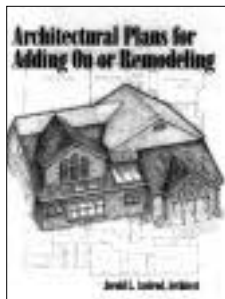




# Remodeling Planbook

by Gordon Tully



**Architectural Plans for Adding On or Remodeling** by Jerold L. Axelrod (McGraw-Hill, 1992; 800/722-4726). Hardcover, 7 1/2 x 9 1/2, 335 pages. \$26.95.

If renovation is your bread and butter, you may have yearned for something like a planbook. Oh sure, there are plenty of "How To" books filled with all the ins and outs of designing and detailing. And plenty of TV programs, including the popular *This Old House*. But nothing like a planbook.

The idea of a renovation planbook has always seemed impractical to me. How could you systematically show all the possible types of renovations, linked up with all the possible types of existing houses? The combinations must be infinite. And yet, haven't you done similar projects over and over? Aren't there patterns in kitchen remodels, or in closing in porches?

Surprise! The renovation planbook has been done, and done pretty well. The Tab Books division of McGraw-Hill has published a very interesting and useful book called *Architectural Plans for Adding On or Remodeling*, written by an

architect named Jerold L. Axelrod.

Axelrod writes a regular syndicated AP feature called "House of the Week," and contributes to *Home* magazine. As a result, he has on his CAD system a surprising variety of plan types, applicable across the country. For his book, he has added a variety of the most common renovations, and developed plans and sketches for hundreds of designs.

The book advertises that plans are available for all the many designs shown, and suggests that homeowners about to renovate should find the closest design to what they want, buy the plans, get some bids, then make any changes based on their budget. Always alert to marketing opportunities, I turned green with envy. Surely nothing could match this book for hauling in clients.

I called Axelrod and got a big surprise. The book is selling very well to homeowners, but he has sold only a few plans and very occasional design consultations to homeowners. His market, it turns out, is you, gentle reader: the small renovation contractor.

Contractors typically use the book as a presentation tool. Working with the owner, they choose the closest applicable design, and in some cases simply buy the plans as is, at prices ranging from \$65 to \$400 or so.

Most of the time the owner wants some changes, so the builder orders a customized set of presentation drawings, typically costing between \$100 and \$200. The builder prices the job and makes a presentation. The accurate price and nifty architect-prepared drawings impress the client and help clinch the deal. If the proposal is accepted, Axelrod's office does a custom set of working drawings, for a price typically between \$200 and \$800 (adding another item to Axelrod's growing database of renovations).

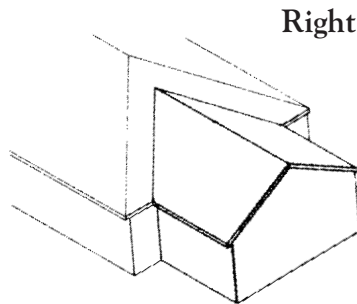
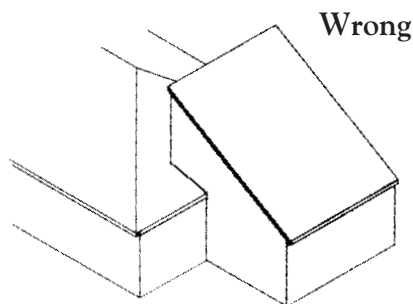
Axelrod points out the importance of designing additions and renovations as add-on packages, so homeowners don't have to move out during construction. This restriction is a great help to the owner, but excludes the unique, major surgery sometimes necessary to make a house a home. The good news is that this leaves something for the rest of us architects to do.

This focus on separate add-ons led Axelrod to write two very interesting chapters (4 and 6) on "blockforms," depicting the right and wrong ways to add a 3-D addition onto various house forms. His approach to building form is the one I try to use in my monthly "Building With Style" column: Classify design problems and work out simple rules that builders can follow. These two chapters are very educational and by themselves are well worth the price of the book (about \$27).

I have one bone to pick, however. Axelrod includes some designs that I find questionable. I know only too well how hard it is to make a living while upholding high design standards in a market with taste in its shoes. But I wish Axelrod had elevated the design dialogue in some cases, particularly designs FAC 15, 16, and 34 in Chapter 9, along with occasional lapses throughout the book.

This exception is more than balanced by the great utility of the book and the associated planbook services. If this is the first time anyone has tried to systematize the remodeling process, the project is a great success. Axelrod's book should be on the desk of anyone who designs or builds additions or renovations. ■

## Designing with Blockforms



The shed roof addition stuck on the end of the hip roof (left) illustrates the type of mistake often made by inexperienced designers. Keeping the new structure below the original ridge line and running the new valleys parallel to old roof lines (right) helps blend the addition with the older building.

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