


ALL FOR ONE

WHETHER IT'S INCOMING IN-LAWS OR ADULT
KIDS STAYING PUT, YOU CAN PLAN FOR A HAPPY
MULTIGENERATIONAL HOME

WORDS SALLY PATERSON

A photograph of a modern, single-story building with vertical wood cladding. A large window is illuminated from within, showing a glimpse of the interior. To the left, a wall is covered in dense green ivy. In the foreground, there is a stone retaining wall and a garden bed with various plants. The sky is a soft, hazy blue.

ONE IN FIVE Australians now calls a 'multigen' household home, whether it's older folks moving in to be close to family or parents co-habiting with adult offspring. In New South Wales alone, the number of homeowners building a subdivision or 'granny flat' in 2015 was up by 75 per cent on the previous five years. With specialist companies such as Inoutside offering design and construction solutions (pictured), these backyard abodes are becoming hot property. It's a big step in terms of time, money and – importantly – good family relations, so careful planning will pay dividends.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Scott Harper of Genliving, custom builders of multigenerational homes, says the first step in planning a home for your whole family is communication. "It's really important to involve all family members in the planning process," he says. "Understanding everyone's expectations about how they like to live, and agreeing upon their responsibilities for sharing the home, will help reduce conflict when they're all under one roof."



Where space allows, allocate a separate living area to one generation, or if that's not an option, take it into an outdoor territory and screen off a section of the verandah or yard with their name on it



HAPPINESS MUST-HAVES

According to interior designer Di Henshall, the most essential ingredients for a personal zone are a dedicated bedroom and bathroom (this Porter Davis conversion above is a luxe example). "It makes someone feel like they've got their own space," she says. "You don't need a huge area to put in a small ensuite with a shower, toilet and basin – you can lop off one metre by about two-and-a-half metres from one side of the bedroom, or encroach into the room next door." Check with your local council what planning approval you will need for these types of changes.

Totally self-contained accommodation with a kitchenette is the diamond standard. A separate entrance supplies young adults with the independence to come and go as they please, and a clever bedroom layout can create a private retreat that meets their needs – with a corner book nook, a desk or their own television. >



"Get everyone's input and agreement about their living needs upfront" ~ Scott Harper, Genliving

PLAYING TO THE OLDER CROWD

Particularly for elderly family members, a safe environment is crucial. "Even recuperation after illness can put someone in a wheelchair," says interior designer Di Henshall. Create wide access (this sliding wall in the Archer Interiors project below is ideal) and opt for flooring with a high non-slip rating, paying particular attention to surfaces that will get wet, such as bathrooms and decking. Stairs, indoor and out, will need a bannister. In bathrooms, walk-in showers with handrails and enough space for a seat are more practical than a bath you have to step into. Also choose tapware with levers rather than knobs, install nightlights either on a sensor or separate switch, and opt for overhead storage.



FUTURE-PROOF FLEXIBILITY

It's a wise homeowner who makes design decisions with one eye on the future. "We need to think in terms of the life cycle of a home, so it can adapt with the people who occupy it," says Scott Harper of Genliving. This could involve incorporating a second master bedroom into a renovation, splitting the two-storey family home into self-contained levels, or just reimagining the garage. "We have many clients who need a design that will still work as their kids become adults, or they're looking to build their last home and want flexibility so they can age in place," explains Will Leaf of Ewert Leaf architects. "It's about zoning and adaptability."





1. EXTEND YOUR HOME

"Look for a solution relative to what the site constraints are," says Will. "If land size is tight, we would consider vertical separation through levels, or if you had a bit more land you could create a pavilion concept, where living and bedroom 'pods' are distinct but still linked."

2. GARAGE CONVERSION

Converting a rumpus room, garage or basement area is an option for the young adults of the home. "An option could be handing over an existing ground floor space and devising a new parents' retreat on an upper floor [as seen above]," says buyer's agent Henny Stier.

3. GRANNY FLAT

If you're building from scratch, a good granny flat design is one that leaves plenty of backyard left over, and doesn't skimp on quality, advises Henny. "It adds a lot more value than a slapdash conversion of a garage or workshop," she says. **hb**

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