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Styles for the future

Home trends are changing. Women are having their say when it comes to a new passion for sheds, partitions and all things hi-tech. **Fay Sweet reports**

SHEDS are in, dining rooms definitely are not. Bathrooms are being transformed into luxurious, mini-spas, the barriers between home and office are coming down and we are investing in more art and designer furniture than ever. These are some of the findings in a new survey of 1,000 householders that paints a picture of how homes and lifestyles are changing in the 21st century. Not surprisingly the capital is ahead of the pack. "Londoners increasingly set the pace when it comes to architectural and interior design trends — not just in the UK, but in the rest of Europe," says one of the report's authors, Martin Raymond. "While, in general, people are still coming to terms with minimalism — wood floors, open-plan rooms, neutral colours — Londoners are repartitioning, creating dens, and rediscovering the joys of carpet and wallpaper. Think new-century maximalism."

‘The humble garden shed has become a girl thing’

The report, called *The Future of Homes*, has been compiled by research company The Future Laboratory for Standard Life Bank. "During the past few years, we have detected a distinct change in the ways that people are borrowing money," Standard Life Bank's Ashley Ramsay says. "Many of our customers no longer consider their mortgages to be a burden, but instead they are using the property equity to refurbish their homes, fund lifestyle changes, such as setting up their own businesses, or fulfil lifelong ambitions, like going travelling. "Many, particularly younger London customers, are buying properties in need of major refurbishment as a way of getting onto the property ladder, while slightly older customers

are using their equity to fund improvements such as loft conversions to accommodate a growing family." With a large proportion of its customer base in London and the South-East, Standard Life is using the research to gain insight into a core group of borrowers: thirty-somethings taking out the bank's Freestyle flexible mortgage. Among the surprises uncovered by researchers is that the humble garden shed — more than 1.5 million were bought in the UK last year — has become a girl thing. The findings show that "40 per cent of women use a shed to 'do their own thing', making them a more popular bolt hole, office or place to potter for women than men, 38 per cent of whom see a shed as a den".

This "extra room" is seen as a highly flexible space, and home-owners are transforming them into bars, meditation rooms, offices, spas and even mini-cinemas.

Our use of rooms is changing, too. While 38 per cent of

Londoners in the poll describe their home as a haven, more than 73 per cent believe their homes are becoming more connected and office-like, blurring the boundaries between home and the workplace.

Margaret Thatcher once famously said that home was where you went when you had nowhere else to go. Nowadays, about 70 per cent of respondents like to spend time staying in with friends, with 48 per cent of Londoners saying their living room is the most important space in the home. Almost 31 per cent nominated the kitchen as their hub, but only 1.2 per cent chose the dining room.

The bathroom has seen a big shift of emphasis. It is now a place where people go not just to wash,



Shed chic: more women than men now use sheds. Designer Morag Myerscough has added a "hut" to the roof of her home and shop in Clerkenwell. She uses it as a retreat, going up there to cook or socialise with friends

but to restore their sense of wellbeing, and to unwind with music, candles and aromatherapy oils. Indeed, nearly a third of respondents believe a home spa adds value to a property.

The survey also reveals that we cannot live without new technology: more than 78 per cent of Londoners say no home should be without the internet and more than a third of interviewees believe a home office adds value to their property (women, at 40.7 per cent, are more convinced of this than men, at 33.1 per cent).

Home cinemas are rising in popularity — 20 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women say a home is not complete without one — which follows the trend in America, where

20 per cent of all new homes include a big screen. Home gyms (11.4 per cent) and wine cellars (9.9 per cent) are also seen by respondents as adding value to a property.

Home-owners also seem to be surrounding themselves with fashionable objects, with 65.7 per cent now buying more designer furniture than five years ago.

Meanwhile, household spend on art and crafts has risen from £400 million a decade ago to £825 million today.

The Future of Homes Report was researched and compiled by The Future Laboratory for Standard Life Bank.

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