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# A FRESH OUTLOOK

How lockdown has influenced the décor and styling of our homes

*By Sarah Moolla*

Contrasting layering of patterns is increasingly popular, like this home design by Sean Symington

**I**n these uncertain times, our home has been our certainty – offering us refuge, security and comfort while the world wobbled. As we spent more time within our four walls, we not only appreciated it more, we began to reward, enhance and embellish forgotten corners and rediscovered alcoves. From a potted plant on a newly painted book shelf to the tearing down (or even reinstating) of walls, we are paying more attention than ever to the aesthetics of our property. There is also the practicality issues our ‘enforced’ spaces gave rise to – for many the dining rooms became places to work, to homeschool, and to eat. We asked our Bath home professionals how they perceive the pandemic to have influenced our home and the changes they have seen, and those to come.

## MORE US, MORE SPACES

Our homes haven't just been our castles, they've been our everything. Or as interior designer Clair Strong puts it, "This year, we've added classrooms into our kitchens, gyms to our bedrooms, and offices in our living rooms and this trend for multifunctional spaces will continue."

"In 2021 we will want to be more 'us', take better care of ourselves and those closest to us, live more gently and be more in tune with nature," says Amanda Clothier, owner of interior designers Quarters Interiors. "This translates into highly personalised interiors."

"There are also changing cultures that have been accelerated by the last year," notes Matt Vaudin, director of Stonewood Design. "This has been identified in recent discussions on housing within the industry. People are moving away from open plan spaces and want privacy, a place to retreat or hide."

As Andrew Sperring of the family-run construction company, JAS Building Services, says "We are literally re-creating the spaces we live in, looking to turn them into multi-use sanctuaries. If 'work, rest and play' has to include staying right where you are, then from staycations to playstations – isolation requires some shape shifting."

"There are some innovative key ways that can allow for overlapping within one open plan space. A small innovation could be the shifting of a chair for example, but the new view of a new perspective, can make a big change to you and your home."



An example from Stonewood Design of utilising a landing and skylight to create the perfect office space



Track shutters like these from Aspect Windows can easily temporarily divide a room

## LOVE ACROSS THE DIVIDE

One way to achieve these spaces to retreat, and a sense of 'us' is by partitions. "We are moving away from taking every single wall down when renovating, and are going back to the more traditional floor plans with defined rooms," says Bath-based interior designer and home staging specialist Sean Symington. "This allows us to be braver with colour as we have defined places to stop and start wall finishes. Within these rooms we can create defined schemes with fabrics, wallpapers, decorative lighting and paint."

Tom Burnford, director and head of design at Burnford Architecture says, "There's a conflict between constraint and openness in open plan spaces too. Paradoxically the fact that there are no subdivisions can act as a limitation – because specific activities do often lend themselves to separate rooms. So one open plan space could be seen to reduce flexibility. If that's a concern there are very simple ways to create a visual partition using furniture and rugs or carpets to demarcate certain areas of an open plan space."

Andrew Cussins, founder of the family-run Sofas & Stuff, has seen an increase in the sale of corner sofas, not just because "families are spending more time together and need a cosy space to relax, but also because these designs are a good solution when zoning areas for work

and socialising in current open plan spaces."

Another option is shutters and folding doors. Nick Hewett, owner of Aspect Window Styling, explains, "With all of us spending more time at home this past year, our living spaces have had to take on a multitude of unusual tasks. From home-schooling to home-working, our lives have been mostly confined to four walls, which can be stressful, especially when in such close proximity."

"While we all would like to dedicate a room to our new home office, typically this isn't viable, so track shutters are a practical solution to create new temporary spaces in your home. These perform much like regular plantation shutters but use a tracked system to open and close panels. This allows them to effortlessly glide across the room, and makes them an ideal option for open plan homes."

*"We are being asked to bring in more vibrant and expressive colours"*



Leroy McKenzie, owner of Schmidt Bath is seeing kitchens become enclosed spaces once again

## KITCHEN MATTERS

Natasha Townsend, design consultant for luxury kitchen and bathroom experts Hobson's Choice, also suggests the use of flexible partitions.

"Rather than build a permanent wall structure, potentially blocking the passage of natural light, large floor-to-ceiling sliding doors can create space divisions whilst still providing the option of opening up the room.

"Rimadesio produces elegant bespoke sliding panels from aluminium and glass, available in various styles and finishes. The sliding doors hang from a single ceiling track leaving the floor undisturbed, perfect for large spaces. The sliding panels create a sense of separation from the more expansive space, allowing the children to carry on playing whilst you concentrate on work. Alternatively, the sliding doors can create hidden storage space, acting as a false wall.

"Open shelving or a glass cabinet could offer a similar feeling of separation, albeit without the ability to move it out of the way. The Rimadesio Zenit system of shelving combines an aluminium structure with elegant glass to form a bespoke solution for your home. An enclosed glass solution, such as Alambra by Rimadesio, could have a similar effect."

As we've all been baking and cooking more, the kitchen, traditionally the heart of the home, has taken an increased significance as Leroy McKenzie, owner of Schmidt Bath, who design and fit interior solutions, explains, "One change that we're continuing to see as open plan begins to fall out of fashion is the re-enclosure of the kitchen. Our new ranges of kitchens feature deeper islands and breakfast bars, perfect for socialising but also a place to sit and do some work. The use of frames and wall dividers with open storage separate the space from the rest of the room, meaning you can still socialise with loved ones and

friends but it won't feel like you're cooking in your living room."

It's also true for many the surplus money, due to lack of holidays, big events, and meals out has been going into our homes, on both small things and big projects. "We have definitely seen the increase in money being spent in homes over this lockdown, and I find that people are more excited to invest in luxury kitchens and furniture," says James Horsfall, senior director of the Bath Kitchen Company. "There is still a big trend for brass and top quality marble being used, and a rising trend of plaster, and more organic materials such as rattan and linens making their way into the home. It's great to be able to see more experimenting in the kitchen, especially with worktop materials. We've used some incredible quartzite, and bold arrabacato marble to create a serious wow factor."

This sense of opulence is also reflected in the colour trends James is seeing. "We have increasingly more colourful kitchens being asked for in jewel tones and light greens for example. We've recently done a burgundy kitchen, which feels fresh yet rich and is a beautiful focal point against the rest of the neutral toned home."

*"We are literally re-creating the spaces we live in, looking to turn them into multi-use sanctuaries"*

## COLOURING IN

"Since lockdown, I have seen a move towards interiors that are comforting, uplifting and joyful. So instead of neutral schemes, clients are looking to bolder, brighter colours," says interior designer Annabel Grimshaw. "These can be incorporated in pops of colour on smaller, more subtle items such as a lacquered lamp base or marbled lampshade, a chair or a tray. Or for the braver, a whole room, a wall of joinery, or a door or window picked out in an unusual colour.

"I have seen a move towards being much braver with upholstery too, lots of prints and bright colours coming through on sofas, armchairs and ottomans. Wallpaper is also seeing a revival – a print to make us smile or feel closer to the calm of nature. Rugs and floor coverings too seem to be bolder and brighter."

This playing with tones and hues is a dream come true for interior stylists, as Quarters Interiors' Amanda Clothier reveals, "I love working with colour, and with a trend towards more highly personalised and long-lasting interiors, I think we will see more eclecticism and colour.

A powder room, or a sitting room that is used primarily in the evening



Annabel Grimshaw's clients are moving away from the neutrals

can be a great opportunity to experiment with more adventurous style. But I absolutely don't believe neutrals are going anywhere, as people seek to maximise natural light in the spaces they occupy 24/7.

"Also there is a continued enthusiasm for the shades and tones that connect us with nature. I'm seeing this in the steady demand for muted, sophisticated shades of colour, along with earthy pinks, peaches, terracottas, and gold."

"Green is the true colour of nature and I love the dark, earthy greens that are popping up everywhere," says interior designer Clair Strong. "From dark olive green through bright jewel tones like emerald to light soft sage tones, greens work well in every room in the home but especially in living rooms. Olive green is a real statement colour that works surprisingly well with many other colours."

The Marmalade House owner and interior designer Vanessa Sayce suggests our new-found need for colour is a result of being surrounded by the same space for more than a year. "There has been a shift towards more exploration and experimentation in terms of colour and design in the home this year. As we have been surrounded with familiar walls for

months, a wholly neutral palette can be dull to the senses. Instead, we are being asked to bring in more vibrant and expressive colours, with visual interest – this can provide a sense of strength and hopefulness."

"As the use of pastel colours continues to decline, we're seeing a big uptake in customers using bold colours in their kitchen and interior designs to really make a standout statement," says Leroy of Schmidt Bath. "Some still prefer light greys and white, but recently we've fitted kitchens with bright yellow splashbacks contrasted to dark grey cabinets and oak panels with a red accent. Darker colours accented with gold are likely to become very popular based on what our customers are choosing.

"Bathrooms are also continuing this trend, going from relatively calm softer tones to punchy colours such as orange, black and dark woods. This year, Schmidt are introducing patterns into their range, allowing customers to become even bolder with their choice of colour scheme."

Andrew of JAS Building has also seen the shift away from paler shades. "While every room in the house or apartment might have a theme, the trend is moving away from overall neutrals, so that colours can be brought in to make subtle statements (or bold ones) to define one aspect of a room from another."

But this doesn't necessarily mean the complete annihilation of neutral in the home as John Law, creative director of the Bath-based Woodhouse & Law who specialise in interior and garden design, points out, "Whilst decorating rooms within a home in contrasting colours can work brilliantly, we always consider a room within the wider context of the property. For example, what is the relationship between one room to the next? If doors are left open, then it's important the rooms relate in some way, even though they might contrast.

"A room can have its own identity, but there should be continuity. This can be achieved through consistent use of materials, such as metallic finishes on ironmongery, or perhaps a woodwork or ceiling colour, so that the overall look isn't too arresting. It can also pay to use a more neutral palate in transitional spaces to help one room flow to another."

## SPRING INTERIORS

### PATTERN DOWN THE HATCHES

Growing along with our confidence with colour, is our willingness to experiment with patterns. From the subtle, as Jonathan Hetreed, director of Hetreed Ross Architects, explains, "We are seeing a resurgence in parquet as clients are opting for floorings which give a subtle pattern to the room. Whilst this is often expensive when compared to some other options, the longevity, durability and timelessness of these types of floors make them a good investment and reduce the need for replacement and therefore reduce waste; often they can be found in reclamation yards which can make them an even more environmentally conscious choice."

And then there's the bolder use of pattern, the likes of which Sean Symington is seeing more and more of. "There's such a noticeable increase in what I call 'pattern on pattern'. For example, there is nothing more chic than a large scale geometric print on an armchair with a small floral printed cushion on top. We are seeing prints everywhere now from coordinated wallpapered walls with upholstered furniture, to lampshades and rugs. Nothing is off limits with pattern."

Bathrooms, traditionally a clean white palette, are even getting in on the pattern act as Neil Curtis, senior designer at Ripples Bath, explains, "Wallpaper, paint decoration and geometric patterns along with brighter greens, rich blues and opulent finishes were becoming very popular before lockdown and I feel those trends that touched 2020 with statement items and contrasting colours, will come to the forefront again this year. The prospect of having visitors around to your home again is not taken for granted anymore, but I think we are all keen to impress when we do have people over. So accessorising well, fresher looks, and a little more investment in the home has become enjoyable for many."

Patterns also serve as sales manager of Tile & Floor, Tom Weaver, explains, "We often recommend colour and patterns within smaller spaces such as guest bathrooms, kitchen sink or range cooker splashbacks or entry halls. There are a plethora of Moroccan Zellige, encaustic and hand-crafted tiles in a vast range of patterns and colours to choose from."

"The lily pad design is all over Instagram and adds real impact to a bathroom with pink trending this year. We are also seeing a strong move towards terracotta in herringbone or lozenge layout, a highly durable product for boot rooms and halls." Plus of course a pattern or two "adds cheer into the home," points out Sofas & Stuff's Andrew Cussins, whose company has seen an increase in the demand for bolder colour and patterned fabrics on their soft furnishings, including larger items like settees.



*"Nothing is off,  
limits with pattern"*

The lily pad design seen here in Porcelain Plaster by Tile & Floor is a huge trend

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There has been an increase in investment in luxury furniture, notes James Horsfall of the Bath Kitchen Company

**WHAT'S IN STORE?**

Nearly all of our home experts commented on the need for great storage in multi-functional spaces moving forward. "Storage has become more of a priority, which has resulted in more shelves in alcoves, fitted cupboards, and built-in storage solutions," notes Stonewood Group's Matt Vaudin. "Also flexible solutions available like ladder shelves, which offer both a desk and shelving, yet only take up a small space, are ideal in bedrooms and corners of rooms for studying or working from home."

"A room can look better proportioned and more interesting, if it is carefully zoned and layered for different uses," says Amanda Clothier. "Adaptive storage and dual-purpose furniture really comes into its own in these situations, and I think we'll see sales growing for these types of furniture items, as we try to restore an

atmosphere of calm and order in such spaces."

Natasha Townsend of Hobson's Choice says, "To mentally and functionally separate the home from the office, the ability to put items away out of sight has become more necessary. For example, clearing the table for dinner whilst safely storing your laptop, notebooks, pens, etc, ready for the next day."

"Our clients have had bespoke media cabinets designed to feature interior power sockets, WiFi routers, wireless surface charging, and shelving aligned to their specific items' size. In the future planning, this will include adding power outlets to breakfast bars and dining areas, removing the need for trailing wires. By considering this capability early in the design phase, electrics can be wired before the flooring is put down or kitchen furniture is assembled."



Andrew Cussins of Sofas & Stuff suggests using corner sofas to help section off a room



2021 will be about us taking better care of ourselves, says Amanda Clothier of Quarters Interiors



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Ben Smith of Battersham says our homes are having to work harder than ever

### THE HOME OFFICE

"Last year has highlighted our need for both permanence and flexibility," says Ben Smith, director of the chartered architects Battersham Smith. "Whilst a dining table may need to be used for home schooling in the daytime, it may still be used for the family meal in the evening. A work desk may now need to be permanent, whilst a yoga mat for a Zoom class does not. Accommodating a home office need not require a large space, just as long as it is arranged efficiently. Home working is an opportunity to get creative with our workstations; from makeshift desks to completely re-inventing parts of our house."

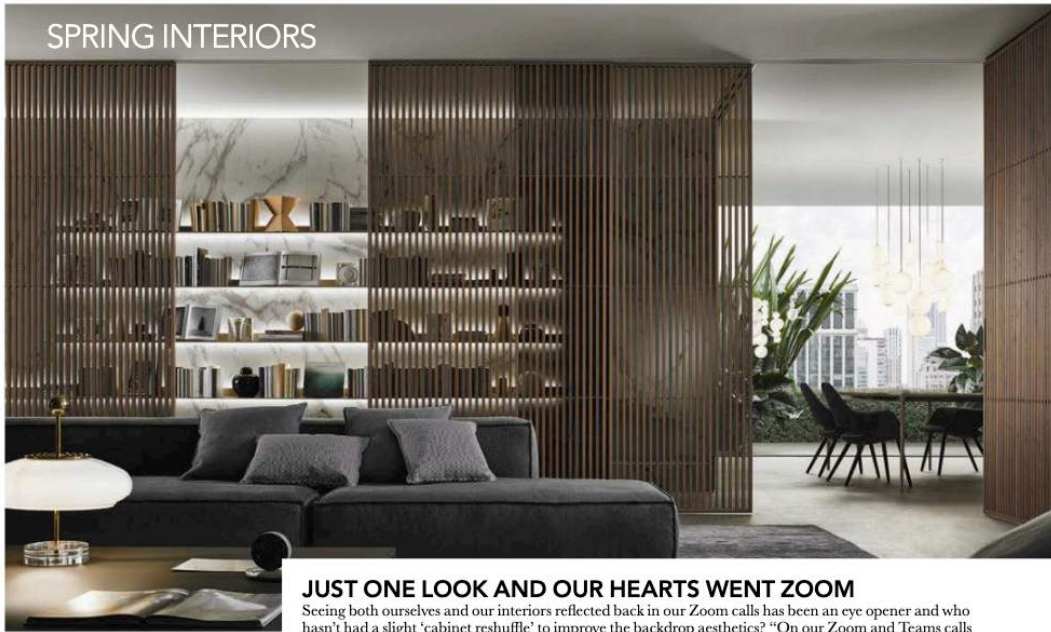
*"A work desk may now need to be permanent"*

"For home working, why not gravitate towards a space with natural light and fresh air; a room with a view with a desk placed near the window both improves productivity and is resting to the eyes. Or for even more of a long term hideaway, invest in an outdoor cabin or shed as office which offers the ultimate in defined separation of work and home."

Our experts also all agree it's about re-designing existing underused spaces. "Our clients are repurposing playrooms, snugs and spare bedrooms as offices or putting desks into a sitting room or corner under the stairs," says Tile & Floor's Tom Weaver. "These rooms have different functions depending on the time of day and so people are doing away with carpet and opting instead for hard wood or stone floors which are more practical for rolling desk chairs and the demands of more 'at-home' family life."

However if you're part-time, in a small property, or planning a return to the office, a short term solution could be simple smart furniture, as Clair Strong explains, "Desks have been incorporated into room designs so we can create multiple workspaces throughout the home so several people can work at home at the same time. Stylish desks, chairs and office storage are now top of many furniture designers' agendas and I am excited to see what new launches there will be this year."

## SPRING INTERIORS



### JUST ONE LOOK AND OUR HEARTS WENT ZOOM

Seeing both ourselves and our interiors reflected back in our Zoom calls has been an eye opener and who hasn't had a slight 'cabinet reshuffle' to improve the backdrop aesthetics? "On our Zoom and Teams calls there is definitely a move towards interesting and colourful artwork in the background with fresh flowers and well placed accessories to give punches of colour," says Stonewood Design's Matt Vaudin. "After this year there is still uncertainty over when we will go back to the office or indeed how often we will be there, which means we will continue to spend more time than normal in our homes. Investment in where we live is clearly taking a higher priority and we are decorating our interiors with colours we feel comfortable with. Light and bright designs which help us to work while still allowing us to enjoy being at home, and bringing more of the outside indoors with pictures, plants and accessories."

For the ultimate wowser team talk scenery, Natasha of Hobson's Choice points us in the direction of the luxury wall-panelling system by Rimadesio called Modular. "This is truly high-style Zoom backdrop. The bespoke panels are available in glass, stone, leather, wood and fabric finishes and create a striking visual when combined with contemporary furniture."

Rimadesio Sail Sliding doors space dividers installed by Hobson's Choice provide both the perfect room divider and Zoom backdrop



### TO BOOT

Offices aren't the only sought-after home must-have, as Sarah Latham of Etons of Bath explains. "Whilst a lot of the focus during lockdown has been around home-working and home-schooling, we've also become a nation of walkers, increased dog ownership and have spent more time outdoors. We've had a lot of enquiries asking us to look at the creative use of space to provide boot rooms for family homes. As all the designs are bespoke, and we design and detail all the joinery, these boot rooms are tailored to the clients' lifestyle and needs."

As we use the outdoors more we need space inside to accommodate that, like this boot room designed by Etons of Bath



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Framing the outdoors to be enjoyed from inside is increasingly popular in house designs like this from Hetreed Ross

**FRAME OF MIND**

Also adding intrigue and style to our backgrounds both online and IRL is the accessories, artefacts and art we've been accumulating and surrounding ourselves with during the last year. "We refer to the process of accessorising our interior schemes as 'dressing a home,'" says John of Woodhouse & Law. "It's a very important part of the design process as the finishing touches are often what brings a scheme to life. We encourage our clients to use a mixture of sentimental pieces, perhaps displayed in an imaginative way with contemporary ones, styled in groups to create interesting collections of objet d'art. This helps a space avoid looking cluttered and fussy.

"We love to introduce artisanal and handcrafted items within our schemes, to add depth and interest. It's much more fun to use pieces with provenance and they can be a great conversation starter for guests or colleagues admiring through Zoom chats."

Modern ArtBuyer's Jessica Lloyd-Smith thinks there is definitely an element of people wanting to bring a little joy into their homes at such a difficult time. "For many people that translates into vibrant colour. We have seen strong sales of prints – both of one-off unique monoprints and limited editions – indicating that people are looking for a bold splash of colour and fun without breaking the budget.

"I think many people have thought about buying art in the past but never quite got round to it with other things like holidays or new cars taking priority, which obviously hasn't been the case more recently. Lately we have seen clients who maybe bought from us three or four years ago returning for more artworks, so the intention to buy art has always been there but it hasn't been top of the list until now."

Artist Emma Rose's recent experience of people buying her work mirrors this. "In lieu of holidays an investment in a commission or large original artwork is very popular. I was incredibly moved when the doctor who saved my life three years ago in the RUH invested in some artwork to remind her of this Covid time – each piece a holiday in itself as she wasn't allowed to travel this last year (let alone leave her work)."



People are investing their unspent holiday money on art like this Lesson 1 Happiness by Bonnie and Clyde limited edition print, available through Modern ArtBuyer

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