

Home Improve

Have you looked at your ceilings lately? Probably not, if they're a featureless flat expanse of white. We've neglected them for decades, but now architects, interior designers and wallpaper and paint manufacturers are taking more interest in the "fifth wall". Ceilings are becoming key components of architectural and design schemes in the same way as walls, floors and furnishings.

It's a move that gained momentum last year, with Pinterest reporting a substantial increase in saves for "statement ceilings". The New London Architecture (NLA) forum declared them a 2019 trend when creating the shortlist for its Don't Move, Improve! awards, with the winners to be announced on Tuesday. "Architects are increasingly making ceilings more exciting using sculptural effects," says Jenine Noble, of NLA, some of whose shortlisted projects can be seen on these pages.

If you're planning a refurb or extension this year, the ceiling gives you an extra dimension to play with. "There's an architectural move to expose the structure of ceilings, making them more interesting than planes of flat plaster," says Catriona Burns, whose timber and red-paint combo in a kitchen extension is on the NLA shortlist. "Don't be afraid to put colour on a ceiling or do something else that's different."

John Proctor, of Proctor & Shaw, is another architect with a project up for an award. His wedge-shaped extension with a roof of varying pitches has a sensational ceiling with white-painted exposed joists at converging angles. "We look for opportunities to create interesting ceilings and introduce an element of craft," he says.

Grand houses of the past often had decorative ceilings: the Victorians loved to pimp theirs with cornices and ceiling roses. Now you can raise the bar with wallpaper, including mural effects (anything from a starlit night sky to jungle ferns), embossed ceiling tiles, decorative plaster panels, the latest paint colours, textures, even bricks or concrete. Shiny tin or faux-tin ceiling tiles can look impressive, reflecting light around the room. These became popular in America in the late 19th century as a low-cost alternative to ornate European plasterwork; you can still buy originals today.

"As well as helping to create warmth and intimacy, a decorative ceiling draws the eye upwards, raising the horizon and adding grandeur to the room," says the architect Rodrigo Moreno Masey, of MorenoMasey. It certainly doesn't get much grander than the gold foil covering a Georgian ceiling in one of his refurbishment projects.

The easiest way to get some oomph onto a ceiling is to paint it – in any colour but white. "We've become wedded to white ceilings, but pure white is deadly for atmosphere," says Marianne Shillingford, creative director of Dulux. "Adding colour to a ceiling alters the mood of the room and creates a sense of delicious cocooning. Even just using a paler version of the wall colour makes a huge difference, and if you want neutral walls for displaying pictures, you can be more creative with the ceiling." If you're worried about low ceilings, then at least paint them off-white, she adds.

Wallpaper is another relatively low-cost route to a showstopping effect. Swap patterned walls and a plain ceiling for a fabulous print above your head and walls in harmonising colours. And it doesn't have to be the whole area – a central mural section could be enough to make sure your ceiling is a cut above.



THE HEIGHT OF FASHION

Designers and decorators are taking their eyes off the walls and looking up. *Cherry Maslen* charts the rise of the statement ceiling



Recessed timber channels in the Japanese-inspired ceiling of this canalside apartment hide the lighting. "The channels reflect the geometric lines of the interior and draw the eye out onto the waterside terrace," says Eoin O'Leary, partner at con|form architects.



Dream of exotic adventures under this Antique World Map wallpaper mural by Lovell Johns, which would also look good in a home office or study. Prices start at £30 a sq metre (wallsauce.com).



The concrete ceiling in this maisonette in a Victorian terrace helps to create the industrial look the owner wanted. The architects, Gundry & Ducker, supported the ceiling with pillars embedded in the walls. "Concrete ceilings need no maintenance and are great for soundproofing – you won't hear anyone walking about above," says Christian Ducker.



Resembling blue sky and fluffy clouds, the Blue Marble Effect wallpaper mural in the centre of this ceiling makes the room feel light and airy. It's made to measure, with prices starting at £26 a sq metre (wallsauce.com).



The ceiling in this Georgian house owned by an art collector has been given the gold-star treatment by the architect Rodrigo Moreno Masey. "Thin sheets of gold foil were rubbed onto the surface and worked by hand into the detail of the ceiling," he says. "It was built as a grand house, so it suits the original decorative intention."

OF FASHION



If you're lucky enough to have a chandelier and high ceilings, that twinkling glass will stand out much better against a dark background than regulation white. The interior designer Michael Minns used matt black emulsion in this room in his Victorian house. Try Zeitgeist, from the Craig & Rose 1829 Vintage Paint collection (£35 for 2½ litres; rocketstgeorge.co.uk).



The structural timber of the ceiling in this extension has been left exposed, with sections in between painted red to match the wall units. "It makes the space vibrant and interesting, with the gloss finish bouncing light around the room," says the architect Catriona Burns.



A desire to maximise width and height was the starting point for the ceiling in this extension by the architects Proctor & Shaw. A low, angled garden wall meant the site was wedge-shaped and the extension roof needed a steeper pitch on that side. The roof ridge rises towards the garden, so the rafters slope upwards. An angled roof light adds to the drama.



This extension to a flat in an octagonal former synagogue echoes the unusual geometry: triangular softwood ceiling sections alternate with triangular roof lights. "We transformed a dark, unused courtyard into a lofty, dynamic and unexpected space," says Sarah Castle, director of IF_DO architects.



Leaving the ceiling cassette exposed in this low-cost modular house by the architecture and design studio TDO adds warmth and character, as well as increasing the ceiling height and allowing more light into the terraced home. It also reflects the birch-faced plywood staircase in the open-plan space.



Bricks from the original back wall have been reused externally and internally to make this extension by the architects Bureau de Change feel integral to the house. Part of the extension roof is stepped, and this is reflected in the ceiling, with the bricks attached to steel beams.



There's nothing clinical about this kitchen: the vinyl wallcovering is Dark Floral II Black Desaturated, by Ellie Cashman. Visit elliecashmandesign.com and enter measurements for an instant quote.



A desire to maximise width and height was the starting point for the ceiling in this extension by the architects Proctor & Shaw. A low, angled garden wall meant the site was wedge-shaped and the extension roof needed a steeper pitch on that side. The roof ridge rises towards the garden, so the rafters slope upwards. An angled roof light adds to the drama.

else that's different."

John Proctor, of Proctor & Shaw, is another architect with a project up for an award. His wedge-shaped extension with a roof of varying pitches has a sensational ceiling with white-painted exposed joists at converging angles. "We look for opportunities to create interesting ceilings and introduce an element of craft," he says.

Grand houses of the past often had decorative ceilings; the Victorians loved