



OPEN-CONCEPT HOMES — Before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-con-

cept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup.

Pros and cons to open-concept homes

Open-concept homes have become increasingly popular in recent years. An open-concept home is one in which the rooms flow into one another with limited obstruction from walls or other barriers.

According to the National Association of Home Builders, 84 percent of new single-family homes have fully or partially open layouts.

While they may seem like a new trend, open floor plans are anything but. Early American homes featured open, often one- or two-room units built around the central kitchen/hearth. This maximized warmth and functionality. Homes evolved as incomes grew, and soon homes had several smaller rooms with specialized functions.

What's old has become new again. However, before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup to determine if it's really right for you.

Advantages of open floor plans

Open floor plans facilitate the flow of natural light throughout a space and can promote air flow, helping to reduce warm or cool pockets of air in otherwise closed-off rooms.

Open homes make socializing easier, even when people are doing different things. While some-

one is cooking dinner in the kitchen, he or she can still interact with someone else playing video games in the family room or paying bills in the home office. Entertaining also is easier, as mingling with guests is much more convenient when walls are not getting in the way.

A smaller home can feel much larger if it employs an open concept. The square footage is not divided into smaller quarters, which sometimes are rooms (such as formal dining rooms) that are only used a few times per year. This eliminates underused spaces and opens up sight lines in the layout.

The value of real estate has risen dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prospective buyers may prefer an open-concept plan because it can help them minimize building costs.

Disadvantages of open floor plans

Open layouts are not for everyone. The same sense of space that occurs when walls are taken down may make rooms feel cavernous and less cozy, particularly in homes with ample square footage. In addition, privacy can be hard to come by when all rooms feed into one another.

When the kitchen is not separate from the family room space, that makes it easy for noise to compromise the area's comfort levels. There is no hiding from

noise in an open floor plan, as sounds from voices, television shows and appliances tend to echo and blend together. And if the home is a single-story layout, those noises from the main living areas also may carry to adjacent bedrooms.

Smoke and smells are another thing to consider. When something on the stove spills over, a small range hood will not be practical for clearing smoke from a large space. Though the aroma of freshly cooked food is enticing, it can make it hard for cooks to keep guests out of the kitchen.

Open-concept homes are popular, but homeowners should weigh the pluses and minuses to see if this trend is truly right for them.

Three factors to consider before converting an attic

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many homeowners suddenly found themselves in need of more usable square footage in their homes. Required to work from home due to social distancing recommendations, millions of working professionals suddenly found themselves setting up shop at kitchen tables or islands, in alcoves, garages or even walk-in closets.

Those makeshift offices were never supposed to be permanent, but as companies loosen workplace policies and embrace full remote or hybrid working arrangements, professionals are seeking more permanent home office solutions.

Home additions are a possibility for homeowners who need more usable square footage, but add-ons may not be the right option for everyone. If adding on won't work, homeowners may want to look up ... at their attics.

Attics with ample space can make for ideal home offices, as they're away from the hustle and bustle of a home's main floor. That can make it easier to concentrate when everyone is in the house and reduce the likelihood that video calls with colleagues and clients will be interrupted by kids and pets.

Attic conversions are not always possible, and the following are three important factors homeowners may need to consider before they can go forward with such projects.

1. Dimensions: Both the renovation experts at This Old House and the real estate experts at UpNest indicate that at least half of a finished attic must be a minimum of seven feet high and seven feet wide and 70 square feet. Requirements may differ depending on where homeowners live, but that 7-7-70 guideline is generally the minimum requirement. An attic that fails to meet such

requirements won't necessarily be a lost cause, but it might be costly to make adjustments that ultimately align with local codes.

2. Access: Access is another aspect that must adhere to local safety guidelines. Many attics are accessible only through pulldown ladders, but that will have to change if homeowners repurpose their attic spaces. A staircase that complies with local laws will need to be installed, and contractors can work with homeowners to build that and estimate the cost. Homeowners who simply want to put desks in their attics without going with full-fledged conversions are urged to adhere to local access requirements anyway, as they're intended to ensure residents can safely escape attics in the case of a fire or another emergency.

3. Climate control: Attics are converted to provide residents with more livable space. Converted space is only livable if the climate within the attic can be controlled so it's cool in the summer and warm in the winter. An existing HVAC unit needs to efficiently heat and cool an extra room. If it can't, bills might spike because the rest of the home likely won't be as comfortable, forcing homeowners to adjust thermostats to offset that discomfort. That also could affect the unit's life expectancy. Before going forward with an attic renovation, homeowners should contact HVAC professionals to determine if attic spaces can be serviced with the existing units and ductwork, or if an alternative arrangement must be worked out to make the spaces livable.

Attic conversions can be great ways to make existing spaces more livable. Homeowners considering such projects should pay attention to three important variables as they try to determine if attic conversions will work for them.

Enjoying spring flowers for as long as possible

From iBulb

If you literally want to experience the spring season up close, why not bring spring flowers into your home. But how can you make sure that you can enjoy your gorgeous bouquets for as long as possible?

Seasonal flowers

Did you know that bulb flowers are real seasonal flowers? Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and ranunculus symbolize spring, and they are typical harbingers of spring. The growth process is both unique and fascinating, since the flowers are already hidden inside the bulbs. A bud grows and emerges from its little bulb to produce one or more impressive flowers.

Art

Once you put them in a vase, spring flowers become a living work of art. Not only are the flowers spectacular and a statement in and of themselves; tulip and hyacinth stems also continue to grow in the vase. Once they are in a warm home, the growing and flowering process starts immediately. The stems meander their way upward and then the buds finally open to display their cheerful color.

Care

You will generally be able to enjoy a spring bouquet for around seven days. If you look after your flowers, you will enjoy them for even longer and the flowers will bloom even more beautifully.

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