

Good Homes Interior-design course

PART 19: CREATE THE IDEAL OPEN-PLAN SPACE



'Unlike the homes of previous eras, in which each room had its own purpose, today open space is of greater importance than privacy. The 1980s and 1990s saw investments being made in warehouse and barn conversions, with an open-plan structure already in place; more recently, properties are being designed with a single-space kitchen, dining and living area. Whether you choose to knock down walls or buy a modern new build, use this guide to make your open-plan living space a success.'

Deborah Drew

Deborah Drew (above), presenter of BBC TV's *DIY SOS*



Using the same fabric at windows and for soft furnishings is one way to bring together the look of your open-plan space. Kitchen/diner in show home, St Mellion Green, Crewe, Cheshire, Bryant Homes

Make a plan

- ★ Draw up a floor plan on graph paper and include windows, doors, radiators and existing architectural features. Consider which space you allocate for certain activities. For instance, it makes good design and financial sense to design your living area around an existing fireplace, or to keep the kitchen where gas connections and plumbing are already in place.
- ★ Think about the different activities your open-plan space will be used for – for example, dining, relaxing, doing homework – then assess which of these are social and which require some privacy. This will help you to decide how many separate areas or zones you may want to create.
- ★ Make a note on your floor plan of spaces that are most likely to become thoroughfares, and pinpoint potential areas of congestion. Consider where to place your furniture and assess whether the amount of space allocated for each area is



EMPLOY A PROFESSIONAL

Going open-plan is not just a case of taking a hammer to a wall. Load-bearing or supporting walls will need replacing with a reinforced steel joist (RSJ) to support the building, while removing internal windows or adding mezzanine levels will require

additional structural support and may affect plumbing and electrics. Always employ a professional rather than tackle a job like this yourself. Plan your budget using three estimates from professional builders, adding a contingency fund

of at least 25% for unforeseen extras. You also need to allocate funds for redecoration costs after the work is completed – the floor, walls and ceiling will all be affected and you may have to move electrical points and fit new skirting.

realistic – this is particularly important when you're planning permanent fixtures such as a kitchen, a low-level wall or sliding doors.

★ Think about the way natural light enters and moves around the space. Ideally, you should try and position activity areas that require a lot of light or ventilation, such as a kitchen or bathroom, nearest to your property's windows.

What about heating?

A common problem with large open-plan spaces is that, as radiators are only fixed to the perimeter walls, heat can fail to reach the centre of the room. One solution is to install under-floor heating – this will help to keep the whole area warm. Good air circulation will also help to distribute heat, so when you come to furnish your space, avoid blocking off radiators with large sofas or a table and chairs. Lagging pipes, hot water tanks and storage

Create a seamless space by using the same flooring throughout.

Bespoke conservatory, from £25,000, Glass Houses



Sliding doors are a simple way to create additional privacy. Black-framed Canto screen sliding doors with acrylic infills, custom-made to order, Draks



cisterns, as well as insulating your roof and fitting draught excluders to doors and windows will prevent heat loss and save money, too.

Get the lighting right

Pay close attention to the lighting scheme in high-activity areas, particularly those where safety is important, such as kitchen and bathroom spaces. Recessed ceiling lights fitted to a dimmer switch are ideal for general lighting, but use pendants, floor and table lights, too, to highlight task areas and add depth to the space. When it comes to decorating, white-painted walls and ceilings and glass walls or floors – especially on mezzanine levels – will all help to increase the levels of light. If you need to use lighting to create a more subdued atmosphere, however – such as in a living area – fabric, Pinoleum or Venetian blinds are ideal. If light needs to be blocked out completely, hang wood or MDF shutters, or go for curtains fitted with blackout lining.

Divide the space

Arrange an open-plan layout into distinct zones, so that work areas can be kept separate from relaxation spaces. Large pieces of furniture such as bookcases, cabinets or console tables are all ideal for dividing space and defining areas. Aim to provide a selection of seating to suit different activities. For instance, sofas can be grouped together for conversation, while a comfy armchair or recliner can

OPEN UP YOUR KITCHEN

- ★ Install low-level kitchen cabinets along a perimeter wall with a window to maximise the amount of natural light at the main task areas.
- ★ Create a division between the cooking and living areas with a group of low-level cabinets or an island unit. If you want to encourage people to gather around this space while you're cooking – for example, when you're entertaining – choose a broad work surface that can be accessed

- from both sides and put stools around it.
- ★ Avoid congestion in the cooking area by keeping seating away from the main work triangle of fridge, hob and work surface.
- ★ If space is limited, invest in integrated appliances for a more streamlined look.
- ★ Noisy, whirring appliances can be a problem in open-plan kitchen-living areas, so go for an ultra-quiet washing machine and dishwasher to keep noise to a minimum.

Integrated appliances are ideal for creating a tidy, streamlined look. Open-plan ground floor of a five-bedroom detached show home in the Aquila development, Bickley, Kent. Bryant Homes



A large corner sofa is ideal for relaxed seating in a large living space. Pillowtalk modular system, from £1,069 for a two-seater sofa, Content by Conran

be placed in a quiet corner for reading. Keep the overall space looking harmonious by using similar paint colours and furnishing fabrics throughout.

Combine kitchen and living areas

The main practical concern in a combined kitchen, living and dining area is ventilation, as cooking smells can settle on soft furnishings and the build up of steam can cause damp. Try to position the hob near a window and as far away from your living area as possible, and fit a good-quality extractor fan that will draw moisture and cooking smells completely out of the building. Choose moisture-resistant tiles, such as vinyl or specially treated hardwood for the floor, to keep it looking its best.

Keep rooms clutter-free

A large living-dining space is likely to contain the most bulky furniture and everyday clutter, so it's important to create a sense of light and space from the start – pale walls and neutral flooring will help achieve this. Make plenty of provision for storage in your plans – multi-function furniture, such as coffee tables with integrated shelves or drawers, hollow seating cubes, and cupboards cleverly fitted into otherwise forgotten recesses will allow you to keep the room looking neat and tidy, but still have books, DVDs and CDs to hand.

▼ **A tall freestanding shelf makes a great room divider and can be used to store books or ornaments without taking up wall space.**

Storage screen (H180 x W200 x D35cm), £1,295, Raft



White walls give small areas a light, airy look. Living area at the This Is Love two-bedroom show apartment in Leith, Strathclyde Homes

MAKE THE MOST OF LIVING-DINING SPACE

★ **Divide the area equally to give your room a balanced feel and, where there is limited space, paint walls in a pale colour to make it seem larger.**

★ **If you're building an extension from scratch, maximise light entering the room by installing French windows leading out into the garden, or fit skylights in the ceiling.** If this isn't possible,

including mirrors will help reflect light around the space.

★ **Start with pale base colours for walls and big pieces of upholstered furniture, like sofas and armchairs, then introduce bolder shades on smaller items such as cushions or blinds for a simple, co-ordinated style. To bring the whole look together, follow colours or patterns through into**

your tableware in the dining area.

★ **Vary the height of lighting using lamps, pendants and wall lights for a balanced look. Include task lighting, such as reading or table lamps in the living area, as well as uplighters to create a soft glow. In the dining area, the table will benefit from a pendant light positioned directly above it.**



'Knocking down walls means less room for storage.

Compensate by fitting tall wall units in the kitchen and consider an island – it will create a focal point while giving you vital storage.'

Organise your work space

The home office is an area most likely to be cluttered with paperwork and having your workstation permanently on display in a living area is never conducive to relaxation, so an organised layout is crucial.

Invest in a desk with drawers, and a cabinet or cupboard with plenty of shelves to store stationery, books, files and accounts out of sight. Choose a design that will blend with the furniture in your living room, or have one customised to fit an awkward space.

Conceal home office equipment in a spacious, well-organised cabinet. Stockholm computer cabinet (H202.5 x W115.5 x D64cm), £2,700. Gustavian



Install a bath in your bedroom

If you have a large guest bedroom and want to add a smart washbasin or bath, think carefully about where it will be positioned, as this will affect the plumbing. To separate the bathing area from the bedroom's sleeping section, put in a waist-height wall – pipes can be discreetly hidden behind it and it provides extra privacy. The best position for a basin and/or bath is near a window where there is plenty of natural light and ventilation – but fit a good-quality extractor fan, too, to keep condensation at bay.

Choose flexible lighting

Lighting is particularly important in an open-plan sleeping/bathing area. Create a flexible scheme so you can adjust it to be bright in the morning when you're waking up and subdued in the evening for a relaxed feel. Recessed ceiling lights are ideal – you could even install separate systems in the bathing and sleeping areas to create different light levels in each.

When it comes to decorating, use the same colour scheme and style of furniture throughout the bedroom for continuity. Neutral or pastel shades are the most relaxing but, if you have an old property, you could go for a bolder colours, like rich reds and greens – try Farrow & Ball's Rectory Red and Breakfast Room Green Estate Emulsion, £22.99 per 2.5ltr.

▼ Choose multi-functional, versatile furniture.

Sunningdale footstool in Connaught fabric (H41 x W66 x D51cm), £575, Multiyork



▲ Different floor levels define a change of use from bedroom to bathroom.

Viva Cherry three-strip wood flooring, from £23.44 per sq m, Tarkett

'Some walls are load-bearing, which means they support a structure above. The removal of these walls without building regulations approval is dangerous, and could invalidate your insurance. Never assume that because a wall is studwork and plasterboard that it is not a supporting wall.'





◀ This loft bed is ideal for homes with high ceilings, creating an extra place below the bed for seating.

Tromsö powder-coated steel loft bed (H206 x W147 x L208cm) from £71.20, Ikea

Build a mezzanine level

If floor space is limited but you have high ceilings, consider a mezzanine floor. This extra platform is a popular option for sleeping or office areas, because it isn't visible at eye level, so gives greater privacy. You will need at least two metres of head height on both levels. The best position for a mezzanine is above an area that isn't needed for light as the new floor will cast a shadow – you could install one over a corner of the room that houses storage, for example.

Design a multi-function family room

If you have children, confining their toys, books, CDs and DVDs to one or two specific areas in the room will dramatically reduce clutter. Try to give them their own play zone, with enough storage for



'Remember, open-plan living allows you to see lots of areas from any given point. It is very important to avoid clutter – tidy up your papers, catalogues and post every day.'



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their things to be tidied away when not in use, and consider investing in folding screens that can be positioned to hide chaotic corners. If you have opted to decorate your open-plan space with bare walls and wood or tiled floors, sounds will echo and multiply in relation to the number of people in the area, but using rugs and plenty of soft furnishings will absorb some of the noise as well as helping to define the different zones.

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details, see
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ESSENTIAL CONTACTS

★ Federation of Master Builders

(0800 015 2522; www.findabuilder.co.uk) represents more than 13,000 small or medium building firms nationwide – use its search facility to find one near you.

★ Electrical Contractors' Association

(020 7313 4800; www.eca.co.uk) promotes quality and safety in the electrical field. It has an online register

of accredited firms that comply with all ECA regulations.

★ Royal Institute of British Architects

(020 7580 5533; www.architecture.com) offers a range of services to help you find an architect in your area.

★ Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

(0870 333 1600; www.rics.org.uk) will help you find a chartered surveyor suited to your project.

Plan your layout on paper first to identify the ideal position for furniture. Ektorp three-seater sofa, £345; Liatorp storage system, from £165 for a bookcase (H214 x W96 x D34cm), Ikea

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