

What's Hot in Home Design

By JENNIFER TZESES Dec. 9, 2018 9:00 a.m. ET



Photograph by Gianni Franchellucci

Decorating is equal parts inspiration and imagination. Sometimes, looking far and wide for design ideas may be exactly what you need to spark your creativity and vision for your home.

Whether you're collecting concepts for a future reno, looking to make small updates to your interiors, or are in the process of a complete overhaul, here's a look at what's trending around the world in the realm of design.

Open-Plan Kitchens

While open kitchens aren't exactly new in the U.S., they're having a moment in European markets, according to the 2018 Houzz Kitchen Trends Study. "This is not a flash trend, but a slowly changing approach to how we imagine kitchens, and this affects the way kitchens are produced," says Leonora Sartori, Houzz Italy editor.

In Europe, where spaces tend to be smaller, kitchens are opening up to dining rooms and living rooms—there are no more walls separating the two rooms. "While in the past, the kitchen was seen as a private space, now we want kitchens we can be proud of and that can fit with a living room," Sartori says.

Anything I can do as a designer to get people to slow down and appreciate time is a great thing”

—Achille Salvagni

There has also been a lifestyle shift. “We want to share the time we have with family and friends, so we don’t want to have someone alone in the kitchen,” she says. There is a lot of middle ground for this: Kitchens can be partly separated by half-walls or see-through panels. Clever solutions, such as cabinetry that can also fit in living rooms, help maximize space.

“Many years ago, the grander houses in the United Kingdom had an upstairs/downstairs mentality,” says Rome-based architect and designer Achille Salvagni. There was often a staff downstairs in the kitchen preparing food for the family of the house. But meeting for pre-dinner drinks in a drawing room before heading into a dining room and then into the billiards room doesn’t fit into contemporary living.

“Kitchens have moved to the ground floor of many houses, and large, open-plan kitchens/dining rooms have become the norm,” Salvagni says. “This allows a hosting family to be preparing for a dinner party all while being able to socialize with the guests.”

These kitchen/dining rooms often lead onto a terrace or garden, so you can get a great use of space out of them. They have become the hub of contemporary living; the dinner table will often be used not just to eat from but also for the kids to do their homework, people to sit at and read newspapers, play board games, and so on.

Dual-Purpose Furniture

“We see a lot of modern portmanteaus that can hold a jacket, keys, and an umbrella, but also have a built-in mirror,” says Allyson Rees, senior retail lifestyles editor for WGSN, a global trend-forecasting company. Flexible furniture solutions are popular across the board, she says. “And for those who work from home, we’re seeing a rise in flexible dining tables; tables have hidden outlets or USB ports, so people can use them as a workspace during the day,” she says.

“Ideas for decluttering and clever storage hacks are always popular on Houzz, especially in European countries where apartments tend to be smaller,” Sartori says.



Bronze console with marble top feels timeworn. Courtesy of Achille Salvagni Atelier

Extra storage space can be found under the bed, with shelves in corners, in false ceilings, or with tailor-made bench beds that can store a lot inside.

“These storage solutions don’t seem like a wardrobe; rather, they look like the flat layout of a wall with almost invisible panels behind where there is space for storage,” Sartori says. As such, custom cabinetry is growing in popularity.

There’s also a rise in do-it-yourself and creative hacking—for example, taking a piece and making it your own, or making it better so that it has a more useful function in your life.

Timeworn Materials

Creating a home that feels safe and comfortable is of utmost importance around the world. “Velvet continues to be the upholstery fabric of choice, seen at furniture trade shows from Paris to High Point, N.C., and interior silhouettes are soft,” Rees says. Interiors with upholstery and plush fabrics—such as heavy-gauge knits, flannel, felt, fur, and faux fur—are becoming more popular.

There is a return to aged surfaces, timeworn materials, and an heirloom quality to interiors, Rees says, “championing the artisan—whose goods bear marks of the hand and small imperfections [that] add a more human element to designs.” There’s also a rise in craft products. Consumers want to know the provenance of the products they buy.

“Noble materials such as bronze, onyx, and marble naturally have aged surfaces and can be considered a luxury,” Salvagni says. “They’re on trend because people recognize the craftsmanship that has to go into shaping

these precious materials into the forms they want; this attention to detail is what people are willing to pay for. These materials are tactile, warm, and so much more appealing than plastics, laminates, and so forth,” Salvagni says.

Wood is a trend not just in flooring but, following a Scandinavian-style trend, in furniture, as well.

“We see that wood is being used nearly everywhere in the house, even in the bathroom where some years ago it was hard to imagine having a wooden bathroom floor,” Sartori says.

Marble is another classic material that’s becoming popular again, Sartori says. “Marble production has become so skilled and advanced that it can be used for things like coffee tables, thanks to a lighter and thinner tabletop, which is a better fit in contemporary homes.”

Mindfulness In Design

“The consumer obsession with wellness and spirituality encourages new self-care rituals for the bed and bathroom,” Rees explains. “We’re seeing sensorial experiences such as scent, color, and sound—once only really found in spas—take on an everyday appeal in the home.” This is playing out with smart lightbulb systems that allow you to create a sensory atmosphere in the home and use different colors for chromatherapy.

The rise of wellness and mindfulness as a key consumer trend is influencing younger generations, millennials especially, to move plants into the home, Rees says. No longer confined to the terrace or windowsill, they’re all over—in the shower or bathtub, hanging overhead.



Having plants or even edible gardens is a way for people to be healthier and more mindful. "Not only do plants make the house feel warmer, but they also contribute to reduced stress levels and a calmer living environments," Rees says.

Another thing that reduces stress: having a spa experience in your home. "We see more and more spa requests in private residences and on yachts, as people love to feel pampered, and it is easy now to have a masseuse come to your home or boat," Salvagni says. Modern living lends itself to better showers and wet rooms rather than traditional bathrooms, he adds.

Dressing rooms are another self-care decor trend. "People love the space to lay out their clothes properly, put favorite items on display, and take time to get dressed," he says. This way, it becomes a relaxing experience rather than just another task they have to do before their next meeting, dinner, appointment, or whatever a 21st century busy life has in store for them.

"Anything I can do as a designer to get people to slow down and appreciate time is a great thing," Salvagni says.