

PRESS RELEASE

Seamless living

Anton Odendaal from leading furniture retailer, Rochester, offers some advice on how to choose furniture for open-plan areas.

31 July 2013, Johannesburg: There was a time when open-plan living was unconventional, but over the last decade or two, it has become a mainstream architectural trend. In many modern homes, the kitchen, living room, dining room and patio are designed to flow seamlessly together. In studio apartments, even the bedroom is part of the living area and often the dining area doubles up as a home office.

At the start of the trend homeowners had to knock walls out to get the look, but almost all newly built houses are designed with free-flowing spaces at the core of the building philosophy. Says Anton Odendaal from leading furniture retailer, Rochester: "Architecture, just like the rest of our contemporary lifestyle, is about comfort, convenience and saving time. Open-plan living areas provide easy access to different zones in the home. The awareness of sustainability and saving energy further endorses open-plan living, as this design style tends to optimise natural light and ventilation."

Anton notes that there are very few drawbacks to open-plan living areas, including heat loss, less privacy and noise. He also points out that there are however, many benefits – these include:

- **Purely practical:** Fewer walls mean less wasted space – there is no need for passages, which saves on building costs. It also translates into more natural light and ventilation.
- **A happy place:** The sunny atmosphere created by natural light flooding free-flowing spaces, is the most appealing quality of open-plan architecture. Homeowners' needs have changed and formal lounges have been phased out. Cooking alone in a stuffy kitchen was probably never fun for anyone, but with open-plan living areas, there is no need to cook in solitude anymore – you can be cooking dinner, while your kids watch TV in the living area, and your partner does some work at the dining room table. The flexibility offered by open-plan living spaces fits in well with our zeitgeist of informal living and less rigid roles of family members.
- **Options and more options:** One large room allows for flexible floor plans for furniture placement. You can change, shuffle or combine work, leisure and dining zones with very little effort, giving you more creative and practical options.
- **A family affair:** Walls are barriers, so when they come down, the result is more social interaction. Each family member can be busy with his own activity, yet have a conversation across different zones – dad braais on the porch, mom prepares side dishes in the kitchen, the kids do homework at the dining table or play in the lounge, whilst they all discuss their holiday plans.

To create a relaxed yet elegant open-plan living area, Anton says that it is advisable to decorate the space as a whole: "This will strengthen the desired free-flowing look and feel of the space. By not doing so, the different zones won't blend seamlessly and could end up looking messy and disjointed. Similar to garden design and architecture, you start by planning the whole project, then you can execute it over time."

He offers a few basic décor guidelines that you can follow:

- Furniture doesn't have to be from the same range, but it should at least be of similar style.
- Choose furniture in proportion to the space, if it is a very big area, then go for chunky furniture, such as an L-shaped sofa with oversized arms.
- Use furniture made from the same type of wood, or at least wood that is the same colour, throughout the space.
- Leather and earth tones go well with any colour wood.
- Upholstery pattern and texture can differ, but stick to a specific colour scheme, such as earth tones, beiges or greys.
- Repeat the accent colour - be subtle, a hint of red in a painting in the dining area, is enough to pick up a red vase or a red stripe in scatter cushions featured in the lounge area.
- Use loose rugs in the various spaces to create warmth and to define the specific zones.
- Group furniture to form cozy "rooms" within the open-plan space.
- Lighting is another way to define zones, whether pendants, floor-standing or table lamps. Instead of lighting the room evenly, create pools of light in each zone. Moody lighting creates a sense of warmth, whereas bright lighting often feels cold and impersonal.
- Console tables and sideboards work well as understated partitions between zones.
- Bigger furniture pieces, such as TV cabinets and bookcases, can be placed as dividers between zones. They also provide some privacy and can serve as sound barriers.
- Use ornaments and artworks to add personality, warmth and to create a more lived-in feel.

"If you have hit a snag, then you can always ask your friendly Rochester sales assistant for further advice," concludes Anton.

Visit www.rochester.co.za or phone 0861 71 72 73 (ask for sales) to find a Rochester retailer closest to you.

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