



# THE TIMES

## The new open plan: the layout that families want now

The new family room layout gives you light and space, but also privacy — and somewhere to escape the noise



An open-plan extension to a home in Camden, north London by Alex Tait Architects. ©EMILIE SANDERWALLER TAIT ARCHITECTS

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Space, light and ease. That is the promise of open-plan living. In pursuit of these goals, hundreds of thousands of suburban internal walls have been demolished to join the living room, the dining room and the kitchen into one room, which is also often extended into the garden. Suddenly, however, there is unrest in these family spaces. However much you may love your children, you do not necessarily want to hear all the noise they make, or the sound of your partner running the blender.

This may sound like a victory for rooms, but agents and interior designers report that most people still like the idea of open plan, just not as we know it. They want open-plan design 2.0: openness, but with a separate living room where they can escape the noise created by their nearest and dearest.

"The trend for large central spaces has been big for the past 10 to 15 years," says Nick Leeming, the chairman of Jackson-Stops, "but now the closed living room is having a renaissance."



Even though the house has an open-plan kitchen/living room, it is on sale for £10.95 million through Savills

Research by Jackson-Stops shows that most people want a living room that is separate to the kitchen and dining area. It seems that families still value the feeling of space and light, but they don't want to hear the dishwasher when flopped on the sofa after a hard day's work.

Buyers in their forties and fifties, according to Marcus Gondolo-Gordon of Incognito Property, an off-market property agency, are against open plan for different reasons. "Energy-conscious Generation X buyers are coming back to wanting more traditional houses, like the ones they grew up in," he says. "They want homes that are easy and more efficient to heat and cool than the large white boxes with high ceilings and no storage."

The American modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the first designers to create a single living space in the home in the 1920s. By 2012 it was reported that one in five Britons intended to create open-plan areas in their home.

Fionnuala Earley, a housing market economist, says that one reason for their popularity is that permitted development rights for extensions introduced in 2015, where you can extend your property without seeking planning permission, are for only one storey. Such extensions generally mean adding on a box to the back room, often a kitchen or living room.

Whether you like open plan or not may come down to the age of your children, says Chris Mullin, the manager of Hamptons International at Muswell Hill. "In terms of practicality, it tends to work fine until child number three comes along, or until little Johnny starts playing the trombone. Then all of a sudden that extra room cut off from the rest of the house becomes a bit of a sanctuary."



This house in Islington, north London, was extended with a modern glass box by Andrew Dunning of London Contemporary  
PAUL CRAIG

So while open plan isn't dead — Kit Kemp, one of the country's best-known interior designers, has recently knocked through some of the walls to make her kitchen and living room open plan — it is evolving.

"Many of our clients like having a large open-plan kitchen to socialise, but they also want a separate living room to avoid the smells of the kitchen," says Penny Mosgrove, the chief executive of Quintessentially Estates, the home-buying arm of the concierge company. "Some even have a chef's kitchen tucked away, so the open-plan kitchen is more for show."



This five-bedroom house in Codicote, Hertfordshire, designed by London architect Brook Murray, is on sale for £4.5 million through Strutt & Parker

#### **How to create an open-plan 2.0 space**

**1** Think about light. "I speak to many people who have added extensions to the rear of their properties, with the ubiquitous bifold doors, only to find that the internal space that used to sit at the rear is a dark and uninviting, redundant area," says Julia Kendell, an interior designer for the London Homebuilding and Renovating Show. If you do have a dark space, create a cinema space or music room.

**2** Zone your spaces. Creating areas with a specific purpose will provide a cohesive clarity to the design.

**3** Make sure there is a focal point. This could be a fire, or a large painting.

**4** Use colour and texture to add character. "Choosing one tone only creates a flat and dull room with little definition and interest," says Kendell. Consider height in the middle of the space, an open bookcase or tall plants, to add a sense of perspective and depth.

**5** Invest in extraction. Food smells will carry throughout an open-plan kitchen so you need an efficient extractor. Similarly, noise can be a problem. Plenty of soft furnishings will help to deaden sound.

**6** Don't go too large. You can lose a sense of scale if the space is too vast.

**7** Snug areas, small box rooms built within an open-plan space, can work well as places for kids to play or as cosier areas for families to watch TV.

To read more, please visit: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-new-open-plan-the-layout-that-families-want-now-bk5ztbr95>