

REDEFINING THE  
UK'S HOMES FOR  
A NEW CHAPTER  
IN TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY LIVING

# FLEXIBLE LIVING REPORT 2020



JOHN LEWIS  
& PARTNERS

# LIFE IN THE



Percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number

28%

repurposed a room for a home office

21%

set up an area for hobbies such as painting, puzzles etc

17%

Made a home gym area and/or yoga space

15%

created a dedicated space for home-schooling



After several months of change, our homes are working harder than ever before, having become offices, gyms, schools, restaurants and more. Nothing so groundbreaking has shaken our use of the home since the rise of open plan living, which began in the seventies. Although sparked by urgent needs in the midst of the pandemic, this new perspective on a modular approach to living within our own four walls, is here to stay.

As customers turn to our services and Partners for flexible,

inspirational and affordable options, as well as dependable advice, we are pleased to be launching a new [John Lewis Home magazine](#), which focuses on supporting customers to get the most from this new chapter in twenty-first century living.

In this report, we look back over some of the key changes taking place currently and where these might lead in this exciting and transformational shake-up of our homes.

**JOHNATHAN MARSH**

Partner and Category Director, Home

# FLEXIBLE HOME

CARVING OUT NEW SPACES: ARE WE DONE WITH OPEN PLAN LIVING?

For many years now, modern life has been so busy that it felt as if people spent more time away from the home than within its walls. In this scenario, open plan living provided welcome moments of togetherness for families and friends in otherwise hectic schedules.

Lockdown changed everything. There was immediate pressure to adapt open plan designs to maximise space for work, exercise, home-schooling, play and dining. Modifying spaces in this way brought a change in mindset, with customers reflecting on the full potential of their homes to serve multiple functions. Many are now committed to investing in this new approach to homelife, with one in five planning on spending between £1000 - £3000 on their homes.



'Plants and open bookcases create a sense of privacy between zones and add height to the space. Rugs or a change of flooring also help to define a zone as the change of texture gives a different atmosphere.'

BETHAN HARWOOD

Partner & Home Design Stylist, White City



MODULAR ROOM DESIGN REPLACES OPEN-PLAN

Making the most out of every corner and crevice often involves setting up multi-functional “zones” within larger spaces. These can be quickly rearranged throughout the day, to meet the different needs of the household; a spareroom is used as a gym every morning, before transitioning into an office space; a playzone is set up in the living room, then tidied away every evening for the grown-ups to relax.

As a result of spending so much time with others, the quest for privacy is reaching new heights. John Lewis research found that one in five of us have created spaces in the home to be alone. This could be as simple as a cosy chair in a hallway, a more comfortable cushion for a window seat or the addition of some candles and houseplants in the bathroom for “me time”.

1 IN 5

have re-configured an open plan space to allow for multiple activities throughout the day

5,830

free virtual appointments across Home Design, Nursery and Personal Styling have taken place since the service launched, 49% were for Home Design

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FLEXIBLE HOMELIFE



Behavioural psychologist Honey Lancaster-James suggests that creating multiple room “zones” is helping us mentally to live in close range to each other and spend long periods at home.

'As human beings we need variety in our environment and positive social contact with others. When we spend time together, many of us feel nourished on a social level, but we also have to respond to each other and accommodate one another's needs and behaviours. This can sometimes be draining. Moreover, if there has been stress or tension at home, or there is not enough space for everyone, this can lead to relationship problems and poor mental health.

Something as simple as separating off an area with a curtain, or a screen, or turning a sofa around so that one side is for relaxing and the space behind is for work can make all the difference. Creating separate space to work, relax, conduct cleaning and maintenance tasks, or be entertained also helps prevent the home from feeling chaotic. Without these physical divisions, we can end up struggling to manage all the various competing aspects of life'.



House by John Lewis Anton Bench £129

Ideal for smaller spaces, this can work around the dining table, pulled into the living room when you have extra guests and as an exercise bench for tricep dips



John Lewis & Partners + Swoon Bar Cart £199

Make it a party up top with this bar cart storing your favourite shakers, glasses and aperitifs but keep it strictly business on the bottom and use this as a chic space to store your printer



John Lewis & Partners Dressing Gown £39

Loungewear has become a staple but as TikTok tutorials have shown us the belt to our dressing gown offers a heat free curling tool and the perfect yoga strap for easing into those post workout stretches



Umbra Trigg Small Wall Planters £15

These diamond shaped planters are perfect for adding a little greenery to your at home workspace and use them for storing stationery or as impromptu speaker for your phone



Breville Blender £28

Usually the reserve of post work-out smoothies we've turned our mixologist eye to the blender and used the super quick tool to whip up margaritas and more



\*survey of 1,000 conducted by OnePoll in July for John Lewis & Partners

# HOW LIFE UNFOLDS IN THE FLEXIBLE HOME



## OUTDOOR

During lockdown customers invested in bistro sets, coffee tables and outdoor sofas, but as winter approaches, patio heaters and outdoor lighting are set to surge as we hope to keep outdoor spaces in use. Customers look to use the space through the colder months to entertain.

OUTDOOR HEATERS	331% <sup>▲</sup>
FIRE PITS	140% <sup>▲</sup>
OUTDOOR LIGHTING	172% <sup>▲</sup>

## LIVING ROOM

The majority of John Lewis virtual home styling consultations (60%) have focused on this space, helping customers to introduce smaller zones and flexible storage options that make the room work harder.

Sideboards have become the rising star of the living room (+20%) working as a TV stand and, now that many customers have ditched videos and DVDs, the storage space can hideaway work, school or gym items.

Smaller side tables (+20%) offer additional space to work for the third of us who opt to work from the sofa.

One of the simplest updates for a living room that can work in many guises all day long is a pouffe or footstool such as the Bobbin. Pop a tray on it for a quick coffee table, prop your feet up after a long day, store blankets and remotes inside or pull it out as a casual seat.

## GUEST BEDROOM

Futons and sofa beds free up floor space without ousting visitors (+22%) as the room evolves into a multipurpose home office, gym or playroom, as well as a place to sleep.

## KIDS' BEDROOMS

Parents go for the retro favourite beloved by kids, bunk beds, to make way for desks and play zones. Mid-sleepers, with desks and seating areas underneath, are up +60%. Options with desks, chairs and storage gives little ones additional space to relax and play.

Stompa Uno S Plus Bed with Fixed Desk and Chair Bed £999



## THE BEDROOM

For some, even the bed became a destination from which to work, with one in five admitting to this. Dressing tables offer a space for skincare, makeup, hairstyling and additional workspace that is kinder to our backs than lying in bed.

400%<sup>▲</sup>

The House by John Lewis Mix it Dressing Table saw sales increase 400% during lockdown.

11.5%

of customers are investing in stylish, high quality bedding to brighten up the space and encourage good quality sleep

## HALLWAY

Customers are now getting more from their hallways, adding stylish small armchairs, coffee tables and free-standing lamps, or making the most of storage with additional drawers and shelving. While there's no sign of micro cupboard-under-the-stairs bedrooms, investments in cordless vacuums, and compact cleaning equipment are rising as storage space reaches a premium.

## BATHROOMS

Nearly 1 in 10 of us admitted to indulging in a little grooming during the day whilst working from home and with spa days temporarily off the cards, customers are investing in luxury touches for this space. Sales of at home hair removal soared during lockdown but now customers are turning their attentions to more luxury tech treatments such as LED light therapy.



The MZ Skin Light-Therapy Golden Facial Treatment Device £385 launched in August and took 40% of total beauty tech sales in the first two weeks.

## MAKING SPACE FOR HOBBIES

The nation's obsession with baking and puzzles continues beyond Lockdowns, with games and puzzles surging in sales 1500% compared to last year, while breadmakers have also risen by 62%. And Britain seems to have caught the sewing bee bug with unprecedented sales of sewing machines, we predict that this Christmas may have a few more homemade touches than usual. Far from being a sign of boredom, the nation's creative flair is important for mental health and self-care.

Over 75% of those who picked up a hobby during lockdown said they are going to continue with it and 22% of them are looking to make a more permanent place to practice it at home.

332%<sup>▲</sup>

As the nights draw in Stargazing looks set to be a favourite among customers as sales of telescopes have increased 332% (August vs LY)



Behavioural Psychologist, Honey Lancaster-James explains:

'Doing something just because we find it fun or interesting or therapeutic is so important for our mental health because it allows us to just be, without the pressure of achieving something or getting something 'right'. Hobbies shouldn't be seen as indulgent, but necessary parts of being human, allowing your natural interests to find expression and rewarding our efforts in life with time that feels just for us.'

# WORKING FROM THE FLEXIBLE HOME

The sudden shock of Lockdown led to a scramble to find a space to work. Coffee tables and even ironing boards became desks. Nearly half of the nation say they will continue working from home at least a few days a week, according to our research, sparking the rise of the “flexi-office”, the statement study wall and the “Insta-desk”. A flexible approach to where we work can be challenging in open plan living environments, with distractions from other household members and noisy household appliances. Where there was no option but to work in these communal zones, noise cancelling headphones came to the rescue with sales increasing 30% from March to May. For those who miss the buzz of the office, there are “office noise” videos on YouTube with thousands of views!

## 1 IN 10

have feigned technical issues such as our cameras not working or that the internet is down

## 1/5

said they expect to work from home five days a week going forward



WIRELESS HEADPHONES

## 30%<sup>▲</sup>

Lightweight tech enables the “flexi-office” The portability of today’s technology makes it easy for people to move around the home while they work, with a change of scene bringing a welcome productivity boost.

TABLET SALES

## 65%<sup>▲</sup>



‘Fragrance can be a powerful tool for separating work from rest. An essential oil diffuser is perfect for creating the right mood. The change in smell, perhaps supplemented by a change in lighting, can create a shift in a room and help you separate the day, even if your work things still remain visible.’

**WIL LAW**

Partner & Home Design Stylist, Leeds

## 22%<sup>▲</sup>

increase in sales of essential oil diffusers

## 86%<sup>▲</sup>

Premium Office Chairs



ZOOMING IN ON STATEMENT WALLS

According to our survey cushions, plants, laptop stands and ring lights were the first things we reached for to spruce up our homes ready for video calls. 32% of those asked have been saving since lockdown so they can renovate and invest in their homes. This has undoubtedly sparked inspiration in many as johnlewis.com had 33% more searches for wallpaper and paint since the start of lockdown in comparison to the same time last year. More significant cosmetic upgrades are now on the priority list for customers, including additional shelving, strategically-placed bookcases and statement wallpaper.

## 419%<sup>▲</sup>

sales of plants increased

## 35%<sup>▲</sup>

Artwork has become the new statement handbag or shirt. Sales up 35% as customers look to prints to showcase their personality and taste to colleagues and friends during video calls.

Lockdown was a bit of an intense situation as I'd just moved into my own flat. I had to quickly prioritise certain areas, such as a workspace and colourful shelves that could also be a Zoom background.



**Kristabel Plummer, Blogger**  
**@iamkristabel**





THE “INSTA-DESK”  
MAKES ITS DEBUT

#WFH has racked up over 2.2m posts on Instagram alone. With our home working environments on display, stylish bureaus and small writing desks displaying objets d’art now take pride of place in the home, worthy of an Instagram shoot. For those with the luxury of space, a second, more functional desk space hides away in a spare room.

CALLIGRAPHY PENS	406%▲
NOTEBOOKS AND JOURNALS	207%▲
STRING FURNITURE	65%▲
SMALL DESIGNER DESKS	73%▲

The John Lewis & Partners + Swoon Franklin Desk, new for AW20, has sold out with more stock coming soon. Designed with marquetry techniques to create a tactile, geometric facade and accented with opulent brass hardware it’s a truly stylish home office update. Mid-century inspired designs are proving popular with the design savvy Hairpin desk with a parquet finish +32% and the faux leather topped Soren with floating shelves +73%.



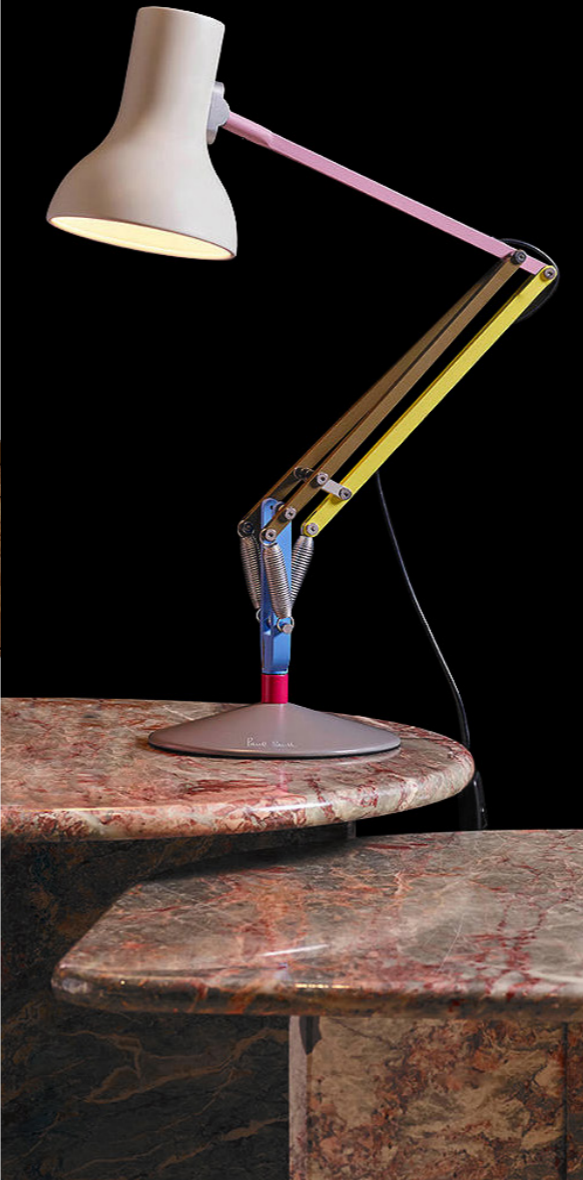
'Finally after I realised that I needed somewhere a little more permanent, I decided to convert one wall of the dining room into my home office. With a little colour blocking, I managed to zone the two spaces well into something a little more multifunctional'.

Medina Grillo, Home Improvement Blogger  
@grillodesigns

'As we head towards winter months, desk lighting is likely to become the next focal point for the nation’s “Insta-desks”. Adjustable angle-poised options will prove popular for finding the most flattering on-camera looks.

'Lighting used to be all about ambient, now we have multiple people working or studying in one space, so you need more fit-for-purpose task lighting, especially as the nights draw in.'

FIONNUALA JOHNSTON  
Partner & Senior Designer



'I have loved working out from home because you can just get up and go. No ‘finding your gym pass’, no ‘packing your deodorant.’ Just pop on your fit kit, kick the cushions out the way and move your body'.

AJ Odudu, TV Presenter  
@ajodudu



WORKING OUT  
FROM HOME

During Lockdown customers were keen to keep up their training (exercise weights +115%) and yoga sessions (yoga accessories +303%) but now we are bringing spin classes home with the introduction of Peloton, the ultimate experience when it comes to at home workouts. Nine concessions are opening up in John Lewis stores across the UK.

YOGA ACCESSORIES August vs LY	145%▲
FOAM ROLLERS August vs LY	43%▲

OVER  
1/4

of people asked want to continue doing their workouts at home

# DINING IN THE FLEXIBLE HOME

In this age of flexible homelife, kitchens work overtime as family hubs, homework stations, restaurant and baking production lines. Never have we been so serious about our surface spaces, or the appliances that reside there. We're unplugging the blender after use, and powering up a multitude of other devices on the kitchen island to engage in baking bread and cakes (one in five of us say we've done more of this recently), elaborate coffee preparation rituals, sewing and crafting, and, of course, WFH.

Banana bread was the lockdown favourite but now customers are moving on to more delicious and trickier to make treats.

MADELEINE PAN	50%▲
BUNDT TINS	29%▲
MACARON MAT	358%▲
BROWNIE TINS	110%▲

1 IN 10  
of us have made lunch  
during a meeting



66%

of customers use their  
outside space for dining  
al fresco

229%▲

increase in sales of  
pizza ovens

## COOK OUTS REPLACE NIGHTS OUT

Our gardens have stepped up a gear to become outdoor eateries, whether for a light lunch or a full blown feast. Outdoor pizza ovens continue to increase in sales, suggesting the nation will still cook out in the cooler months. Hightech barbecues, featuring apps to monitor heating, alongside compact electric grills, that are perfect for balconies, also see ongoing high sales. Meanwhile, outdoor tables and chairs have seen stronger sales than ever this summer, suggesting the nation is fully equipped to dine al fresco.



## A RETURN TO SIT-DOWN CELEBRATIONS

With larger indoor gatherings likely off the cards for winter, families will give careful thought to the details of how they mark special celebrations and annual festivities, like Halloween, Diwali and Christmas. During lockdown we were encouraged to #makeamealofit and lockdown birthdays saw partyware sales soar +186% in April in comparison to the year before. We anticipate the return of sit-down dinner parties as smaller gatherings mean more effort placed on the little details of the food and the decor. Dressing up rooms for different occasions is all part of using it flexibly.

## COOKS INGREDIENTS

Since lockdown home cooks have been exploring world cuisines like never before with many attempting to recreate their favourite restaurant or holiday dishes at home. Online sales of Waitrose Cooks' Ingredients range have more than doubled this year.



'Living alone, I'm quite a social person and Saturday night would often mean having friends round for dinner. Instead it became routine for me to push back the furniture, take some cushions and sit on the rug, eating an overly elaborate dinner I'd cooked for myself and watching a movie I'd always said I'd never got round to seeing'.

Dan Hull, Interiors Writer and Stylist  
@\_millergrey

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE FLEXIBLE HOME?

The Flexible Home is here to stay. John Lewis predicts how the space will evolve over the coming years:



'Over the next year, it will be important for us to invest our time and energy in getting our homes ready for a "new normal", where we will be juggling multiple roles and where different family members will need different things within a relatively confined space. Listening to each other and figuring out what everyone needs will be key to making sure our homes remain harmonious and also ensuring that everyone gets a say in what goes on within the Flexible Home.'

Honey Langcaster-James, Behavioural Psychologist

# 1

Could the sharing economy come home? In flexible living spaces, furniture rental could become increasingly appealing, providing quick fixes for freshening up a room, without long-term commitment. It also supports those who aren't sure about their long-term setups, such as students needing a desk for remote working until universities welcome them back. Rented artwork could allow customers to make over their statement walls regularly to keep their space inspiring, without significant financial investment. We've teamed up with Fat Llama to trial furniture rental with 100 products available to rent from sofas to sideboards.

# 2

Storage becomes increasingly flexible  
An explosion of innovative foldaway and stowaway products will hit the market over the next few years. Wall-mounted pull-down desks, foldaway desks and sideboards that transform into desks are all on the horizon. Obsolete storage options like TV cabinets will be a prime target for repurposing space, with DVDs and CDs replaced by equipment for hobbies, toys and anything that doesn't match the room's overall look.

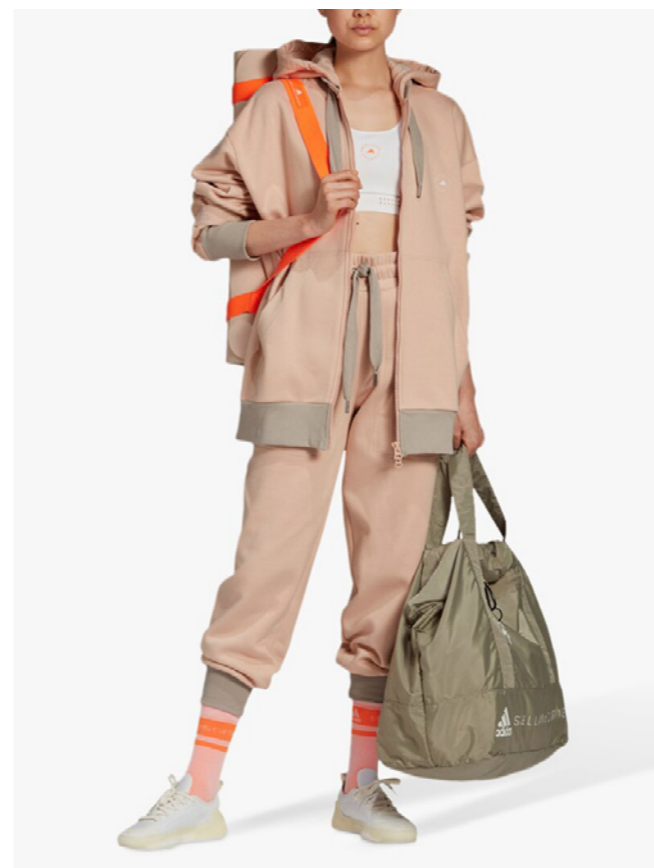


# 3

Flexible homes become more sustainable  
From growing veg in the garden to reducing food waste through smarter storage, preserving and pickling and greater freezer usage, we are becoming more organised and dedicated to reducing waste in the multi-purpose home. Expect further sustainably designed kitchen ranges to appear in John Lewis very soon.

# 4

The home gym makes a statement  
The Legs, Bums and Tums workout dvds of the nineties were most likely to be discreetly kept out of sight. Today, although many have suspended their gym memberships, we are loud and proud with our exercise routines, posting virtual workouts to Instagram and recording progress on TikTok. With over half of people planning to continue exercising at home even when restrictions are lifted, gym equipment will soon enter a new arena of aesthetics to become Insta-worthy and take pride of place in the home. Colourful kettlebells and luxe yoga mats will be proudly on-display.



'One minute we are on a video call with colleagues, the next we are campaigning activists from the kitchen, or we are looking for new ideas to support our children's learning program. Consequently, our homes are like Rubik's Cubes with so many possible layouts - future products and services must align to this agility, providing modular options in the most effortless way. Looking to the future, living like this will also result in less waste and a more circular way of living.'

**JOHN VARY**

Partner & Futurologist