

What makes a house a home?



Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz only had to click her red shoes and say 'there's no place like home' to get there.

In the real world, most of us have to fork out rent or go into debt to the banks to put a roof over our heads. And then we have to FIND something we'd want to live in.

So what is it that makes us decide to call a particular place "home"?

There are so many platitudes and cliches about homes, houses and properties:

"It takes hands to build a house, but only hearts can build a home"

"A house is made of walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams."

"A house is not a home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as the body."

Is this all a load of codswallop?

I interviewed the Australian Psychological Society about this, as they had studied why we choose to live where we do, and they found that function and convenience had more to do with why we choose our homes.

But with houses and property costing us an ever-increasing portion of our incomes, what features, factors and ideals make a house a home?

Is it budget?

Is it location? Most of us need to be close to work or schools or uni.

Is it being a part of a community or village of other people who understand and like you?

Boral sent me a press release this week telling me that it's our backyards - oh, pardon me, our "outdoor rooms" - that make a house a home.

I really don't know the answer, except to say that it is something that you feel inside. I don't feel that this sprawling four-bedroom

house I am currently renting is "home" ... maybe it's because the kitchen tiles are so darned ugly or maybe it's because it feels too isolating for someone who works on their own most of the time.

Demographer Bernard Salt says our property ideals are related to our lifestyles - or the lifestyle we aspire to.

He says more of us want to live in places where we can be surrounded by people "like us" rather than being too worried about whether we have the fourth bedroom or the triple garage.

American research shows that [safety is a huge concern](#) for choosing to live in certain locations, hence that nation's propensity for "white flight" to new, expensive suburbs which left many inner city areas suffering during their housing subprime crisis.

In China, there's [a dwarf-only village](#) (maybe they need to be called Little People these days?) where tourists pay to watch them as entertainment and the Little People get to live among like-minded spirits.

In Sydney's Bondi, a group of homeless men [slept under the roof of the beachside](#) pavilion - but with people across the road paying close to \$10 million for apartments, they didn't get to stay in the [rent-free, open plan](#) pavilion for very long.

I suspect that every person has different ideals of home, different lifestyle needs and wildly varying ideas of decent accommodation. Which is why it's always so hard to find the perfect "home".

Since most Australians buy established homes (that's the fancy word for "second-hand"), a property is usually tapered to someone else's ideals rather than your own.

Just last week, I bought what I hope will be a FANTASTIC home. It's an apartment - which isn't ideal when you have two small boys - but it's in a great cosmopolitan location where I can walk to the supermarket every day, meet my girlfriends who live nearby and stroll to the movies or bookstore whenever I feel like it.

For me, this will be home ... but only once I've removed the carpet that smells like four truckers rubbed their armpits on it and scrubbed the kitchen clean. Oh, and put in a bathroom that doesn't look like a kitty litter tray.

I stare at hundreds of homes every week in my job, and I have to say - and not just because I am paid to say it - that the new [Domain Radar](#) search is one of the easiest ways to find a property you can call home.

And that's because the "home" isn't just something that's three bedrooms or in a particular suburb - it has to have all those other quirks, tweaks and little things that determine whether a property will suit you and your lifestyle.

Radar helped me select whether living near my kids' school was 'important' or a 'nice to have' and then I could get streetview pics of the property to check whether the neighbours had 14 old cars up on blocks in the front yard or had turned their house into a nuclear power station.

You see, my new property didn't have to have all the traditional things like bedrooms or a carspace to become my home - it had to suit my lifestyle.

I'm afraid I am one of Bernard Salt's latte-loving, lifestyle-seeking property types that had found myself at a weird lifestage of being a single working mum that needs to balance the kids' needs with my every-second-weekend of kid-free fun time for me.

But what about you? What is it that makes a house a home?