



INTERIOR DESIGN ADVICE

# HOW TO WIN AT *OPEN-PLAN LIVING*

Spaces that flow are the dream, but can be challenging to pull off in terms of how they function and how they look. We've brought together three experts to share their tips and solutions to help make it work for you

## ON WHEELS

Divide an open-plan space with a moveable unit, so it's easy to shift things around. Try Casey bookcase on wheels, £429.99, Wayfair. Arundel table, £1,380; Wardley dining chairs, £290 each, all Neptune



**STYLED SCHEME**

'Repeat colours, finishes and textures across an open-plan space to "sew" the interior together,' says Clare.

**O**pen-plan spaces, where we can entertain, keep an eye on the kids and relax, take a lot of planning and insider know-how to get right. We asked a property expert, an interior designer and an architect how they would do open plan...

**OPEN-PLAN AREAS ARE GREAT FOR FAMILY TIME, BUT WHAT IF WE WANT OUR OWN SPACE?**

'That's always the big challenge,' says property expert Kunle Barker. 'Open plan looks great in magazines and TV shows, but you are all in one space, with noise, cooking smells and everything else going on. The key is to design a space that has the ability to be transformed into different zones by some kind of barrier.' Clare Pascoe

of Pascoe Interiors agrees: 'Take the time to plan the space to determine how different layouts can create different opportunities.' Architect Craig Marston of Ke-Design always tries to include a separate room to accompany an open-plan space. 'This could be a snug where people can shut themselves away,' he says.

**WHAT DOES 'BROKEN PLAN' MEAN AND HOW DO WE DO IT?**

'People imagine open plan as one large rectangular-shaped room, which can often feel too open, cold or stark,' says Craig. 'But broken plan sees an open-plan space divided up either by a partition, like half walls, glass or slatted screens, or some form of room divider, like a bookcase or furniture.' Clare says: 'Think of broken plan as planning an open-plan space to



**CONSIDERED BUYS**

Kunle suggests pocket doors to create zones: 'Use some of the budget on the fabric of your project, the things you'll live with for 10 years or so.'

*“If you can get open-plan living right, then it's beautiful”*

**KUNLE BARKER** PROPERTY EXPERT

## SPACE AWARE

'Designing an open space takes confidence and expertise. It's so important to get it right, otherwise you end up with a huge box and furniture around the outside,' says Kunle.



work for different functions. Some open-plan areas have corners, which create natural zones, while for others, we need to create recesses and nooks with furniture.'

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BROKEN PLAN VS OPEN PLAN?

'We love open plan for the sense of space,' says Kunle. 'But when you lose a wall, you technically lose space to put things on or against. So breaking things up, moving furniture away from the walls and using it to divide the space helps to settle things down.' With broken plan, you get the best of both, says Craig: 'You get the benefits of open-plan, but within zones.'

### HOW DO YOU DIVIDE UP AN OPEN-PLAN SPACE FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES?

'You need to create furniture groups that create natural zones,' says Clare. 'If these seem

uncomfortably close to one another, try a linking/dividing element, like a sofa group that backs on to a sideboard that faces a dining table.' Think about how you use the space, advises Kunle: 'When people talk of open-plan or broken plan, what they are really talking about is how they use a space: parties, then that's open plan; reading or listening to a jazz LP, then that's broken plan. The key thing is not to forget storage. Most of us don't have our spaces finite, so they need to be multi-functional.'

### HOW DO YOU GIVE EACH ZONE ITS OWN MOOD?

'Change the floor material, wall colour, textures, lighting or furniture,' says Craig. 'It's about the things that are easily changed, that aren't structural,' agrees Kunle, who loves using plants. Clare likes more of a cohesive scheme across zones, preferring to use lighting for differentiation. 'I think you need to

## BOX ROOM

'A separate laundry room need only be less than a metre deep,' says Kunle.



repeat treatments across an open-plan space to “sew” the interior together.’

**SHOULD WE LIGHT EACH AREA DIFFERENTLY?**

‘Lighting needs to be flexible,’ says Kunle. ‘It’s not just about fitting 20 spotlights and that’s it. We talk of colour and dressing a room, but this can be massively affected by lighting. You need ways to change the mood easily – spots, pendants, table lamps, floor lamps or even your jazz music lighting scheme.’ Craig agrees: ‘Lighting gives a space its own identity.’ Clare adds: ‘The kitchen area needs to be brightly lit with spotlights that can be turned down when the space is “resting”; the dining table needs direct cones of light from above

and the living space needs low lights – in terms of both position and emission.’

**HOW DO WE MAKE A BIG SPACE FEEL COSY AND INVITING?**

‘Big, open-plan spaces can feel stark and cold. Try using plenty of textures and a rug,’ says Craig, who also suggests a change in ceiling height above a living area to make it cosier. ‘It’s everything we’ve spoken about so far,’ says Kunle. ‘If your furniture is pushed up against the walls, everything is painted white with spotlights, then it will feel like a factory and not a home. It’s fine for a space to be decluttered, but things like plants and rugs can make a huge difference.’ Clare says to layer

*“I love to see repetition in the palette of an open-plan space as this creates a calming base”*

**CLARE PASCOE** DIRECTOR OF PASCOE INTERIORS

**SIZE MATTERS**  
‘Don’t max out on everything just because you have a large space – consider proportions that work,’ says Clare.



**HIDE AWAY**  
Think about what you want guests to see when you are preparing food. Raising a section of an island can help hide the dishes.

**3 OF THE BEST BOOKCASE DIVIDERS**



**ART PIECE**  
Vox Ribbon tall bookcase, £745, Cuckooland

**MULTI-USE**  
Paulo shelf, £275, Next Home



**STEP UP**  
Lene Bjerre Depot bookcase, £700, Sweetpea & Willow



## STYLE & DECOR

up textures in a simple palette that revolves around a degree of monochrome, 'like cream with navy or a sharp grey with an almost black/green, which work just as well as classic white and black.'

### HOW DO WE CHOOSE THE RIGHT SIZE FURNITURE?

'Make cardboard cut-outs of potential furniture,' says Kunle, 'and move them around within the space.' Craig agrees that you need to think differently: 'A large L-shaped sofa in a small area can make the area feel bigger, while in a big space, furniture up against the walls can make it feel empty.' Clare says: 'Plan, plan and plan again. Either use CAD or draw by hand.'

### HOW DO YOU HEAT A BIG SPACE EFFICIENTLY?

Clare says: 'Embarking on an

interior refurb poses a great opportunity to upgrade insulation under new flooring and within wall cavities, as well as windows.' Kunle agrees: 'Underfloor heating works really well, but you have to make sure the space is well insulated.' Craig adds: 'People think that a large, open-plan space will be cold or heating it will be expensive. But, if the space is south-facing, there will be natural solar gain from the sun. In the summer this can be too much, so ventilation to keep cool is important, too.' Craig and Clare would also go for a log burner – 'They create a wonderful ambience as well as a lot of heat,' says Clare.

### WHAT ABOUT NOISY APPLIANCES?

'We will always propose a separate room or hidden space for a utility room,' says Craig. Kunle adds: 'For

*“With more of us working from home, open plan might not be practical – that’s where broken plan comes in”*

**CRAIG MARSTON** DIRECTOR OF KE-DESIGN

### WORK THE LAYOUT

'Some open-plan areas have corners, which create zones, while for others, we need to create recesses with furniture,' says Clare.



### FOCAL POINT

'Lighting can help create zones,' says Craig. Try the same pendant, but in different sizes, above both the island and dining table.



FEATURE JENNIFER MORGAN PHOTOGRAPHS T1-MEDIACONTENT.COM

our open-plan space we bought headphones for the TV and piano, fitted the washing machine in a sound-proof box and bought the most expensive low-noise extractor we could find.' There are also a few design tricks, as Clare explains: 'Acoustics are key to controlling noise in open-plan spaces. Soft furnishings help, but you can also add acoustic materials to walls.'

### **I DON'T WANT ALL OUR COOKING MESS TO BE ON SHOW - HOW DO I HIDE IT?**

Clare loves dishwasher drawers and recommends a double sink. Craig remembers a client who chose to put the hob on the island rather than the sink. 'She said that you don't leave your pots and pans on the hob when finished, but you leave the washing up next to the sink. They didn't want to walk in

and see dishes in the middle of the room.' Kunle loves the idea of a 'kitchen wardrobe', where you can put things such as toasters out of sight. 'It's about keeping a nice sleek feel to your kitchen,' he says.

### **HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH CLUTTER BUILD-UP IN A MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE?**

'A feature or partition wall can be used for books, but where space is limited, it could also house everyday items nice enough to have on display – like serving bowls and glassware,' says Craig. 'For items you want to keep hidden, go for secret storage – bench seating or a shallow feature wall with concealed cupboards work really well.' Clare believes it comes back to planning. 'A place for everything and everything in its place' is her mantra.

## ***MEET THE PROFESSIONALS...***

**CRAIG MARSTON, DIRECTOR OF KE-DESIGN (KE-DESIGN.CO.UK).** Based in Shropshire, Craig has created a small, design-focused architectural studio offering traditional, modern, contemporary design backed up with good construction knowledge.

**CLARE PASCOE, DIRECTOR OF PASCOE INTERIORS (PASCOEINTERIORS.COM)** A BIID-registered interior designer, Clare has been delivering ahead-of-the-trend, award-winning interiors, championing mid-century style, the best of British and sustainable design, since 2000. She's based in West Sussex.

**KUNLE BARKER, PROPERTY EXPERT, WRITER AND BROADCASTER (KUNLEBARKER.COM)** In 2004 Kunle set up Illustrious Homes, an award-winning construction and design management company, specialising in delivering high-profile projects, on time, on budget and of quality. He's also a brand ambassador for InFrame Space.