

# SPATIAL PLANNING

Renovating doesn't always mean large-scale works and stratospheric budgets. Much can be achieved by reworking existing spaces within the footprint of your home, writes *Elizabeth Wilson*.



Never underestimate the value of looking inwards when it comes to renovating. Building outwards and upwards will undoubtedly deliver maximum metamorphosis, but clever reworking of spaces can be totally transformative, too.

If you feel your home's layout is lacking flow or cohesion, it may be time to rethink your spatial planning. Removing a wall or repurposing an under-utilised area is often enough to create a greater sense of space, efficiency and joy in your home.

"Good spatial planning gets natural light in the best places, improves functionality and makes daily living easier," says interior designer Sonia Simpfordorfer, creative director of Melbourne firm Nexus Designs. "Thinking about how you move in and through a space is the key."

Reorienting a layout can deliver great gains, such as creating a dual use for a single room or maximising storage, says Sydney interior designer Natasha Levak. "With a clever floor plan, you can ensure no space is wasted and the general feeling of the interior becomes not only practical but aesthetically pleasing."

Levak recently remodelled an Art Deco apartment in Sydney's east. "By removing one wall and swapping the second bedroom with the kitchen - placing the living room to the rear of the kitchen - we created an open-plan kitchen/living/dining zone with the northerly light flowing into the living zone rather than the sleeping zone."

Thinking outside the square can pay dividends, too. On a recent project, Melbourne architect Daniel Wolkenberg of POLYstudio

## ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

There are no limits when it comes to reconfiguring a floor plan - but you need a good builder and flexible budget, says Sonia Simpfordorfer. "Whenever I ask my favourite builder if I can take out a wall he says 'anything is possible'. It just depends on the size of the steel piece you need to put back in to hold up the house!"

converted a bedroom into a carport by removing an external wall and lining the space with plywood. "This resulted in a very compact and efficient floor plan that incorporated off-street parking but not at the expense of the back garden," he says.

Even minor changes such as relocating a door can be effective in enhancing the flow from one room to another. "In one project, we shifted a doorway to the left by a metre," says Simpfordorfer. "The door led from a hallway into the living room and had been positioned diagonally opposite the door leading from the living room to the kitchen. By shifting it, we made the pathway between these rooms more direct and the living room now feels more like a complete space rather than a passageway."

Make sure you take a holistic approach to the floor plan. "By considering the house as a whole, you'll create a better, balanced layout and use of space," says Sydney interior designer Andrew Waller. "You don't need to build all areas at the same time, but by preparing a full plan you'll see which elements are interrelated and need to be built or installed together."

Improving spatial planning doesn't necessarily involve knocking down walls. Sometimes, it just comes down to careful placement of furnishings - whatever it takes to enhance access, flow and orientation of the setting. We asked the experts for their top tips.



## Living room

The key to success is choosing the right scale of furniture. "Make sure the furniture is in proportion with the dimensions of the room," says Levak.

✦ Beware the large modular sofa. They can be too dominant in a space, and have limited seating capacity despite the size, says Andrew Waller. Levak concurs: "Often a couple of armchairs with a standard three-seater sofa and roaming ottoman will ensure a better use of space and provide the same amount of seating."

✦ In a large open-plan space, be sure to anchor your furniture groups with rugs, says Simpfordorfer.

✦ Watch the scale of the rug, warns Levak. "The rug is not meant to be an island in the middle of the room; rather, it's a platform to ground the furniture and

define the space. As a general rule, a rug should extend halfway under your sofa(s) and armchairs."

✦ TVs should be positioned to allow easy viewing without dominating the room. Orient the furniture with a prime TV view and also, if possible, a secondary view of the outdoors or back to the kitchen/dining.

✦ In smaller spaces, Waller recommends using furniture with delicate detailing: sofas and chairs with narrow arms and on raised legs. "Having the floor visible underneath the furniture creates the illusion of a larger space," he says.

✦ "A pair of sofas or chairs facing each other might look lovely and symmetrical," says Simpfordorfer, "but conversations flow better when people sit at right angles to - not opposite - each other. The latter feels too much like an interview." ▶

Photography by Sharyn Cairns (Mim Design room, this page), Eve Wilson (Craig Tan Architects room, opposite).





### Dining

There are many variables at play in a dining area, especially if it's part of an open-plan living zone. Think about how your dining space interacts with other rooms, your daily dining needs as well as your requirements for entertaining.

✦ In a small space, choose a dining table that is extendable and slim so as not to crowd the space. That way, it still allows multiple seating scenarios - smaller for everyday and larger for entertaining.

✦ If your dining table is anchored with a rug, allow at least 90cm from the edge of the table to the edge of the rug to ensure there's room to push back the chairs without falling off, says Levak. "The same measurement applies in relation to a wall and other furnishings to prevent the room from feeling too cramped."

✦ The table width will be dictated by the size of the space: "Where possible, go for a minimum table width of 1.1m to allow enough space for platters at the centre of the table," says Waller.

✦ Oval and elliptical tables help the flow of conversation. Round tables can work well in a square room, but be careful of the size: "If it's too big, space in the centre of the table is wasted and it's hard to carry conversation from side to side," says Levak. Oval and rectangular tables are the best choices if you need to add seats to the setting when your crowd expands.

✦ Lighting is a key consideration: "Light fittings suspended low over a dining table will allow for an intimate feeling," says Levak. "Make sure the fittings are adjustable and on a dimmer function to allow you to change the mood in the room."

### BRING THE WALL DOWN

There are several factors – and costs – to consider before removing an internal wall. An engineer will be required to gauge if the wall is load-bearing and whether its removal will require reinforcement (a steel beam) overhead. "This can cost between \$500 and \$2000, depending on the size of the wall and level of documentation required," says Natasha Levak.

The second factor is the demolition and, if necessary, installation of the new beam. Most builders would charge a day's labour and a day for the install, plus associated plastering, rendering and carpentry, painting and electrical. "All in all, this should cost less than \$5000 to achieve," says Levak. "But it's very much dependent on the size/structure in question and whether it involves brick construction versus timber frame and gyprock."



Photography by Tom Blachford (Meme Design room, this page), Shannon McGrath (Hecker Guthrie room, opposite). Artwork (this page) by Maximilian Daniels.

### Main bedroom

While we may not spend many daylight hours in this space, having a well-designed bedroom is something to aspire to, says Daniel Wolkenberg. "Waking up in a room with morning light or a beautiful outlook is an uplifting start to the day," he says. "Good bedroom design includes orientation towards natural light and views as much as the internal fittings and layout."

✦ Where possible, try to position the bed on the opposite wall from the door into the room, says Wolkenberg. Allow at least 75cm for circulation around the bed.

✦ Andrew Waller agrees: "Orienting the space so you enter the room at the foot of the bed will allow for easier access to both sides of the bed, and will also create a larger sense of space and balance."

✦ Think about scale and proportion, says Levak. "The bedsides need to be of a size that balances the scale of the mattress or bed," she says. "I see lots of interiors where the beds are high and the bedsides are small and low, which looks completely out of proportion to the bed itself."

✦ When space is tight, use wall lights instead of table lamps and consider bed bases with storage to house additional blankets and pillows.

✦ If your bedroom has an ensuite, avoid locating the toilet within direct sight of the bedroom. "Position it in a more concealed area. Locate more luxurious fittings in direct sight on entry - either the bath or vanity sink," says Waller.

✦ Make sure there's a door dividing the bedroom and ensuite, for privacy and as a barrier against steam from the bathroom, says Levak. "If a conventional hinged door isn't possible, cavity sliding doors have come a long way. These days, there are some brilliant tracking systems that are smooth and quiet to operate."

✦ Simpfendorfer advises against locating the toilet behind a nib wall. "Leave those open bedroom/bathroom configurations to hotels. Hearing or watching someone brush their teeth (or worse) every day can really kill the romance." **H&G**