

reorganising a room



MY favourite room

House consultant Eva Byrne revels in the freedom of a flexible open plan living area. She tells us how the flow between the various parts of the room is perfect for harmonious family life.

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The three metre table in the dining area is perfect for Zita's art projects, and it takes centre stage in this middle section of the long room. The Series 7 chair by Arne Jacobsen is the quintessential dining chair and is a perfect match for this elegant iroko table

The musical family play piano, harp and double bass, so it's vital that everyone has space to practice. The space was minimal five years ago and now it's full of instruments, as well as the various accouterments that children gather for their hobbies, from reading to arts and crafts



Eva finds that the family tend to gravitate towards the kitchen, and this handy 1.5 metre table joins up to the three metre table in the living room to form an extra-long table for larger meals. It's not hard to see why Eva loves to incorporate their north-facing garden into the house, as the outdoor space adds light and life to the capacious living area



Our whole ground floor is open plan and it breaks up into three spaces. We have the living room at the front with the piano in it, the dining room in the middle with a large table for eating and doing arts and crafts, and at the back we have the kitchen. Sliding screens separate the three spaces, which makes it extremely flexible and means that we're not stuck with the one large space all the time. The alternative would have been to break it up into separate rooms, which would have been a shame because the light in that space is fantastic. It's a very bright, tall and spacious room, with ceilings that are three metres tall. I love the way that it opens into a garden at one end and a courtyard at the other; which gives a great feeling of space.

We built the mews five years ago and designed the space ourselves, as myself and my husband are both architects. We had been living in a second floor apartment of a period house and we were determined to live on the ground floor; with a mews, you have the option to put the living room on the first floor; but we wanted to have that flow from inside to outside, which is what drove the design.

We have a little TV upstairs, because I think that it would be hard to have a television in an open plan space, though if we are all watching something we bring the television downstairs. At any one time of the day I might be cooking dinner in the kitchen, our daughter might be at the table in the middle doing an art project, our son may be playing in the living area, and my husband could be on his laptop.

Because there are no corridors there is more space to use. The walls are white and the floor is tiled in white terazzo. These two decisions were based on enhancing the light in the room; the room is sixteen and a half metres long and four metres wide and we wanted to get in as much light as possible and reflect it around the room. The white walls form a backdrop for art, otherwise it would all be very busy. It's actually very calm. A lot of the furniture was specifically made for the space, and it is all made from either iroko or birch ply. The living room table is three metres long and the kitchen table is one and a half metres long, so the two can be joined

together to make one really long table. A lot of the furniture is on castors, which makes it really flexible since we can whisk it around as we please, and some of it is also built in. It only takes a few weeks to have a piece of furniture made, from thinking of the item, to drawing it up and having it made.

Everything is a response to a particular issue. For example, my daughter loves art, so storage must be carefully considered. The room is driven by how things evolve, like the bookshelves, which are there to divide the kitchen and living room. We were looking for things that are versatile but not precious. It's a family home, so there was never going to be any 'don't do this, don't do that' in our house. Robust was the word I had in mind – there is a dog in the house as well! All the covers on the furniture are removable and washable. Our house has evolved and is continually evolving; five years ago it was bare and minimal, then a harp, piano and double bass arrived. I play the piano, I went back to take lessons in Walton's, I find it very relaxing. Oscar plays the double bass and Zita plays the harp. Our collection of paintings has also evolved over the years, it's something that we have always enjoyed. I like plants inside as well. We have quite an amount of plants indoors, they give a nice outdoors-indoors feel, and it's nice to have something natural growing in the room. Things are going to change, certainly. We plan to extend. We're conscious of the kids needing somewhere to bring their friends, but it's not about letting them run amok – we have to be happy too! It's not entirely driven by them.

I work as a house consultant, so I advise on how to deal with issues of space, light and storage. These issues were huge in the evolution of our own house, and remain an ongoing thing. I understand that these needs are very real to people, and when I go to people's houses I know exactly where they're at and what solutions are available. My work is very informed by my life, and there are always things that I have done in my own house that are relevant to my clients' homes. *Eva Byrne, Architect and House Consultant.*
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