

# THE SPACE

# between us

By Bethany Hayes

They say life is for sharing, and for the place you proudly call home, having open, free-flowing spaces hosts a plethora of benefits that extend far beyond a spacious appearance. In conversation with Steven Hedger, director of the multi-award-winning Hedger Constructions, Bethany Hayes unpacks the ins and outs of open-plan living – discerning exactly how this particular layout can encourage connection throughout not only your home, but with those you love.



Being one of the dominant architectural trends since the 1990s, the open-floor plan has found its rightful place in homes and buildings across the world, where the goal of a functional, communal living space is in mind. Fast forward 30 years, and the open-plan layout is still one that's heavily favoured. For Steven Hedger, who has spent the cumulative years of his career redefining modern living with Hedger Constructions' innovative homes, it is perhaps the open-plan layouts emphasis on functionality that is key to the "successful flow of the home".

## FAVOUR THE FLOW

When picturing your ideal home, chances are, a central living space that affords the convenience of kitchen and lounge proximity comes to mind – and rightly so. Unlike closed separate spaces, eliminating walls and opting for an open-plan living area propels airflow and encourages a shared source of light. In essence, and open-plan design is the unification of what would otherwise be zoned spaces, and according to Mr Hedger, these layouts have continued to increase in popularity. "An open-plan layout gives the perspective of a larger home and can improve the flow of the space," he explains. Moreover, to bolster this flow of space even further, look to the light. "The use of large windows in open-floor plans helps maximise natural light and adds to the perception of space, while also capturing views."

So, where to start? If you've already got an existing abode, fear not. Mr Hedger affirms that converting your existing home into an open-plan layout can actually "be achieved in a number of ways". "Removing internal walls between the kitchen and living spaces, and reorienting cabinetry and benches is a popular approach," the director explains. Alternatively, Mr Hedger affirms that homeowners can consider "combining two rooms into a larger family space" – but does caution that this may mean sacrificing a spare bedroom, so it is best suited to a home that includes some rooms that aren't frequently used.

And, if the other two options aren't feasible for you, it's time to spread your wings. "Existing homes commonly add a wing and extend outwards to create a new lounge area," Mr Hedger says. "Often with this approach the lounge opens out onto a deck or outdoor entertainment space." It's all about what will suit you and your family's needs both now – and in the future.

## YOU'RE IN ZONE

Functionality is absolutely paramount when considering a renovation or new build, and this extends to the inclusion of open-plan living spaces within your home. "Open-plan works well for shared spaces, encouraging family connection and socialisation, but privacy is important too," Mr Hedger flags. While kitchen, dining and living spaces represent the open-plan layout like a dream, there are some parts of the home that quite simply, cannot be open-plan. "Bedrooms and home offices should be zoned for privacy, to balance the needs of all home occupants," notes the director. "Open-plan living spaces provide a communal, central area for meal preparation, dining and family relaxation, while also maintaining private zones for bedrooms," he continues. "This flexibility ensures the social – and private – needs of all occupants are met."

It is perhaps this unique combination within a home, of both open-plan spaces and zoned areas for privacy and focus, that can truly meet the demands of modern living. "Some of the most successful [open-plan homes] are those that have embraced a combination of open-plan living with private zoning," Mr Hedger says.

If this is something that resonates a need within your family, consider using the middle of the home as its social hub, with rooms instead at either end. Creating a "parent retreat at one end of the property, and positioning the children's rooms at the other end enables privacy, with a large central open-plan area in the middle of the home for socialising". This ensures that moments of connection and social entertainment remain at the home's core, while other family members can retreat to their own personal space as required.

## ENTERTAIN US

Now that you've established the location of your open-plan living space, turn your attention to the furniture occupying this space. Without the literal barriers of walls, your open-plan living area can seem vastly bigger – and it's worth holding back on excessive clutter and considering the positioning of your furniture to elevate the illusion of this space even further. "Scale and smart positioning of furniture enables a living space to appear more open and larger – too much furniture clutters the space," says Mr Hedger. "However, furniture can also be used to create intimate spaces within a large open area," he continues. "Putting a lot of thought into furniture selection will often yield the best results."

When considering the entertainment functionality of your home, why not turn your thoughts to the humble alfresco space? Mr Hedger confirms that if the dining or living areas within your home are positioned at the rear of the property, adding to the space by "extending out onto a patio or deck is an excellent option". This way, your family and friends can naturally trickle out to the deck and patio when the occasion permits, as this versatile space becomes an extension of the living room, and enables "great flow in the warmer months". "The use of a large, glass sliding window or door systems is a great way to achieve this, reconceptualising how the interior and exterior work together to create a cohesive and welcoming design," the expert explains. Hedger also flags that the inclusion of outdoor heating and weather protection will enable this alfresco space to be used all year round.

If you're on a budget, there are still plenty of options to enhance the flow and open feel of your home – without a crazy renovation or complete revamp. "For a cost-effective approach, often leaving the kitchen in its existing location is better, as the services are already in place and can be expensive to relocate," the director affirms. "However, just modifying the orientation of kitchen benches can have a big impact to open the space," he adds. Consider a long kitchen bench, as opposed to a U-shape, which Hedger dubs a common and effective way to streamline a space, and the floor room around the bench itself.

From encouraging greater flow and cohesion throughout your home's hub, to its limitless benefits for entertaining, an open-plan layout really is the embodiment of modern living. While still ensuring privacy where needed through clever zoning, opening up your home truly unleashes the opportunity for new levels of versatility and connection.

Photography by Paul West