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for the Next Decade



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Dear Dwell,
We have an old, beat-up garden shed in our backyard that seems ideal for a home office, if it weren't filled with trash and mold. It's hard to see past the garden hose hanging from the ceiling and weeds surrounding this wee structure. Any ideas on how to approach a shed renovation?

—Sadiq Said Bouhamama, Brooklyn, NY



Tale of Two Sheds

Generally, old detached garages and toolsheds are in a state of such disrepair that even dreaming of them as glorious, sun-filled offices or guest houses requires great leaps of the imagination. Still, the possibility of gaining another 200 to 400 square feet is enough to make even the most uncreative amongst us get up and do a jig. In order to help answer your question and provide some inspiration, we found two examples of backyard conversions and asked their architects for pointers.

As with any architectural undertaking, the first step is to know what you want and need. Take Colleen Bal, a lawyer living in San Francisco, who needed extra office space and was fortunate enough to have an old garden shed built just after the 1906 earthquake. Luckily, she also had a husband and brother-in-law who are architects—together they make up Terry and Terry Architecture in Berkeley, California—to take on the transformation of a dingy collection of molding wood into a sunny garden getaway and office pied-à-terre.

The Terrys astutely point out that in addition to knowing what you want, it's important to recognize what you've got—and be grateful. "In most cities and towns, building additional new structures like this on residential property would be completely illegal, but since they already exist, they are grandfathered," says Alex Terry, "so you are pretty much free to do what you want, as long as you tell your neighbors." Which leads to the next step: Avoid incurring the ire of your neighbors by letting them know what you're doing. As long as you keep the same height and you're not (overtly) converting your ►



In San Francisco, Terry and Terry Architecture took a dilapidated 1906 garden shed and turned it into a garden getaway. The architects left the back wall, keeping the new structure within the original footprint. The rickety wooden fence was replaced with a concrete retaining wall.