



HACKED OFF...

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The following feature was published on www.headlineproperty.co.uk, a leading resource of information for UK property journalists.

What makes journalists really angry? In this regular spot, journalists have a chance to vent their spleen over the issues they care about. And we invite readers to respond. This week, Rebecca Winward challenges the merits of knocking down walls to create sitting-cum-dining areas. Homeowners who lose a room in the quest for more space often end up with more of a headache than a solution, she suggests.

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So, recent research by Halifax Home Insurance has shown that an increasing number of homeowners are 'knocking through' to turn two rooms into one with the dining room being the most likely casualty. I'm amazed! When I bought my Edwardian semi, one of the main reasons that I chose it (despite the woodchip, damp problem, and lack of anything resembling a functional kitchen) was for its separate dining room. Having always lived in properties with a 'lounge/diner', I wanted a house where I could sit down and eat a meal properly. At the table. Without being tempted to see what was on the box and without my flatmate inflicting his terrible TV taste on me.

It's not just an irrational pet hate of mine. Nutritionists and diet gurus agree that it's not good to 'multi-task' at meal times, as it distracts from the job in hand. For a start, you don't obtain the maximum nutritional value from your food. Then you don't notice when you're full, making overeating all too easy. Of course, it's still possible to sit around the dinner table in an open-plan space. But how many people with this sort of layout in their home can honestly say they never give in to the temptation to just settle on the sofa with a takeaway? A separate dining room avoids such moments of weakness. As the saying suggests: 'what the eye can't see'...

Meal times aren't the only tricky aspect of the sitting-cum-dining room, either. People living in the same house often want to do different things, and this doesn't always make for a harmonious atmosphere. Open-plan is great if you're cooking and want to keep an eye on the kids doing their homework. But how convenient is it if they're playing a noisy game of Twister and your other half is trying to sort out his tax return? And it's not just the traditional family unit that may not always love the lounge/diner either. I've known countless people in house-share situations who have been driven crazy by the fact that there is effectively only one communal area.

I also have a sneaking suspicion that this one-room-does-all philosophy is not exactly, as it's currently being presented, a lifestyle 'choice' any more. With developers squeezing every penny of profit out of building plots, property footprints are shrinking. So many

homes are actually too small to be able to incorporate separate sitting and dining rooms. Which prompts the question: why are some people so keen to take a sledge hammer to their older homes? Don't they realize they are, in fact, losing a room?

They may gain the illusion of space. But, unless it's very carefully thought out, they could find themselves stuck with an awkward room where doors, windows and fireplaces all end up located in the wrong places. There may be additional problems when it comes to furniture positioning too. After all, if you take out a dividing wall, you can no longer put a sofa or a sideboard up against it. Open-plan living? No thank you!