

# What do modern families want?

Zones to give the kids some privacy, garden rooms for adults to escape to, lots of hidden storage and even a proper slide. These are the latest must-haves for the perfect family home

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Milicent, in West Sussex, has a bowling alley — yours for £19.5m (savills.co.uk)

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Families used to trade up the ladder every few years, but now they're staying put, thanks to stamp-duty hikes, moving costs and an increasingly stagnant market. In recent years, they have been buying their "forever home" younger and younger, so it pays to get it right first time. Here are the top 10 trends to consider for a happy family home.

## 1 Storage walls

One of the problems with open-plan living is that when you knock down walls, you lose storage space, says Paul Ruff, co-founder of the London firm Studio Ruffnassetti. And because you've done away with small rooms, your new extension has to double as a playroom/study, and is buried in toys and family detritus. As a result, architects are increasingly being asked for feature walls that double as full-height cupboards, to hide all the clutter away.



Feature walls can hide toys and utilities, like this iroko storage wall in Islington ([neildusheiko.com](http://neildusheiko.com))

NEIL DUSHEIK

It's not just toys: the London architect Neil Dusheiko designs textured timber feature walls that hide everything: the fridge, the microwave, the washing machine, the pantry, even the loo. "Feature walls hide utilities, but can be part of interior designs," he says. "You can bring in rich, warm materials — we used iroko timber at a house in Islington. In Victorian houses, you had compartmentalised spaces for different functions. Now, with open-plan living, this is a small way of separating the utility spaces from the living spaces."

The biggest storage issue for many modern families is the pram. “They are colossal now, and some of them won’t fit through the door,” Ruff says. He is often asked by clients to build outdoor pram and scooter storage at the front or side of the house; inside, he revamps cupboards under the stairs with concertina doors that can fit a pram.



Broken-plan: Open-plan living is giving way to a more flexible arrangement — big rooms divided into zones and nooks so families can be together but apart, with sliding doors that can close off a space when required. This room in Hammersmith is a good example ([neildusheiko.com](http://neildusheiko.com))

CHARLES HOSEA

## 2 Broken-plan living

The backlash against open-plan is in full swing, as families realise that walls have their advantages: privacy, noise reduction, cosiness. Yet rather than reverting to poky rooms, architects are breaking up open-plan spaces into zones and nooks. “Parents with young children want to have them close, but that phase doesn’t last long,” says Meredith Bowles, founder of Mole Architects, in Cambridge. “It’s about different degrees of privacy, of permitting withdrawal while feeling together.”

This can be done with a nook with a desk, which can be enclosed by sliding or

concertina doors when required. Bookcases and half-height walls also help to create zones, as do T- or L-shaped rooms where an office can be tucked away or a kitchen hatch introduced. In a West Sussex house, Wilkinson King Architects designed a glass-enclosed reading room within a large open-plan living space, so you can see the family, but read in peace.

Ruff extends the zones outside, past the bifold doors into the garden. Hedges form a wall so teenagers can have privacy at the back of the garden. “It’s about establishing subtle boundaries, passive supervision,” he says. “With broken-plan, parents can be close enough to see and hear, but not smother.”

Desk nooks are said to motivate kids to study. “Getting teens to do this can be really hard,” Ruff says. “You have to keep half an eye on them. Rather than sending them to their room, by having them stay in the family room, you’re getting them to do homework without feeling like they are, because they’re still part of family life.” Parents can answer questions — or lend a sympathetic ear when the stress gets too much.



Internal windows allow parents to keep an eye on their children — and vice versa — at Pear Tree House ([edgleydesign.co.uk](http://edgleydesign.co.uk))

### 3 Internal windows

These are very much in vogue, and cosseting parents love them. In a Victorian house in Hackney, east London, Scott Architects kept the sash window at the back of the living room when they added an extension. This means adults can have a party in the living room while monitoring the kids in the kitchen/family room behind. “It’s a trend to fill in the side return and keep that window,” Ruff says. “It’s also an architectural feature. They’re beautiful windows.”





The Power House (paularcherdesign.co.uk)

Internal windows are not only used on the same storey. At the Power House, in Highbury, north London, Paul Archer Design built one in a music room looking down to the kitchen. And the architect Jake Edgley can always spot his children at Pear Tree House, in Dulwich, southeast London, where an internal courtyard is enveloped by glass on three sides.

“It’s designed around a pear tree, with views across the courtyard,” Edgley says. “We can keep an eye on the kids when they’re on the other side of the house. The free-flowing space and poured concrete floor gives a sense of freedom — they race scooters from one end to the other.”



Swish sheds are in high demand, as adults seek peaceful retreats from noisy open-plan living rooms. This one in Belsize Park, north London, is used as a yoga studio ([neildusheiko.com](http://neildusheiko.com))

AGNESE SANVITO

#### 4 Garden studios

This isn't a new trend, but demand is soaring, says Sophie Rogerson, managing director of the London buying agency RFR. "People feel stuck. They can't afford to trade up, they don't have room for a study and sitting rooms are all open-plan now, so there's nowhere to hide. At the same time, more people are working from home."

Garden studios don't usually require planning permission if they are one storey high (less than 2.5 metres), take up less than 50% of the garden and are not bedrooms. They are often used as offices or adult retreats. After he built a yoga studio for a house in Belsize Park, north London, Dusheiko received 20 requests for one. But many parents turn them into teen zones later.

"Parents really want homes where their children will bring their friends," Ruff says. "They want them to feel comfortable and have some autonomy, so they won't go and drink White Lightning in the park."







The Lucas family love the slide at Kew House, in southwest London, which is on sale for £3.8m ([themodernhouse.net](http://themodernhouse.net))

VICKI COUCHMAN

## 5 Fun, fun, fun

Keen on “bringing the community club home”, as Ruff puts it, parents are investing in climbing walls, soft play areas, trampolines, treehouses or even a bowling alley, in the case of Millicent, a seven-bedroom home in Lurgashall, West Sussex, now on the market for £19.5m ([savills.co.uk](http://savills.co.uk)).

In their four-bedroom home in Kew, southwest London, Tim and Jo Lucas built a slide from the ground floor to the basement. It’s a hit with local children, say the couple, who are both engineers. They designed the space to encourage kids to run around: there’s an internal bridge, a courtyard with a window through which the kids can jump onto a sofa in the living room, and a basement with Astroturf.

“They wanted the children to be able to run across a bridge, jump out of a window, go down a slide, come up the stairs — to have circuits, loops,” says the architect Stuart Piercy, director of Piercy & Company. Fun it may be, but the Lucases are now selling up for £3.8m so they can move closer to central London ([themodernhouse.com](http://themodernhouse.com)).

## 6 Hi-tech homes

Families used to argue about which TV programme to watch — now they compete for bandwidth. To ensure that a family of five can surf in peace, Virgin Media suggests an ultrafast broadband connection (at least 100Mbps). That would allow three people to stream Netflix in high definition simultaneously, while still leaving 25Mbps for two other people to surf the web, play online games, make video calls or stream music from Spotify. Just over half of the UK has access to ultrafast broadband, and more than 90% of us can get superfast broadband (at least 24 Mbps). To see what’s available in your area, visit [broadbandchoices.co.uk](http://broadbandchoices.co.uk).

Too much internet, however, risks creating zombie children. Crestron Pyng, a new app from the home automation company, lets parents monitor and limit their children’s web use from afar. Crestron gizmos also allow parents to turn down music, switch off lights and block adult TV shows from wherever they are. Pity the children of today ([crestron.eu](http://crestron.eu)).



This Belfast house has a family of five on one side and the grandfather next door. They have separate entrances, but an atrium links the homes ([johnkennedyarchitect.com](http://johnkennedyarchitect.com))

DONAL MCCANN

## 7 Multigenerational layouts

As more grandparents get roped into childcare, or are scared away from retirement homes by high costs and frightening headlines, multigenerational homes are on the rise. But granny is no longer being shoved into the attic. Sometimes she's in a hip garden pad.

Better still, the architect John Kennedy has built a funky home in Belfast where the generations are separate but equal, with a layout that occasionally unites them. There are different entrances and garden terraces; a central atrium separates the younger family from the grandfather, who has his own living room, kitchen, study and bedroom, but uses the same garage and utility room. The main home has a living room on the ground floor, but there is a larger first-floor living room for bigger gatherings, as well as a guest suite for visiting relatives ([johnkennedyarchitect.co.uk](http://johnkennedyarchitect.co.uk)).

## 8 Downstairs loos

“Mum and dad now expect a downstairs WC in family homes,” says Robin Chatwin, a director at Savills estate agency. “It’s easier for smaller children. Any new home has to be built with one, and period properties can usually accommodate one easily. Even a small loo under the stairs adds a premium — we’ve had buyers lower offers on homes that didn’t have one by £30,000 or more.”

## **9 Master suites**

It’s not all about what children want. Master suites are now a must-have, Dusheiko says — all that togetherness in the open-plan living spaces does not extend to bathrooms. No self-respecting supermum is prepared to queue for the shower in the morning. Or to take a candlelit bubble bath with her kids banging on the door and their clothes strewn across the floor.

As for those coddled children who demand their own ensuites, not all parents are caving in. “I have one client who has multiple children, but refused to provide a separate bathroom for each of them,” says Mark Charter, partner at Carter Jonas estate agency in Oxford. “Instead, he has a large bathroom with six sinks.”





Key features in vestibules and mud rooms include floor-to-ceiling cupboards, benches with concealed storage, coat pegs, shelves and stone floors (lewisalderson.com)

## 10 Vestibules

At this time of year, front halls are a disaster area of scattered schoolbags, shoes, coats and sports gear. The vestibule, or mud room, controls the madness. And with more terraced houses expanding at the back, you can squeeze one in at the front of the house, Dusheiko says, by closing off the door to the living room and moving it further back.

Must-haves include bench seating (for putting on shoes) with a lift-up lid concealing storage, according to the cabinet makers Lewis Alderson. Also on the list: full-height cloak and shoe cupboards to hide things (visible coat pegs are okay); a rack of shelves for hats and umbrellas; open slatted shelves for boot storage, which makes for quicker drying and better ventilation; tongue-and-groove cladding, to stop walls becoming grubby with handprints; and a stone floor to withstand mud and moisture



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