

# Ask the expert

## Property Clinic

### The market

We have a large house with 60 acres of land, two modern barns and several small stone outbuildings. We paid £625,000 for it in 2004, and have spent £200,000 on restoration and on a new manège, stable block, wind turbine and three-bedroom log cabin. We have also developed a successful b&b business. A few months ago we contacted several agents for advice on selling. Some said it's a commercial property, some domestic (we are rated domestically). The four domestic valuations ranged from £600,000 to £825,000. One agent said the income was irrelevant, another that it was an impressive selling point. One used a standard formula of cost-to-buy plus property inflation, never mind improvements. Three were unwilling or unable to explain how they arrived at their valuation and simply showed us nearby properties on their books, none of which were at all similar. What should we do?

### Lorna Vestey writes

It is very difficult to make decisions with such varying advice from different agents and you have my sympathy. First, always discount any agent who works to a formula and ignores the actual property and its condition; they don't deserve to be in business. I would also ignore the one who says that the income generation is irrelevant. It might not matter to the eventual buyer but equally it might be the crucial selling point; no one can yet know. Agents should be able to justify their pricing advice but, to be fair, your home is unusual and sales of substantial properties may have been few and far between in your area over the past couple of years, so this might be very difficult. What's on the market can give context on local pricing but this may also be over-optimistic. It is only when properties are sold that they provide solid evidence.

Since this is your home (and rated domestically) there is no doubt in my mind that it should be

## Room rescue

Each week readers can put forward a room in their house for a 3D makeover by mydeco.com users. Their favourite design will be assessed by Kelly Hoppen of the mydeco Design Board. Alan, of Thundersley, Essex, is looking for a redesign of his outdated oak bedroom that features an innovative storage arrangement for all his stuff. "I'd like the space to feel modern - maybe even minimalist."



**Alan says:** "The layout seems practical and allows for storage. There are some funky touches and the mirrors, though a little Seventies, are sensible given the small size of the room."

**Kelly Hoppen says:** "This room is certainly minimalist, but it feels a bit cold. I like the clean, white scheme but the stripes clash with the patterned cupboard, and a full wall of mirrored storage, though giving the illusion of added space, is overwhelming. The design all in all seems rather bland. It's definitely not to my taste."

**Design by FRANKHAM. Cost: £5,446**

mydeco



### Get the look



Faces  
Cupboard -  
Bryonie  
Porter, £750



Missoni Home  
Federico  
Throw -  
Amara, £202



Dani Victorian  
Armchair -  
Milly Rose,  
£1,200

**THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?** Redesign next week's room at [www.mydeco.com/roomrescue](http://www.mydeco.com/roomrescue) 16. Or to enter a room in your house for a redesign, email a photograph to [roomrescue@mydeco.com](mailto:roomrescue@mydeco.com). Each week a different photograph will be rendered as an empty virtual room for you to redesign

*conventional brick-and-block versus timber frame with brick cladding. We were leaning strongly towards the latter as it's less expensive and quicker to erect. Now we've been given details of a third option, Celcon thin-joint block. It would be really helpful to have your opinion of this product and its advantages or disadvantages.*

### David Snell writes

The truth of the matter is that both timber frame and brick-and-block are perfectly acceptable methods of mainstream construction. They cost the same. They're both capable of having the same thermal efficiency and are capable of providing sound insulation. Both methods are equally acceptable to lenders and insurers. Most importantly, both

the same length of time from start to moving in - around 25 weeks.

Thin-joint blocks are the masonry industry's fightback on the speed issue. They are highly engineered lightweight aggregate blocks that can be glued together rather than having a mortar bed. There's no waiting for the lower courses to "go off" so the overall speed of erection for the shell stage is roughly the same as for timber frame. The drawbacks will be availability of the blocks and of labour that knows how to use them. On both counts, because you're cutting down your gene pool, you could experience greater costs. And, as I say, your home will probably take the same time from start to finish whichever method you employ. The most important things are that you are happy with the

### John Winter writes

Your builder may or may not be right. It depends where you live and where the garage is in relation to the main house.

If your house is not listed, nor in conservation area, and if the garage is not set forward of the house, then I do not think that planning consent is needed. But, to make absolutely certain, drop the planning officer a line to tell him what you propose.

Where I lose faith in your builder is that he seems unable to make a flat roof waterproof and has resorted to refelting, which sounds to me like an obsolete technology. I appreciate that flat-roof covering have performed badly in the past, and small builders may not be up to date on the performance of the sophisticated, modern alternatives. Have a pitched roof by all means.