

MANSION GLOBAL

DESIGNER'S CORNER

Want to Add a Skylight? Here's What to Consider.

These architectural features introduce light and air, create healthy interior environments and add depth and character

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Architect Sarah Jeffreys said skylight size will depend on room size, the purpose of the skylight, and aesthetic preferences.
MORTEN SMIDT

Each week, Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week, we explored how and where to add a skylight.

From stairwells to windowless attics to rooms garnering little sun, skylights can elevate spaces and bring the outside in.

“Skylights transform spaces with natural light streaming through, linking a space with the outdoors,” said Sarah Jeffreys, principal at Sarah Jeffreys Architecture + Interiors in [New York](#). “They can make a room feel more spacious and provide a beautiful natural light environment. They also help with cross-ventilation and fresh air, which, depending on the type of skylight, can help cut down on energy costs in the long run.”

Mansion Global asked three design pros for their thoughts on installing a skylight to bring in natural light and ultimately create a more dynamic interior.

Consider Your Lifestyle and Needs

“Many different kinds of rooms can benefit from a skylight. The reasons can be aesthetic or functional. There might be an architectural feature that you want to highlight. My wife and I had a beautiful stairwell in our home that was quite dark. We added a skylight to the stairwell, and the influx of natural light means that we enjoy the beauty of the stairwell without the need to turn lights on during the day. Adding a skylight can have functional value as well. Perhaps you need more light to work in a kitchen, so you place the skylight over the kitchen island.

“We often recommend translucent skylights, because they disperse the light and create an ethereal effect. It gives the room a luminous glow rather than being harshly lit. Another option is an operable skylight, if you like having natural ventilation. In our last home, we had a vaulted ceiling with two operable skylights and it was nice to pop them open and feel the breeze. An operable skylight naturally ventilates, allowing heat to rise and exit out the top.

“You have to decide how much you are willing to spend. An older house may have a clay tile roof or plaster ceilings, which can make adding a skylight quite expensive. To add a skylight to an older home you have to really want it, but skylights can have the most transformative potential in older houses, which tend to have naturally darker interiors. We don’t shy away from adding skylights to any type of home. A skylight in a vaulted ceiling allows the light to spread out over a large area. A skylight in a flat ceiling tends to focus its light in a pool underneath.”

—Bruce Bockus, chairman at Bockus Payne in Oklahoma City

Optimize Size and Placement

“Skylight size will depend on the size of your room, the purpose of the skylight and aesthetic preferences. If you’re adding purely for aesthetic purposes, you’ll want to size it based on the design and layout of your room. Another factor to consider is the size and spacing of the rafters in your roof. This can be a determining factor for how large you can go without making significant structural modifications.

“We love to use very large skylights to increase the link to the outdoors. Lamilux skylights are triple-pane, making them energy-efficient, and they come in a wide range of very large sizes.

“Be sure to consider where you live and the orientation of your skylight. Depending on its placement, the amount of sunlight and heat gain will vary. If the skylight is on a roof deck, it may require a railing around it to ensure someone cannot fall through.”

—Sarah Jeffreys, principal at Sarah Jeffreys Architecture + Interiors in New York

Hire a Skilled Skylight Professional to Install

“Skylights integrate the roof as a fifth facade, breaking through the conventional boundaries of interior and exterior spaces. They add depth and character to the architecture and can change the dynamic of any space, making it more welcoming. Skylights can be customized to fit the architectural style and enhance the overall aesthetics. If oriented correctly, skylights may contribute to passive solar design, by helping capture heat during winter.

“Proper installation is essential to prevent leaks, hence why a skilled professional must be hired to ensure proper flashing, sealing, and the execution of regular inspections and maintenance. Also consider the accessibility of the skylight for cleaning. If not possible, consider features such as self-cleaning glass or mechanisms that allow it to open and close easily. Skylights are hard to reach, so if not mechanically controlled, it can be difficult to get to them. Incorporating advanced systems enables convenient operation and adjustment of skylights, allowing users to open or close them, control blinds, or manage ventilation without the need for physically reaching the skylight itself.”

—Philip Consalvo, principal at PJCArchitecture in New York



Architect Philip Consalvo said skylights add depth and character, like in this bathroom designed by his firm, PJCArchitecture.

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