

## Inside story

### Back to the walls

Could our love affair with open-plan be coming to an end? Jessica Doyle asks whether separate rooms could be just what the modern home needs post-lockdown



When it comes to home design, trends have a cyclical nature. Colours, patterns and materials come and go, and what was dated only a few years ago can suddenly feel right for now. This year, following the fundamental lifestyle changes that have come about as a result of Covid-19, the usual decorating trends have seemed rather irrelevant as practical considerations have come to the fore, and thus it is the turn of the humble interior wall to swing back into fashion.

After years in the wilderness, while we knocked through rooms with abandon in thrall to the perfect all-in-one, light-filled living space, the wall is starting to seem quite a good

idea after all – as anyone who has tried to work at the kitchen table with a computer game in one ear and someone else's Zoom call in the other will probably attest.

In fact, separate living spaces have been making a tentative comeback for several years. 'Many homeowners who took out walls over the past decade or so have realised that, as perhaps their children started to get older or they took on more hobbies, more separating zones were needed,' says Sam McNally, co-founder of design practice Echlin (echlinlondon.com).

So could we start to see a more traditional layout on homeowners' wishlists? 'As we continue to spend more time at home, I am sure we will see hints of a return to the Victorian-style home, with

its hive of little rooms reflective of a time when formality and privacy were paramount,' says interior designer Deborah Bass (baseinterior.com). However, she adds, 'I don't see this completely overriding the open-plan approach, which suits our modern, casual lifestyles so well.'

It may be a little too soon to sound the death knell for the open-plan layout, but there's no doubt that, for many, priorities have changed. 'It's too early to say what the long-term effects of Covid-19 on home design will be,' says McNally, 'but lockdown has reminded us that there is a very fine balance between wanting room to breathe and wanting peace if you have a houseful. It could prove to be a major catalyst.'

#### DESIGN TIP

Richard Angel suggests making a feature of a dividing wall by covering it in fabric, leather or panelling, to add texture and a cosy feel. All furniture, Habitat (habitat.co.uk).



#### SPLIT UP YOUR SPACE

'We're noticing a need for greater separation of spaces following lockdown, with people wishing to divide rooms or designate specific purposes to areas,' says designer Richard Angel of Angel O'Donnell (angelodonnell.com). 'However, walls do make a space feel



Here, Angel O'Donnell has created a separate snug area using a partial wall and sliding doors



#### DESIGN TIP

Sometimes, a partial wall is all that's needed to create a sense of separation, particularly for a desk area.



smaller. We often advise alternatives like sliding doors or room separators – this way you achieve the desired result of splitting up the spaces without compromising on light and the natural flow of an area.'

In a recent project Angel worked on (above), the living, dining and entertainment areas were all in one big room. 'We decided to split it up and introduced a wall to create a sepa-

rate snug,' he says. 'We didn't close it off completely – we had a fixed wall in the middle and sliding doors on either side so the client could close that space off in the evening.'

In another home, the dining room was separated from the living space by a glazed wall with sliding Crittall doors. 'It's this delicate balance of open-plan and closing rooms off that's proving popular,' says Angel.

'People need quiet spaces for home working and virtual meetings, but we still want our homes to feel light and open, which is good for our well-being.'

Think of it as the modern, multifunctional iteration of the wall. It doesn't have to be bricks and mortar, and it can be sliding, folding or even see-through. It might not be the end of open-plan, but the best of both worlds.

#### CARVE UP THE KITCHEN

The popularity of open-plan living has brought with it a hankering for separate pantries, laundry rooms and boot rooms. As kitchens have become more decorative, and are used as entertaining spaces rather than functional zones, extra rooms or cupboards where you can hide



away the necessary but ugly stuff have become prime real estate.

This type of room has traditionally been the preserve of the country house, where, according to Rupert Sweeting of estate agent Knight Frank, it has long added value. 'The traditional rooms of a pantry and



A separate laundry room designed by British Standard by Plain English

utility room are now high up on buyers' priority lists – especially those who are moving out of London,' he says. 'In my opinion, the utility room is the most vital room in the house.'

However, there's evidence they are becoming just as coveted in city homes. Searches for pantries on Google more than doubled during the first week of lockdown, and Katie Fontana of Plain English (plainenglish-design.co.uk), whose kitchens are as likely to be found in London homes as in the country, reports that 'having a utility room has become a status symbol'.

Before starting on a kitchen redesign, consider carving out part of the space to create a separate housekeeping room, even if that does mean reducing the size of the main kitchen area. Not only will this keep the washing machine and tumble dryer out of sight (and earshot), it will also allow you to save your open shelving for displaying kilner jars and cookbooks.

#### DESIGN TIP

Adding a wall to separate off a living area from a kitchen also allows for useful extra storage.



## THINK BEFORE YOU SEIZE THE SLEDGEHAMMER

When renovating, the urge might be to knock down walls to increase the flow of light and sense of space, but think about how you are actually going to use the rooms, how you might want to use them in future, and whether light is more important than usability.

Interior designer Emma Shone-Sanders (designandthat.com) recently worked on a renovation for a young couple, both of whom run their own business. 'Their ground floor was divided into three spaces – one front living room, a kitchen at the back which they extended, and then a small middle room,' she says.

'They discussed using this middle room to extend either the front living room or the kitchen – or even knocking the whole thing through – but instead kept it as a central snug.'

space, they added an internal window between the kitchen and snug to let light through and connect the spaces.'

#### DESIGN TIP

Interior bifold doors or shutters (from £299 per sq m, shutterfabulous.com) can be a neat way to divide rooms. Although be aware of the bulk they add to the room when open.



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### Kingston - Rattan Lounge Set

Relax in style with this stunning modular lounge set of two corner chairs, two matching ottomans and tempered glass topped coffee table. Finished in a gorgeous rattan like material with plump polypun fabric seat cushions, the Kingston is designed to adapt to whatever suits your mood. Arrange the ottomans in front of the sofas and stretch out or push the ottomans and coffee table together for an ultra-comfortable daybed. Each piece has a powder coated frame and is maintenance free. Normally £599, it's yours for just £399\*, when you quote your £200 discount code DTMSEP20A at the checkout.



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