



📷 Architect David McCrae's home, by mm+j architects, has an unusual staircase design which breaks up the space to provide storage next to the kitchen bench.

Home Mag

Forget open-plan living, there's a new wave of 'broken plan' design taking hold

Chelsea Clark, The Daily Telegraph
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REWIND 25 years. It was the early 1990s, Seinfeld and The X Files ruled the TV ratings, fashion stores were full of grunge-inspired flannel shirts and Silverchair were top of the music charts.

At home, Australians suddenly became obsessed with knocking out walls and designing homes with huge spaces that dominated floorplans. And so began our love affair with open-plan design.

It was a bold departure from the homes of the early part of the 20th century where rooms were divided by walls and the kitchen, dining room and lounge room were three distinctly separate — sometimes very small — spaces.

The new design style was a sensation and, even today, we see it as the predominant layout in new and renovated homes.

In recent years, however, there has been a subtle but significant shift and it looks as though 2017 will be the year “broken plan” finally breaks through.



📷 The Melody by Kurmond Homes has a partially open butler's pantry separated by open shelving.

Broken plan — a phrase coined by UK architect Mary Duggan last year — refers to a transitional movement between the modern open-plan layout and traditional separated home layouts.

It keeps all the functionality that we love about open-plan living, but defines separate living spaces, giving an element of privacy and defining each zone as a separate function.

“People are becoming more aware of the possibilities and solutions available and have a desire to add a little more privacy to living areas, creating snugs or office zones,” says builder Daniel Mazzei from Mazzei Homes.

“It’s particularly prevalent among those who have large, young families or grandchildren and wish to be able to keep an eye on their activities while also continuing with their own agendas.”

Architect David McCrae from Manly’s mm+j architects says part of the methodology of broken-plan floor design is to create a path around the home.

“It can help cut traffic through the middle of a space, meaning you can often help the segmented area feel larger,” he says.

WHAT’S BEHIND “BROKEN PLAN” DESIGN?

According to UK architect Mary Duggan (above), our love of technology is part of the push behind a move to broken plan design.

She says increased iPad and tablet use is creating a demand for quiet spaces around the home, and “grand lounges are becoming snugs”.

Builder Daniel Mazzei says personal devices are changing how we use the available living space.

“Rather than the whole family sitting around the one TV, we’re now seeing a surge in design requests that call for split levels, and breakaway zones so family members can do their own thing,” he says.

More people working from home and children staying at home longer are also factors in a more divided approach.



📷 Plan partial walls well to include storage, fittings or heating, such as this Elderton Homes design which includes a fireplace.

FUNCTIONAL JOINERY

One of the best ways to create broken plan is to use lower height joinery, McCrae says.

“A dwarf wall has a kind of 1970s retro quality to it which we’re beginning to see a lot of people choosing,” he says.

A dwarf or half-wall between a dining area and kitchen retains that visual block from the mess of cooking when you’re enjoying a meal with family or guests.

“A plaster divide that can separate spaces without removing their connectedness is an easy way to introduce sections within rooms,” McCrae says.

Depending on the size of the wall you want to create, Mazzei says this is even a job that could be tackled by the home DIY-er.

The dwarf wall technique also works well in larger bedrooms where you want to separate a sleeping area from a wardrobe or even a small sitting area.

“Small walls with integrated storage serves two functions, so it’s a really effective solution for a lot of people,” McCrae says.

SMART SHELVING

One of the biggest complaints about open-plan design is that mess or clutter can be difficult to conceal.

“People don’t like the fact you can see all the mess in every space,” says Rawson Homes interior designer Julia Johnston.

“It’s easy to make open-plan spaces look confusing with an overload of clutter so you need to be careful about how to furnish it to keep clutter at bay.”

One solution that also helps break up and define a space, is open shelf storage. You can have it built-in or choose from the options from retailers such as Ikea or Freedom.

Ideal for renters, cube-shaped shelving can be used in the middle of an open-plan space as a divider and could also be placed horizontally for sideboard-style storage.



📷 Architect David McCrae’s home has an unusual staircase design which breaks up the space to provide storage next to the kitchen bench.

SPLIT LEVELS AND MEZZANINES

An extra stepped level (think sunken lounge) is a great way to subdivide a large space and create separate zones for living, dining, working or just relaxing.

But bear in mind adding a secondary level is a structural change and will require considerable planning, time and expense.

If you're planning a renovation, employing a split level should be a consideration.

The stairs could also be a space divider — as used in David McCrae's own home where open-tread stairs create an easily accessible but hidden storage space for large items such as his bicycle.

Interior designer Janik Dalecki from Dalecki Design says the split level doesn't need to be dramatic to be effective.

“With this design, you can still have a completely open-plan layout with all the benefits that brings, but the rooms themselves function in a broken-plan way, with the clear definition of zones,” he says.

“This can be further layered with the introduction of varying materials across the different levels, such as a change of floor or ceiling material, giving the final fine tuning to a multi-layered zone.”

LOVING THE LIGHT

One of the benefits of open-plan design is the potential for a huge amount of natural light that you can let into a space.

Partial or lowered walls and open shelving mean spaces such as studies and even butler's pantries no longer need to be kept in the dark.

“You can even incorporate internal windows or features such as plantation shutters to add style,” Mazzei says.

This could be extended to small glass walls or balustrades on mezzanine levels.

But don't think you need windows to introduce window dressings.

“Recently, I have started to see internal curtains being used successfully as dividers,” Mazzei says.

“They can be elegant or contemporary, depending on the style and fabric selected.”



📷 Try this vertical garden design by Garden Beet for something different

KEEPING IT GREEN

If installing custom joinery or a split level just isn't possible in your home, consider creative ways to divide or zone a space using greenery, such as this unusual design from vertical garden designers Garden Beet (above). An internal green wall or simple hanging planters can be enough to segment a space.

Furniture also works as a divider, as long as you get the scale right.

A high-back chair is a favourite of interior designers as it can create privacy for a reading corner and, paired with a side table and lamp, is the perfect “getaway spot” for a quiet cup of tea.

More: Garden Beet gardenbeet.com

Dalecki Design daleckidesign.com.au

Mazzei Homes mazzeihomes.com.au

mm+j Architects mmjarchitects.com.au

Rawson Homes rawsonhomes.com.au