



# HOME, BALANCED HOMIE

In order to live a meaningful, happy life, a secure and beautiful home helps, so how do you create that equilibrium in your home?

WORDS / MARIE ROWLAND

**T**here are many aphorisms that endeavour to capture the meaning of what a home is: "Home is where the heart is", or how about, "A man's home is his castle"? The famous Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, who ushered in the age of Modernism in the 1920s, coined the saying, "The home should be the treasure chest of living." After all, we merely reside in a house, but we live and perhaps die at home.

So what does the perfect home comprise? Speak to any number of designers, architects, builders or even to your next-door neighbour and each would have a vastly different viewpoint. This is because a home is a deeply personal experience. It is a reflection of not just our tastes but also our values and ideologies.

From excavating ancient sites where families lived, archaeologists can determine what people valued, what they believed in and even how they interacted. In ancient times, as now, the home, its adornments and layout played a vital role in how the occupants viewed themselves.

In the 1st century BCE, Roman architect, author and engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio published a multi-volume work entitled *De Architectura*, commonly referred to today as the *Ten Books on Architecture*. In one of the very first texts on this topic he asserted that any house must possess

three metaphorical pillars: solidity, functionality and beauty. Not much has changed. However, even beyond its structure and aesthetics, the home still plays a vital role in revealing who we are and what matters to us.

There is no doubt that we are different people depending on the place we inhabit and what that place denotes. For instance, an office is about productivity and is hierarchical. How we feel in this environment contrasts with how we feel in a gym, a yoga studio and, of course, at home. The home allows us to shut the world out or to view it through a transparent pane, feeling safe and secure from our position on

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the inside. It's a place of restoration and respite. It's where love dwells and intimate emotions can at last be expressed far from prying eyes. It's where we can finally be ourselves.

So what constitutes a balanced, supportive home?

## THE VALUATION

It is part of our primal makeup to need to feel safe and keep the wolves from

the door. A happy home is a secure one but, once we feel safe, feeling at home is essentially the next step.

In the hedonistic 1980s, when wealth was the maxim, minimalism in the home ruled. Monochromatic colour tones and industrial furniture symbolised our detachment from ourselves and reflected the collective value of greed. While still consumer-oriented, we have returned to more soulful values of health, wellbeing, family and community. The home is a less aggressive and more reflective place. Being at home is a touchy-feely experience. Yet we still respond to the aesthetic and we use form and beauty to heighten our emotional responses in our home.

How, then, do you create this sense of wellbeing and stability when the world outside is so distracting?

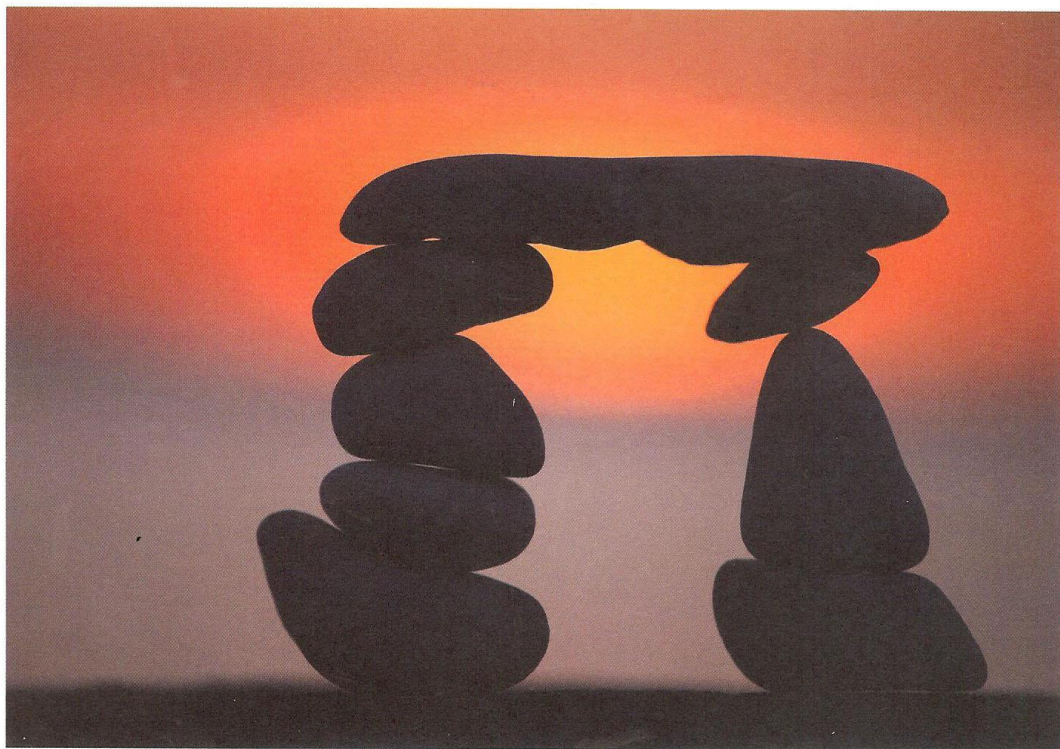
## A PURPOSEFUL HOME

Creating a purposeful home sounds somewhat abstract but, in fact, it is a conscious process. When you divide a home into specific zones, each area takes on a particular function. It's worth taking the time to do a walk-through of your home, observing each room and its proposed function, to assess whether it is, in fact, meeting its intended objective.

Nowadays, the dining room (especially in open-plan homes) is the place for homework or Facebooking, a dumping ground for magazines and often the home office. Amidst all this you may find a forlorn candleholder or a misplaced napkin.

Of course, economy of space is at a premium now and areas of the home have to be multi-functional, but any furniture catalogue can show you how easy it is to compartmentalise, rearrange or convert. It's vital to create demarcation in the home, otherwise you cannot live with clarity or a sense of meaning. To sit together at a dining table uncluttered by paraphernalia from other parts of our lives makes eating an everyday social event where real interaction occurs, as opposed to a chore open to distractions.

Once your rooms have their assigned purposes, their functions are optimised. Bedrooms can be viewed as places of restoration rather than the rooms where you catch up on your favourite show on the iPad.



In a home where there are multiple occupants, this demarcation is especially vital. Many young families have toys, nappy-change bags and sippy cups strewn all around the house, leaving no area at all for adults. The psychological impact is significant.

The space informs the occupants how to perceive and react to one another. Suddenly they forget to address each other by their names and are constantly "Mummy" and "Daddy". No matter how small the home, an allocated precious space can be divested of anything that reminds you that a kid has been there. There needs to be a place where adults can interact and "play", too. Using Moroccan screens or dividers, or building wall units that use space going up, is a great way of increasing the tightest of floorplans. Resurrecting "alone time" means the home has a greater definition than the "family home".

In the same way, a teenager's room has to be a space where they feel safe and can enjoy the privilege of privacy like their parents do. They feel respected and have a sense of individuality while living together harmoniously (mostly) under one roof.

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#### **ORGANISATION MAKES FOR AN ORGANIC HOME**

If cleanliness is next to godliness, then organisation is the key to organic wellbeing. An organised space allows for happiness to grow naturally.

The psychological impact of clutter is now well documented in many research papers. In fact, we know hoarding to be a psychological disorder which in extreme cases requires medical treatment. There is a causal link between chaotic environments and the wellbeing of children, who become confused, agitated and disoriented. Adults, too, find it hard to be motivated and to get things done.

There are many "experts" that come in and do home "audits". This form of intervention seems a little extreme, but we do tend to accumulate, so it's important to allocate time to

sort through all of that "stuff" and sell it, give it away or chuck it out. Your home will never stop thanking you. Dumping all your unused items can be cathartic. Who needs a therapist when you have a quarterly council pickup on your doorstep?

#### **A PEACEFUL HOME**

Creating a peaceful and beautiful space does not mean you have to sell your soul to have a *Vogue* garden or a chic interior. In fact, the addition of candles, flowers or plants and aromatherapy burners can transform a space into an environment that embraces and evokes calm. Painting a feature wall in a soft pastel or muted colour can also achieve this sense of peace. If that is what you value.

By contrast, an energetic and highly creative environment may be what inspires you, but consider devoting just one living space to this endeavour so you can have balance. The psychological effect of how we feel through light, space, colour and smell is vital for our sense of wellbeing. The home is an energetic zone and it has the power to transform and even heal. Be mindful when you create the "feel" of your





## HOME CREATING EQUILIBRIUM

home and think about how you want to embody your values in a physical sense.

### LEAVING THEM TO THEIR OWN DEVICES

Most homes now seem to run on battery power. Research shows that the more devices there are at home, the less social interaction occurs. It is totally normal in some families for Mum, Dad and the kids to be texting, playing games, updating their social profile or Instagramming while having dinner. To add insult to injury, at any one time, individuals in a home can each be “connected” from different parts of the house. Many psychologists now recommend that there be one communal zone for devices and even “curfews” where, after a certain time, all devices are switched off.

Creating a “home base” for devices to be centrally stored means the house reverts from being a hub and becomes a home again. This requires leadership from the top as often parents are the main offenders, frequently indisposed as they are otherwise engaged on the phone or ordering something online. Put down the gadget and pick up a book or even start a conversation! Time spent engaging in real-time human activity or even allowing yourself to disconnect and sit in the garden is all part of becoming reconnected with what matters in life.

### HOUSE RULES & RITUALS

With privilege come rules. If your teenager has won the right to privacy in their bedroom where they can determine how it looks, then they have to conform to house rules. Whether it is a no-device-in-the-bedroom rule or a strict 7pm-sit-down-to-dinner rule or sticking with the roster of household chores, all regulations should be clearly



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outlined and enforced. We all do this in our offices and in places of leisure or physical activity, so why should the home be any different? House rules are not imposed to demean or diminish our sense of freedom, but to respect the home as a living and breathing organism that needs to be looked after and cherished. When we lovingly care for our homes, we care for each other and increase our daily enjoyment and living experiences.

Rituals make up our daily lives. Whether big like a marriage ceremony or small like arriving at your yoga studio where the incense heralds the practice, rituals give us a sense of place, time and meaning. No matter how insignificant they may seem, rituals can be practised every day in the home.

It may be that weekly bath where you can create a spa-like setting with candles. Or the big Sunday lunch that seems to get bigger every time.

Rituals and traditions form the memory bank of the home. It may be

that you institute Friday family fun nights or celebrate the first day of the summer solstice with a garden meditation. When you create your own set of rituals and traditions, your home is like no other and has its own idiosyncratic meaning; it comes alive and the space no longer operates in a utilitarian way but breathes life and stores love and cherished moments.

### I'M COMING HOME

Home for many of us is the last refuge. You know the feeling when you walk into the house at the end of a stressful day and, as soon as you shut the door, you close your eyes and exhale an immense sigh of relief. You know, even at a subconscious level, that you are safe and in a place where you can drop all the masks and arrive back at yourself, your true self. You don't have to perform or be at your best — you can just be. It's the place where you can be truly known and acknowledged. Where else in the world would you rather be? 🍷

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