

Joint Decisions

Ewa Shephard looks at the advantages of space sharing



Many modern homes are designed around the open-plan principle of living with a sociable blend of room arrangements, often serving more than one purpose. This brings generous fluidity to our flexible lives - but also often causes a dilemma in visually separating and defining these spaces for comfort or perceivable impact.

Take, for example, the dual purpose sitting and dining room. Traditionally, dining areas have been decorated in a manner to encourage discussion and debate, to promote or enhance lively and passionate discussion for convivial dining - hence rich deep colours such as reds and greens have traditionally been used for walls and textiles.

However, the sitting or lounging areas need to be of a calmer persuasion, allowing us to relax and rejuvenate our senses, quite often with more neutral and soothing tones.

How do you bring these two areas together and create a multipurpose area without losing each identity? A compromise is required to marry the passionate and the relaxing, which in the contemporary use of neutrals and softer tones, is easier to achieve than sticking with the traditional.

Physically separating the dining and living functions is generally easily done: furniture has its own way of doing this for us. Yet the visual delineation is the more complex issue.

Changing the floor covering in the separate areas is an obvious way to create definition - from hard to soft: wooden boards in the dining area, blending into a softer surface such as wool carpet or sisal flooring; or a stone surface throughout accented by a large rug in the sitting area to aid comfort (consider underfloor heating as either a tile warming or sole heat source for added cosiness).

Creating definition with wall colour is another easy separator, using subtle taupe tones to contrast with a deep plum or even just a tonal change to a stronger chocolate or honey in the dining area. Linking these spaces by the use of colour in soft furnishings will bring the two back into a single entity and make it easy on the eye. If you prefer to use one main colour for the walls, definition can be brought about by altering the

colour or texture of various soft furnishings and accessories: smooth vs textured, shiny vs matt, neutral vs colourful. Think of 'edible' colours for a dining area to stimulate taste buds; blues are more difficult to work with in these areas as opposed to reds, greens and yellows.

One very important way to define space is with lighting. Employ subtle, convivial lighting for all areas, blending with atmospheric illumination for dining, through to specialised use of light for specific tasks such as reading.

Light can also alter moods and even replace the need to use colour, adding softness and liveability. This is a specialist area which, in the light-poor areas of Scandinavian countries (think only two hours of sunlight per day in winter!), is resolved by lighting architects.

Luckily, we don't have such extreme issues, but it reminds us to think of lighting in a more prominent way in our room designs, rather than as an afterthought.

Creating division and identity is a challenge for many of us, but one that is rewarded by a sociable and comfortable home in these modern and often stressful times.

Ewa Shephard, formerly an interior designer for Fired Earth, is a partner in the family business, The Shephards Group, offering full bathroom and kitchen design, creation and implementation services. Her fees start from £50 for an initial in-home consultation and can lead to full room design, product sourcing and project management.

An installation service is available, specialising in brands such as Villeroy & Boch, Fired Earth and Thomas Crapper - please call or email for an informal chat and further details.

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Product suppliers include:

Vanessa Arbuthnott fabrics, tel: 01285 831437

www.vanessaarbuthnot.co.uk

Jim Lawrence lighting, tel: 01206 263459

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