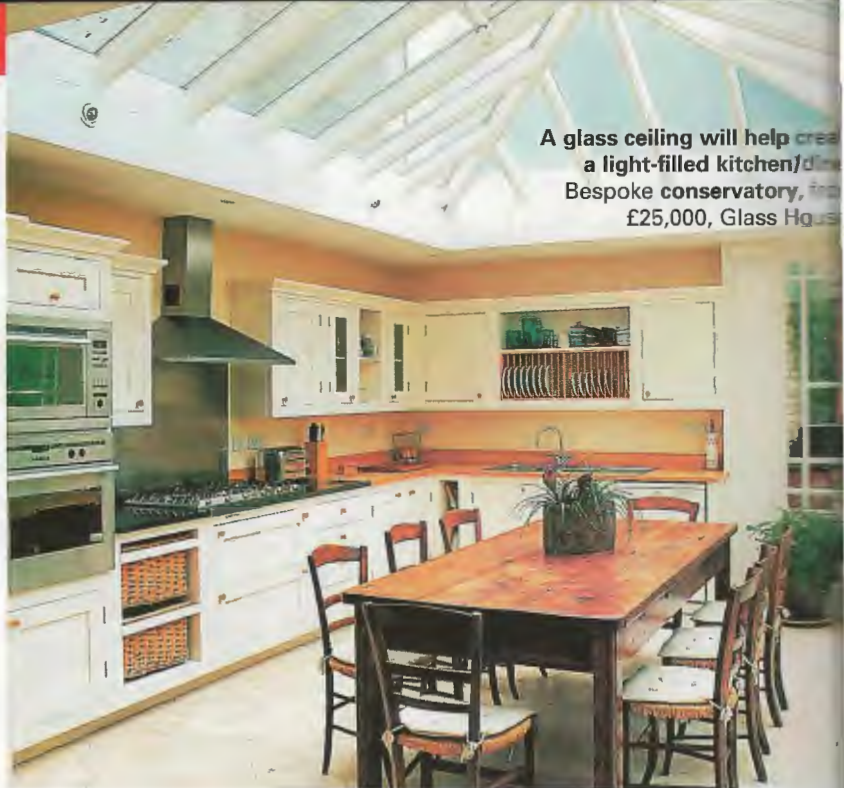
## Design a home office

A conservatory is an ideal place for a home office, which is often tucked away in the smallest room in the house. With plenty of light, it's a great opportunity to create a tranquil and inspirational space that's less oppressive than a solid-walled room. If possible, position your computer screen on a desk so it faces a solid wall, to avoid glare from direct sunlight.

## Choose suitable furniture

Conservatory tables need to be resistant to sunlight and damp. Unvarnished wood or wicker with a glass top is a popular choice. Another classic option is a decorative iron base – which can be painted – with a glass or mosaic top.

For table surfaces, stone and marble are a durable option, while dark Welsh, grey-green Cumbrian or green Italian slate create a modern look, although you will need to seal it. Glass is another up-to-date choice and helps reflect light around the room, but it can scratch and will need regular polishing to keep it smear free.



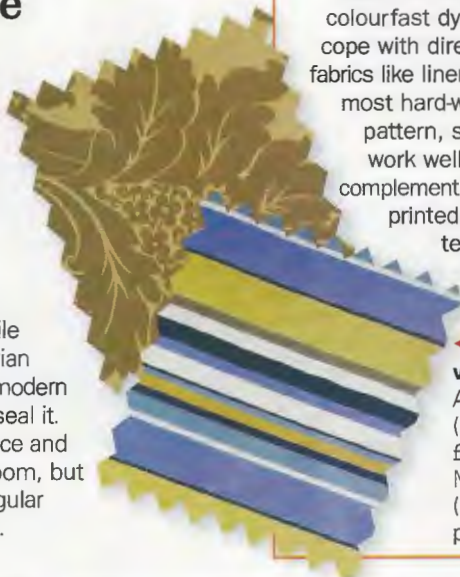
A glass ceiling will help create a light-filled kitchen/dining area. Bespoke conservatory, £25,000, Glass House

## USE TOUGH FABRIC

Choose different materials for the conservatory from those used in the rest of the house, made with colourfast dyes that are able to cope with direct sunlight. Simple fabrics like linen and cotton are the most hard-wearing. If you want pattern, stripes and checks work well when their colours complement the paintwork. Floral-printed cotton looks good teamed with woven patterns such as ticking or damask.

### ◀ Pick fabrics that will resist fading.

Almavira MF5840/120 (100% polyester, top), £39.95 per sq m, Monkwell. Carnival 2 (100% acrylic), £24.95 per sq m, Crowsons.



'A fresh look that works well with green plants and stone flooring is a plain, white cotton sofa with textured scatter cushions, teamed with subtle duck-egg blue or apple-green accessories. If you have a modern design, combine black modular furniture with a pebble-tiled floor, then use white and charcoal accessories to provide striking contrast.'

Create a classic look with furniture made from natural materials. Rattan three-seater sofa, £699 The Cotswold Company



Choose ▶  
a decorative  
pendant.  
Both five-arm  
light, £125,  
Laura Ashley

## Mix lights & lamps

Conservatories have different lighting requirements to most rooms. Uplighters, for example, are unsuitable because light will be reflected back from the roof panes, causing a sharp glare. The best

solution is to install a variety of wall and pendant lights, plus a selection of table lamps. Also, consider placing lights in different areas of your garden so you can enjoy outdoor views during the evening.

## Keep floors practical

Your conservatory will provide direct access to your garden, so the flooring will need to be low maintenance and easy to clean. Consider the floor in relation to the outside space as well as any adjacent rooms. Using the same tiles both indoors and outside the conservatory doors will add continuity and create a more streamlined appearance.

Timber is easy to clean but can shrink and show cracks when exposed to intense sunlight, so it needs to be sealed with varnish and protected with light-reflecting blinds. Vinyl is also soft, easy to maintain and comes in a variety of colours and patterns, including imitation stone or wood. For a striking look, invest in a vinyl floor with a patterned motif or border.

## Add potted plants

Depending on your room's aspect, a conservatory is the perfect environment for nurturing tender or exotic plants. North-facing spaces with shady spots are ideal for ferns and other large foliage plants, whereas a south-facing room is more suitable for sub-tropical or Mediterranean species, such as bougainvillea or dwarf citrus trees. Plants that require a semi-shaded environment, such as lilies, are usually a good choice – even if the conservatory faces south, protective blinds should prevent the leaves from getting scorched by strong sunlight. A scented plant like oleander or jasmine will fill the room with natural fragrance.

## Ensure security

A room with glazed sides needs to be just as impenetrable to intruders as one with solid walls. At the time of installation, have security bolts fitted to all opening windows. If the doors are designed to open outwards, fit hinge bolts on the inside, as this makes it impossible to lift the door out by unscrewing the pins from the hinges outside.

Choose toughened glass, and wire your alarm to include your new room.

Most manufacturers will offer to install these measures when they erect the frame.



◀ Add colour with a leafy potted palm. Washington Filifera, £9.98, B&Q



Limestone flagstones with a rough finish are a hard-wearing option. Distressed limestone flagstones, £128 per sq m, Smallbone Stone

## EXPERT DECORATING TIPS

★ When choosing a colour scheme, avoid using white on the interior walls, as this will generate extra glare when the sun is out. Go for a neutral palette and use more subtle tones instead.

★ The décor of the conservatory should complement

the interior of your home, so select flooring materials, colour schemes and furniture that blend with your choices in other rooms.

★ Use decorative accessories with an outdoor theme to link the room with your garden – try

terracotta planters, a large stone urn, a hurricane lantern with chunky glass or even an antique mirror.

Pistachio

Pearl grey

Shell

Use subtle shades ▶ for a relaxing scheme. Marston exterior paints, £35.50 per 2.5ltr, Marston & Langinger

## ESSENTIAL CONTACTS

★ **Marston & Langinger** (020 7881 5700; www.marston-and-langinger.com) sells conservatories plus garden-room furniture.

★ **Vale Garden Houses** (01476 564 433; www.valegardenhouses.com) offers a bespoke conservatory design and installation service.

★ **Sanderson** (01895 830044; www.sanderson-uk.com) supplies a range of fabric blinds.

★ **The Conservatory Book** (£25, Cassell & Co) by Peter Marston is an inspirational guide to planning and decorating conservatories.