No one knows more about hard flooring than Jeff.

carpetright

Shop now

INTERIORS

How to make the most out of natural light at home

Create light, airy spaces with sun tunnels and glass partitions

Almost half of UK homeowners say that their home lacks natural light or wish they had more

Jayne Dowle | Friday November 19 2021, 12.01am, The Times

Share Save

Albert Camus said that autumn is a second spring, “when every leaf is a flower”, but not where hours of daylight are concerned. With darkness descending by 5pm, natural light, which improves the mood and makes a home feel airier and healthier, is in shorter supply than Christmas turkeys and Ocado slots.

Almost half of UK homeowners say that their home lacks natural light or wish they had more. More than a third admit that it makes them feel fatigued, and one in four people say that lack of natural light contributes to their ill-health, according to a survey for the advice website myglazing.com.

But don’t despair. There are ingenious ways to make the most of all available natural light. Some are quick fixes, others demand careful consideration. Autumn’s fading rays provide the perfect opportunity to open your eyes to the possibilities.

Polished and glossy surfaces can help to reflect natural light indoors

The architect Adrian Manea of Manea Kella says that, before the Blitz destroyed their homes, residents of crowded narrow alleyways such as Paternoster Row in the City of London would hang mirrors from their exterior walls to catch what they could of the daylight. We’re not suggesting that you go that far, but reflective surfaces do play their part. If carefully placed opposite a window, a mirror will effectively double the light coming in.

Shiny metallic finishes, including silver or metallic photograph frames, polished metal furniture and chrome taps, help to reflect natural light indoors. It includes the floor — polished surfaces reflect light better than matt finishes or carpet — and glossy surfaces, such as cabinetry and glass tiles in kitchens and bathrooms. If a cream or pastel sofa can withstand the daily rigours of your domestic set-up, go for it. Otherwise opt for leather or leather-equivalent with a sheen.

ADVERTISEMENT

No one knows more about hard flooring than Jeff.
Kährs
Kährs
carpetright
Shop now

If you don’t want to commit to the whitest of whites for walls and ceilings, choose a soft cream or eggshell. Avoid dark grey. It leeches natural light. Instead, create a natural palette.

“If the objective is to get as much light in as possible, smooth and shiny light surfaces will reflect light better than dark, textured ones,” says James Bernard, a director at Plus Rooms, a design and build company. “Ultimately, light neutral tones within the space with coloured accents such as cushions will give a greater feeling of brightness.”

Light neutral tones with coloured accents will give a greater feeling of brightness

Look outdoors too. If trees and shrubs are overhanging windows, prune them back, taking care to follow advice on the correct time of year to do so, and certainly before the first frosts.

A more serious short-term fix, Bernard says, is to reorder living space so that key activities — meal preparation, eating, relaxing, studying and working — take place in the lightest areas, leaving darker spaces for transit.

SPONSORED

Here’s what will happen if we don’t change the course of our planet

Want to know the best way to grab yourself a bargain on Black Friday?

These darkening days are the ideal time to consider longer-term improvements too. Take the opportunity to monitor how natural light falls and where. Make a note of how the sun moves around and over your home, and at what time of day. Consider the locations of windows and other glazing. Are they in optimum position? Could glazed areas be moved or extended within the bounds of budget and abiding by permitted development rules, listed building or conservation area requirements?

Don’t forget that orientation can’t be argued with, and is year-round, not seasonal: “For instance, if your garden is south-facing, then you would want to be more conservative with glass in your roof than in a north-facing property,” Bernard warns.

Trip the light fantastic now, and next winter could be a much brighter prospect. Here’s our lowdown on how to plan.

Glass bricks can help flood a house with natural light

Windows

If you have scope to add a window, especially on a wall that faces east, west or south, do so. Think indoors and out. Framing an element of nature is an architectural trend. During the conversion of a mews house in Knightsbridge, central London, Steve Clinch, the head architect at Echlin, devised a 6m-high vertical garden visible internally through a series of glass apertures. “A signature of Echlin’s architecture is to create natural light even where it cannot be found,” he says. “We do this through internal voids, lightwells and courtyards, which are not dissimilar to a riad in style, being at the centre of a property, as well as expansive glass and green living walls that go down into lower-ground living and generous skylights.”

Glass bricks

ADVERTISEMENT

No one knows more about hard flooring than Jeff.
carpetright
Shop now
Kährs

Big in the 1990s and often used as dividing walls in bathrooms, architectural glass bricks have been out of fashion, but the designer Remi Connolly-Taylor, who founded Remi.C.T Studio, shows their potential for flooding a house with natural light.

Almost the entire back half of the work/live home she has built for herself on an urban infill plot in Maryland, east London, is constructed of architectural glass bricks, including a southwest-facing terrace on the first floor that leads off her studio. “The glass blocks were a strategic design choice,” Connolly-Taylor says. “The dwelling’s mass was curated around how the natural light would enter the home. But we needed to be mindful of privacy, both for the neighbours and inside the house, so the glass blocks allow light to filter through but maintain privacy at the same time.”

Roof lights/roof windows

You will always gain more light through a roof light than its equivalent size in a wall, Bernard says, “so if there’s a choice, and light is your priority, opt for glazing in the roof”. Also, glazing in an angled (pitched) roof will create a better “reach” than in a flat roof, which will only focus natural light downwards.

If you’re thinking of more than one roof light, position them so they follow the sun’s movements. “Then your room can enjoy sunlight throughout the day with daylight from above,” says Grant Sneddon, a director at Velux, a roof window company.

Velux recommends that, for the correct ratio of daylight, the glazed area of windows in a room should be no less than 20 per cent of the floor area. It has a useful online calculator to help to calculate the size and number of roof windows at velux.co.uk.

Roof lanterns

While a roof light or roof window generally fits flat and flush to the roof, a roof lantern can be an architectural feature in itself, increasing the wow factor by adding internal height.

There are structural and practical considerations to be aware of. “More often than not, it would require the existing roof to be replaced, or at least reinforced with additional joists or steels to take the weight of the proposed glass,” says Ryan Schofield, the managing director of Thames Valley Window Company. “It would require a structural engineer to look at it to provide calculations and suggest a suitable design.”

ADVERTISEMENT

No one knows more about hard flooring than Jeff.
Kährs
Kährs
carpetright
Shop now

Unless your home is listed or you live in a conservation area, roof lanterns can usually be fitted under “permitted development”, but check with your local council first. You will need a competent builder or roofer to do the preparation work and the glazing to be fitted by a Fensa-registered glazier or glazing company to ensure the work complies with building regulations.

Clerestory windows

Originating in the Middle East as a form of natural ventilation, and used in cathedrals and churches across Europe to flood naves with natural light, clerestory windows are strips of glazing above eye level or at roof level providing “zenithal”, or overhead, light.

Their modern use is invaluable, the architect Michael Collins says. “The clerestory can obviously provide more privacy and bring natural light and a glimpse of sky into the most intimate domestic settings, shower rooms, dressing areas and bedrooms — an advantage in urban areas. They provide a solution to the common planning issue of locating new windows close to a neighbour’s boundary, and flood gloomy areas within the centre of a dwelling, like staircases and hallways, with daylight.”

Sun tunnels/solar tubes

Invaluable in windowless bathrooms and along dark passageways, sun tunnels are an innovative solution to bring in natural light where it's impossible to install a roof or conventional window. A sun tunnel — basically a tube fitted in a ceiling to reach up towards daylight — can be installed in a pitched or flat roof. Sun tunnels are also a secure option; as far as we know, there are no records of intruders breaking and entering by such means. Velux sun tunnels cost from £271, Roofing Superstore.

Open-plan natural light

Knocking through downstairs walls and adding a rear extension may open up living space, but bring in kitchen cabinets, an island unit, furniture and the rest and, odds on, you will end up with at least one dark corner at the back or side. These can be directed towards more intimate functions, such as dining, of course.

A general rule, Bernard says, is to have the roof beams of the extension as high as possible to maximise the natural light coming in. "The higher the beam, the less obstruction to the light there will typically be." Another idea is to open up the extension horizontally as far as you can, so that the aperture for bringing in natural light is as wide as possible. Roof lights and/or a roof lantern will maximise natural light too, bearing in mind that light from above always goes further.

IN YOUR INBOX

Property newsletter

Go behind closed doors inside Britain's most exclusive homes, get expert advice and find out what's really happening in the property market.

Sign up now ❯

Borrowing natural light

In some homes there's plenty of natural light, but it's in the wrong place. For instance, an en suite bathroom may have a huge window, but the adjoining bedroom is dark and cavern-like. Manea's solution is to use glass partitions between the spaces, which can be frosted or otherwise blurred.

ADVERTISEMENT

No one knows more about hard flooring than Jeff.
Kährs
Kährs
carpetright
Shop now

The architect Carl Croft of Croft Architecture says that clients often struggle to bring natural light into an area of their home where they require privacy. Inspired by the soft diffused light of Japanese Shogi walls — which resemble paper screens — one idea he likes is Kalwall+ Lumira aerogel (kalwall.com), a material made from silica that is highly insulated, water-repellent and light-transmitting.

Basement conversions pose a particular challenge; a structural glass floor-to-ceiling panel can bring in lots of natural light. For his Knightsbridge project Clinch designed the sunken lower-ground floor living room with oversized windows to bring in as much light as possible. Dark hallways and landings can be illuminated by fitting glazed panels above doorways. Glass fitted above kitchen and bedroom doorways should be fire-rated.

Glazed gable

The last word in maximising natural light is a full-height glazed gable, a project that should be undertaken only with professional advice from a structural engineer, an architect and a specialist structural glass company, such as [IQ Glass]() or [Cantifix](). "Glazed gables certainly provide a wealth of natural light, but the major consideration is they are difficult to light-proof, especially if south-facing," Bernard says. "They are an awkward shape for any blind."

Home interiors | Property | Companies

Share ✉ Save ☆

Related articles

MOVE

Little Manor, the Elstree mansion where Elizabeth Taylor stayed, is on sale for £5m

Imagine Elizabeth Taylor's glitzy get-togethers at this pastel-pink thatched mansion in Elstree, a patch of Hertfordshire that has long attracted...

November 19 2021, 12.01am

Victoria Brzezinski

INTERIORS

Which statement bauble to buy for 2021

Here's the secret about baubles that the mainstream media never mentions: you have more than enough. Unless your house burnt down since we...

November 18 2021, 5.00pm

Katrina Burroughs

INTERIORS

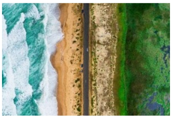
The best drinks cabinets to buy now

Chin-chin — make mine a Manhattan! The craze for home cocktails is going strong, with 36 per cent of Brits planning to do more entertaining at...

November 16 2021, 5.00pm

Victoria Brzezinski

PAID PROMOTIONAL LINKS Promoted by Dianomi



Voluntary Carbon Credits: what they are, why they matter
S&P Global Platts

Seeking long-term capital growth by investing in Chinese equities
abrdn

Reversing the decline of the Asir magpie
Aramco

Recycling carbon to make stronger concrete
Aramco

Unlock the East, unlock the west.
HSBC Global Private Banking

Comments (4)

Comments are subject to our community guidelines, which can be viewed here.

Henrietta Harwood-Smith

H Add to the conversation...

Sort by **Recommended**

Sven S · 2 HOURS AGO

Just replaced the light blocking mass of frames of my Bi-Fold doors for simple nearly frameless sliding patio doors, far more light and a lot less draughts.

Reply ☆ Recommend (1)

McLovin · 34 MINUTES AGO

McLovin says

Avoid purchasing on a house farm.

Reply ☆ Recommend

Ellie · 28 MINUTES AGO

Really interesting article thank you xxx

Reply ☆ Recommend

Lex11 · 30 MINUTES AGO

How are people supposed to open, clean and maintain those high up windows in the first photo? Just wait till there are a few seagull or pigeon droppings and you can't clean them off.

Reply ☆ Recommend

OpenWeb

Feedback

BACK TO TOP

THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

GET IN TOUCH

- About us
- Help
- The Sunday Times Editorial Complaints
- Display advertising
- The Sunday Times corrections
- Contact us
- The Times Editorial Complaints
- Place an announcement
- Classified advertising
- The Times corrections
- Careers

MORE FROM THE TIMES AND THE SUNDAY TIMES

- The Times e-paper
- Times Print Gallery
- Times+
- Schools Guide
- Sportswomen of the Year Awards
- The Sunday Times e-paper
- The Times Archive
- The Sunday Times Rich List
- Newsletters
- Times Appointments
- Times Currency Services
- Times Crossword Club
- Times Expert Traveller
- Best Places to Live
- Podcasts
- The Sunday Times Wine Club
- Sunday Times Driving
- Good University Guide
- Best Places to Stay
- Times Money Mentor

© Times Newspapers Limited 2021.
Registered in England No. 894646. Registered office: 1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF.