



Brighten up your home

Thinking of building a conservatory? It's all about orientation and use, advises interiors expert Noelle O'Donoghue.





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Roman blinds work much better than curtains as they wind up out of the way.



Are you thinking of adding a conservatory to your home? If so, there are a number of important factors to be considered before you start. Ask yourself what you want the main functions of your conservatory to be – is it a dining space, another living area, playroom, breakfast room or garden room?

Ideally your conservatory should face south, so you benefit from the sun in the morning, afternoon and evening, allowing you to use it all day. If this isn't entirely possible, then south or southwest is best if you

plan to use it more in the evening. Or perhaps you just want a breakfast room, in which case east or south-east works best.

As a garden room, it should have lots of plants and comfortable chairs where you can relax and read the paper. If it's a playroom for the kids during the day they will have lots of space and natural light.

A small conservatory used as a breakfast room where light pours in from the east during the morning offers a great start to the day. If it's for extra living space and for use in the evening too, then you'll need a good heating source.

At this stage, it's worthwhile to consider a sunroom instead of a conservatory. A sunroom will have a roof, which makes the space easier to heat in the winter and at night. The roof can also have skylights to allow more light in and, on hot days, this will prove extremely effective for ventilation. The most common style of sunroom involves a pitched roof but if height is restricted, then an orangery-style roof also works well.

NEUTRAL COLOURS

Whatever style you have selected for your conservatory – traditional or contemporary – it's important to keep colours neutral. The sun fades most fabrics over time, so light colour schemes are essential. Some fabrics are fade-resistant so you can afford to cover a chair or couch in these. Otherwise it's better to use wicker or wicker-style furniture. Keep away from traditional yellow wickers as these colours are difficult to match with fashionable colour schemes. Beige, grey or even black wicker will look well with lots of greenery and cream upholstery.

A couch or chair in Dutch-style furniture could be stripped and bleached or painted, with cushions re-covered, and this is an inexpensive way to add seating.

Other furniture such as tables and consoles should be constructed with neutral or oiled timbers. Steer away from furniture that is lacquered or varnished as the sun will discolour the varnish over time. Painted furniture looks well and can be easily refreshed over the years.

WINDOW DRESSING

Window dressings depend on the style of your conservatory. Curtains are generally too bulky as you need so much fabric to cover the space. Roman blinds work much better as they wind up out of the way, but still cover all or part of the window space. Roman blinds also show off fabric and pattern more, to add more colour and style. Line your blinds with fade-resistant fabric to prevent any fading in the sunlight.

Window sizes vary considerably in a conservatory but a common size is 130cm X 165cm. A Roman blind this size on easy chain rail with chrome or brass chain and black-out lining will cost you about €334 including fitting. You're looking at around €175 for a venetian blind in various thickness and colours



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→ including white. Cellular blinds offer duette shades, silhouette shades and facette shades. Speak to your local stockist about personal requirements and style.

All blinds, including Roman blinds, offer manual and/or motorised operation. Contemporary sunrooms or glass-roofed conservatories will work with cellular, venetian or vertical panel blinds and all are easy to manipulate and can be rapidly pleated to avoid troubleshooting. A motorized system is a good option for your roof area as this will give you total control over whatever light is entering the conservatory.

My advice is to steer away from timber flooring in your conserva-

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tory as the sun will fade or discolour the wood. French doors wear badly in our unpredictable Irish weather, especially if there's a lot of traffic through the doors. Natural stone tiles or porcelain tiles in a neutral colour both look well and are practical. If you find tiles cold and noisy, a good alternative is to choose vinyl or Amtico tiles. If your sunroom is a living space, consider carpet or tiles with a large rug around the seating area. Don't choose anything too dark to keep the room airy.

Fresh green botanical prints with whites and natural textures will help to create a tranquil living area in your conservatory. This adds life to any room and suitable combinations will look great in the sunlight. Try to

have one large floor plant and a console table with a selection of varied plants. Storm lanterns and candle holders create a lovely soft light to make the room more inviting on a summer's evening. Book shelves to store reading material are a good idea, as is a screen to add some privacy, especially if glass doors lead into the rest of the house.

The same rules apply to lighting a conservatory as with any other room. Overhead lighting is for task proposes only so depending on the room shape and style, I suggest using a large centre piece and a collection of lamps around the room. A height-adjustable floor lamp provides a versatile lighting option.

The rest is up to you. ☺