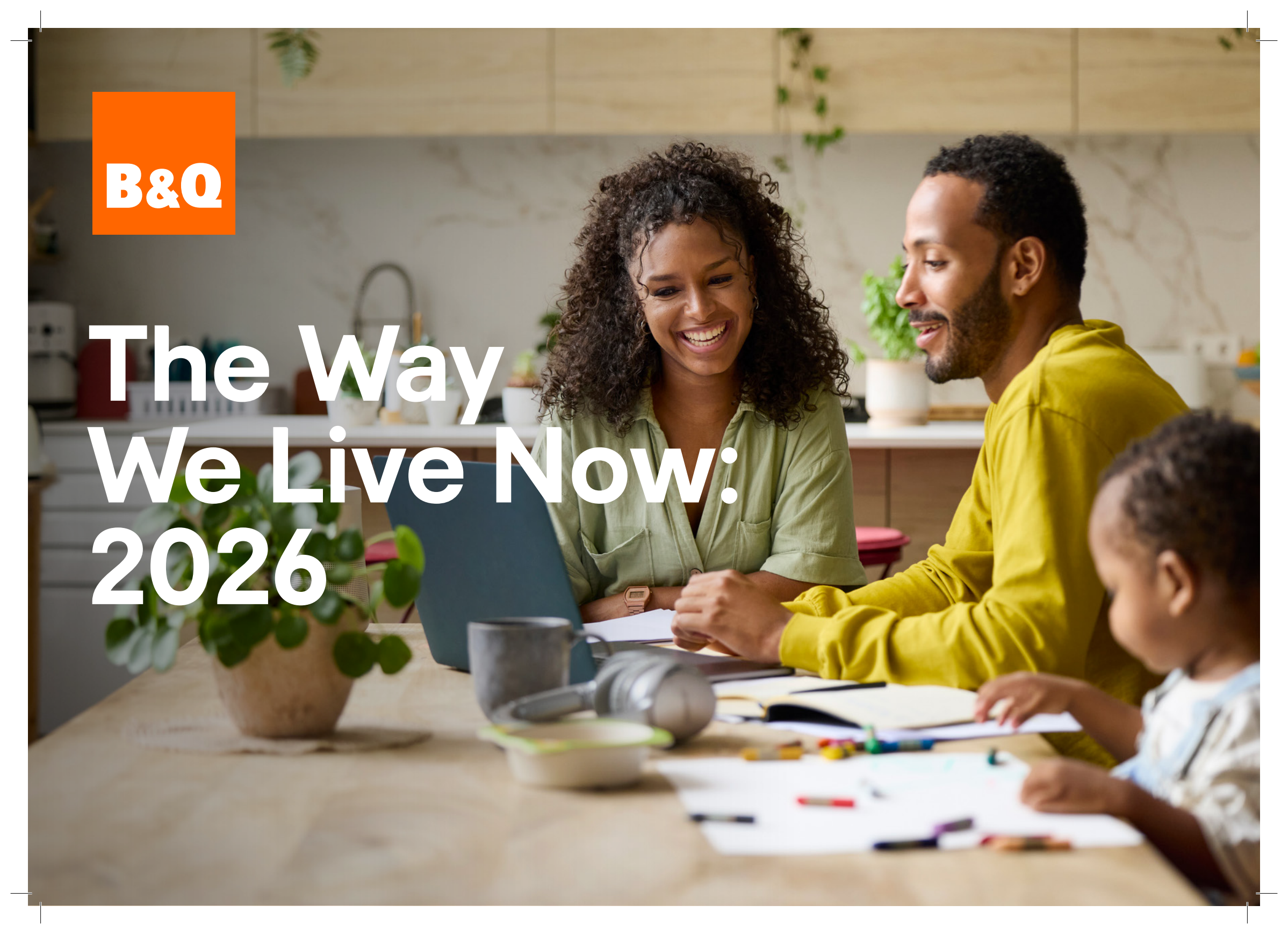




B&Q

The Way We Live Now: 2026

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A word from our CEO

People are leaning on their homes for moments of calm and joy

As the world feels louder and increasingly more uncertain, people are using their home more deliberately as a space to relax, recover, and enjoy small moments of joy.

At B&Q, we believe anyone can improve their homes to make life better. Our annual 'The Way We Live Now' report is a key indicator of the latest trends, attitudes, and behaviours around modern living. These insights support our evolution as we adapt our business to the way our customers want to improve their homes.

This year's report reveals that people are increasingly seeing their home as a place to relax and recover from the outside world. We've seen an intentional shift in design choices that support emotional wellbeing, from creating cocoon-like rooms to dialling down visual noise, helping people feel more balanced in their day-to-day lives.

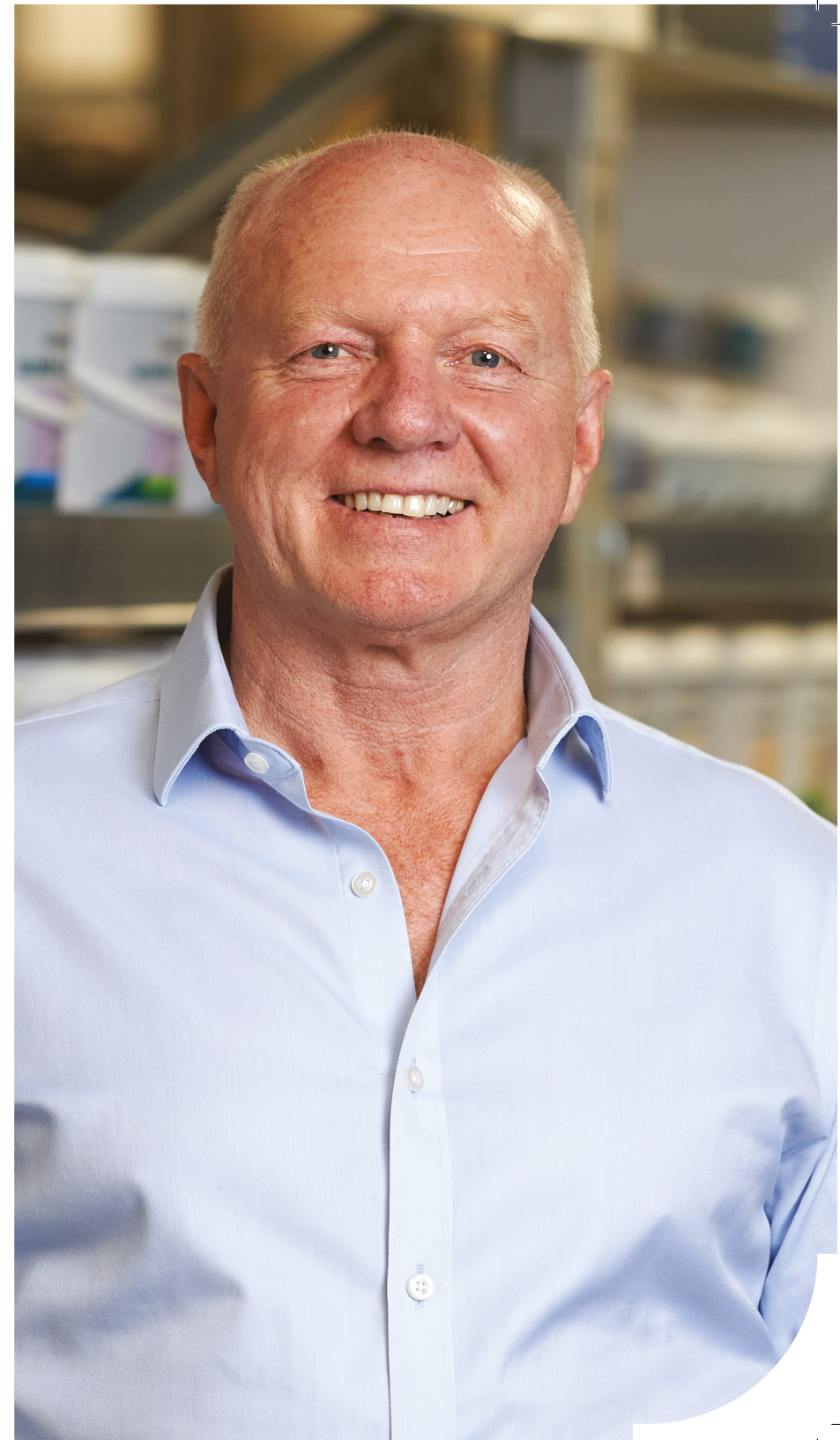
We're also seeing some people, particularly younger generations, placing more emphasis on fun, choosing novelty features that add joy and talkability to the home. These small, emotionally uplifting additions reflect a growing desire to create spaces that spark delight in everyday life.

The trade is also undergoing an impressive evolution, with a greater use of social media to help foster trust in their expertise, which is boosting people's confidence with bigger projects. This is a positive shift for a critical sector that underpins UK economic growth.

The insights in this report will help to shape how we serve our customers. We continue to modernise B&Q and to invest in greater choice and convenience to support every home improvement journey.

Thank you to our customers who have contributed to this report by sharing the way they live now, providing invaluable insight into how we can help the nation build a better life.

Graham Bell, B&Q CEO



Context

The home as a place of recovery, joy and togetherness

In the UK, we're witnessing an evolution in how people live in their homes and the approach they take to making improvements:

- Homeowners are creating cocoons of calm to support wellbeing.
- People are prioritising fun, micro upgrades that deliver moments of joy.
- A new wave of togetherness is bringing shared spaces back into focus.
- More competition amongst tradespeople is driving more transparency and professionalism, giving consumers more confidence to act.

We're going to explore:

01

Homes with Feelings

02

JoyMaxxing

03

Togetherness

04

Trade Evolution



Summary infographic

01 Homes with Feelings

Designing for calm, rest & emotional wellbeing

As wellbeing takes priority, homes are shifting towards calmer, more restorative spaces.

87% say the home is a sanctuary from the world outside

92% say how the home looks impacts how they feel at home

From sleep-first bedrooms to mood-led lighting, home improvements are increasingly about how a space makes you feel – not just how it looks.

Calm is the goal

93% prioritise making the home relaxing and calming when deciding what to improve

Bedrooms are protected rest zones

71% try to use the bedroom only for rest/sleep

Lighting sets the mood

63% like to use colour and lighting to change the mood at home

03 Togetherness

Homes are evolving to bring people together

After carving out personal space post-Covid, people are choosing togetherness again at home.

84% say spending time at home with the family is increasingly important

Homes are being redesigned to make shared moments easier – bringing family life back into the heart of everyday living.

Homes designed for togetherness

85% value rooms or areas that make it easy to gather and spend time together

The kitchen leads the shift especially for younger generations

60% like the idea of the kitchen being the main social space in the home

Gen Z	70%	Millennials	66%
Gen X	56%	Boomers	45%

Children back in shared spaces

82% of families encourage children to play or hang out in shared living areas, not bedrooms

02 JoyMaxxing

When small pops of joy matter more than being practical

Playful, feel-good upgrades are being added to homes simply because they bring joy.

81% want the home to feel fun and joyful

70% enjoy adding playful or quirky touches to the home

From smart lighting to hidden rooms, home improvement is increasingly about adding delight, surprise and personal enjoyment.

Joy-led features people already have or want

61%

Appliance Garage

54%

Voice-controlled features / smart tech

51%

Hidden Rooms (e.g. pantry / bathroom behind a cupboard)

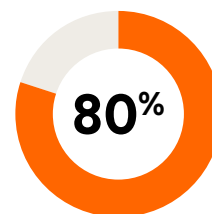
45%

Wine Fridge

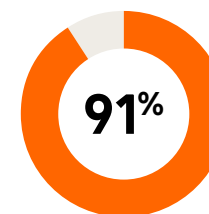
04 Trade Evolution

The trade is raising the bar on trust and professionalism

In a more competitive environment the trade are working harder to earn trust.



say that tradespeople seem more professional than they used to be



state that their experience with tradespeople in the past year has been positive

A strong social presence is now key to helping trades win work with younger generations.

Gen Z and Millennials are **3x** more likely than Boomers to prioritise professional online presence when choosing a tradesperson

01

Homes with Feelings

Homes have evolved to support our mental and emotional needs

As the outside world feels louder and more uncertain, people are increasingly retreating into their homes, as sanctuaries of calm and comfort.

With mental wellbeing a topic of national conversation, the home is no longer seen simply as a place to live, but as an essential influence on how we feel every day.

As a result, people are making more deliberate choices guided by what works best for their emotional wellbeing. They're redesigning spaces to support ease, reassurance and balance – not just aesthetics.

87% of people love spending time at home – stating that 'it makes them feel happy'. This is one of the very few things that all generations agree on

x2 The home environment has double the impact on wellbeing compared to exercise

80%

say that the way the home looks has a big impact on how they feel when they are at home

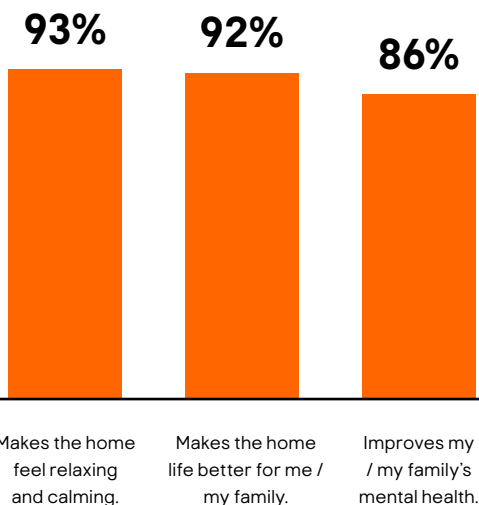
87%

think of the home as a sanctuary from the world outside

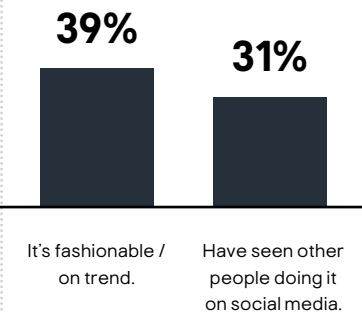


Most important factors when deciding what improvements to make

Top 3 most important factors



Bottom 2 most important factors



From bedrooms to bathrooms, homes are being re-designed to support rest and recovery

As people place greater importance on emotional wellbeing, the bedroom has emerged as a key focus. With sleep recognised as essential to how we feel, bedrooms are being pared back to that core purpose. Visual clutter is reduced, screens removed, and crisp whites and bright finishes are giving way to darker, warmer and more cocooning tones.

These spaces are being reimagined as calm retreats – designed to quiet the mind and shut out the noise of the day. Parents are extending the same thinking to children's bedrooms, moving play and screen time elsewhere in the home to prioritise calmer, sleep-first environments.

In some homes, this instinct to cocoon is extending beyond the bedroom. Bathrooms – once purely functional – are being adapted as small oases of calm, offering moments of pause and mental reset within daily routines. While not a widespread shift, this reflects the same growing desire for sanctuary at home.

When it appears, the design language echoes the bedroom: moodier colour palettes, softer lighting and tactile materials that dial down stimulation. These spaces aren't about luxury or indulgence, but about creating moments of restoration in otherwise busy days.

66%

have or would like to have hotel style bedding

71%

try to only use the bedroom for rest/sleeping

69%

of parents try to keep children's bedrooms free of toys/clutter

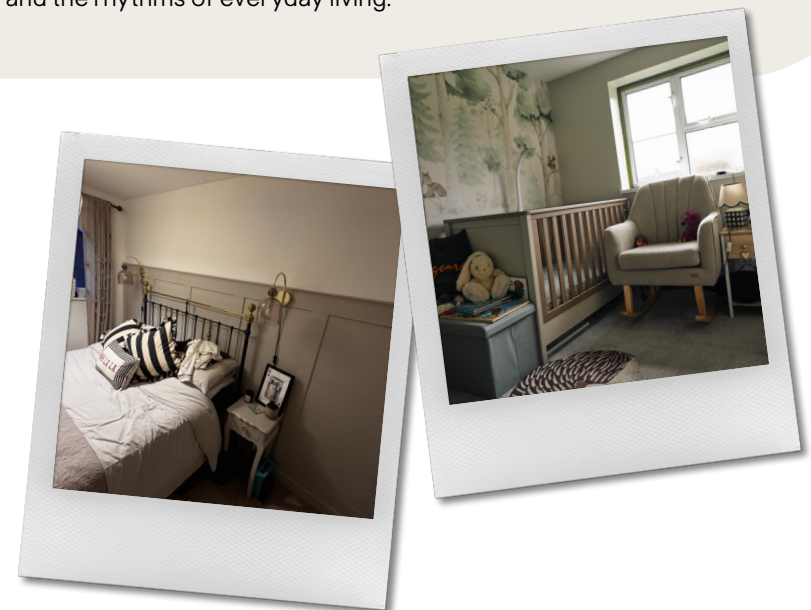


CASE STUDY

Elizabeth

In this home, the bathroom is designed as a private sanctuary, with ambient lighting creating a calm, restorative environment suited to busy family life.

Darker paint tones, natural wood, and greenery establish a calming setting that promotes relaxation. These choices allow the space to act as a versatile mood setter, adapting easily to both quiet moments and the rhythms of everyday living.



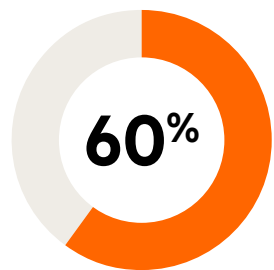
In kitchens, restraint is on the menu

Across the home, decluttering is increasingly about meaning, not minimalism – keeping what earns its place. It's a wellbeing habit, not an aesthetic ideal. But the kitchen is different.

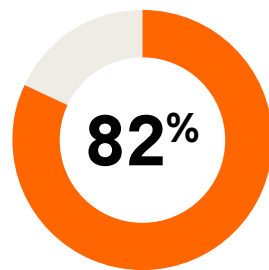
Here, clutter isn't personal – it's universal. Tolerance for visual noise is lower, and the ambition clearer: space, calm, and visual ease. We're seeing a decisive move away from surfaces that work hard and towards surfaces that stay clear. Appliances are disappearing behind doors, storage is becoming invisible, and order is designed in – not something you create after cooking.

Even everyday staples are being questioned. Once essential items are now contributors to visual noise. Even the humble toaster – long a fixture on the worktop – is being hidden away when not in use. In the modern kitchen, visibility equals friction.

Smooth worktops and concealed storage have become powerful status symbols of calm – not just good design, but control. The kitchen is no longer just where life happens messily; it's where noise is deliberately edited out.



already have
or would like
to have an
'appliance garage'



agree that having
clear surfaces
in the kitchen is
really important

8 in 10

people have taken steps to create a more peaceful, calm environment in the home in the past year

CASE STUDY

Ben & Beth

The home of the Keen-Toombs family embraces a warm, cocooning feel, shaped through considered choices in layout, lighting, and décor. It's designed to feel calm, using storage solutions to contribute to an overall sense of comfort and retreat.

The kitchen has been intentionally decluttered to create a more streamlined, functional environment, allowing design details to stand out more clearly.



Lighting choices are transforming how people are feeling in their homes

Home improvers are increasingly focused on how lighting influences mood, rather than how much it illuminates

As a result, the traditional central ceiling light is falling out of favour, replaced by layered lighting schemes using lamps, mirror lighting and, most notably, LED strip lights.

The aim is to dial up the atmosphere – light that softens the space. In many homes, the best lighting is now almost invisible: felt rather than seen.



63%

like to play with colour and lighting to change the mood of rooms around the home

Gen Z

Millennials

Gen X

Boomers

82%

72%

61%

36%

CASE STUDY

Elizabeth & James

Ellie and James bought their family home two years ago, and it continues to evolve as they adapt it to the needs of their teenage children and their changing family life.

Rather than big renovations, they've focused on creating impact through small details – using lighting as a key design feature to shape how the home looks and feels. A media wall acts as a focal point, while layered lighting is used to add depth, softness and a subtle sense of drama.

Carefully placed light creates contrast and warmth, turning everyday spaces into something more expressive and considered. Throughout the home lighting is used to set the mood, rather than simply light the room – balancing practicality with comfort, and creating moments of visual impact that can shift with the time of day. It allows the space to feel calm and lived-in, while remaining flexible for future change.



62%

don't like the bright central ceiling lights ("the big light") and try not to turn them on at home

62%

already have or would like to have statement lighting in the home

02

JoyMaxxing

Feel good upgrades are rising as joy matters more than justification

As homes take on greater emotional importance, younger generations in particular are carving out space for something different: indulgence without justification.

This is what we call 'JoyMaxxing' in the home: a growing willingness, especially among Millennials and Gen Z, to invest in small, joyful, sometimes deliberately nonsensical upgrades simply because they are fun, impressive or emotionally uplifting.

It's less about big permanent statements and more about everyday micro-pleasures – features that may not be necessary or rational, but reliably lift mood, spark conversation or quietly delight them day-to-day. The value lies not in what these upgrades **do**, but in how they **feel** – playful, clever, surprising, just indulgent enough to be worth it.

“

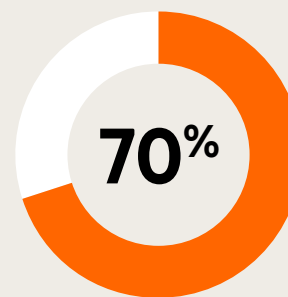
I'm not denying I live in an ex-council house in St Albans, but why can't I have a log cabin in the woods? It's fun and we all love it.

”



81%

want the home to feel fun and joyful



enjoy adding playful touches that make the home feel unique

Gen Z

83%

Millennials

81%

Gen X

70%

Boomers

46%

Gen Z

78%

Millennials

74%

Gen X

63%

Boomers

39%

64%

like to add fun or quirky elements to the home

58%

like having features in the home that make guests go "wow!"

Gen Z

78%

Millennials

70%

Gen X

52%

Boomers

33%

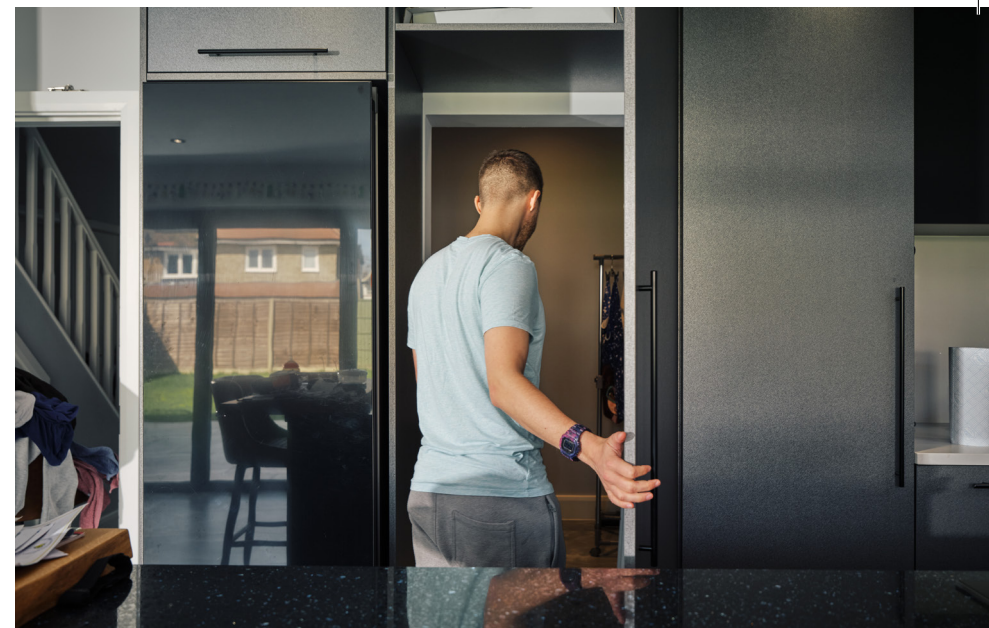
In some corners of the house, practicality is taking a back seat

The increasing desire for hidden rooms is perhaps the purest example of JoyMaxxing for the home.

Concealed utility rooms, secret offices or playrooms hidden behind bookcases or cupboard walls often make little practical sense. They can be more expensive, more complex and sometimes less efficient than conventional layouts.

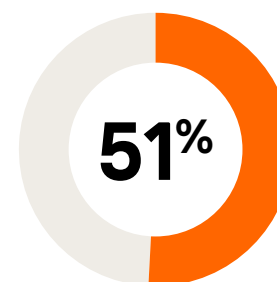
And that's exactly the point.

Tapping into childhood fantasy and playfulness, these spaces are deliberately indulgent: created to delight rather than optimise, and to prioritise joy over pure practicality.

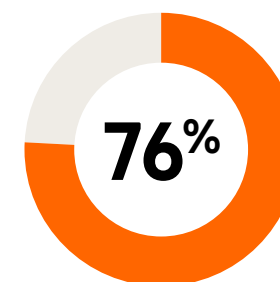


CASE STUDY | Hidden Room

The 'hidden room' trend is the perfect example of JoyMaxxing; though it does provide some useful extra space (in this example as a utility room) its real benefit comes from the fact they're a secret room. Any unsuspecting visitor sees just a straightforward kitchen cupboard, but then those doors swing open to reveal a beautifully designed compact room. It's fun, unusual (though a growing trend) and a great talking point.



have or would like to have a hidden room e.g. bathroom/pantry behind a cupboard door



say that not everything they buy for the home needs to be practical

The appeal of a smart home isn't just intelligence – it's theatre

Smart home technology is not just a tool for efficiency, but also a source of fun.

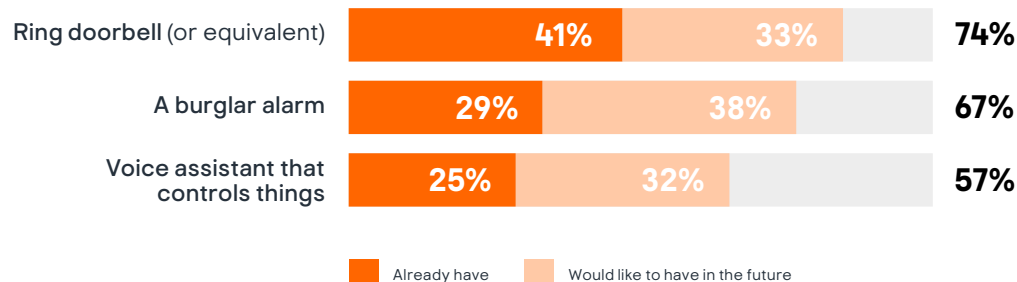
Building on the rise of feel-good upgrades where joy matters more than justification, smart lighting is a clear expression of JoyMaxxing in the home.

While these technologies offer functional benefits, their real appeal lies elsewhere. Motion-activated lighting, voice-controlled lights and automated LED strips are being chosen less for efficiency and more for the wow factor and novelty they bring.

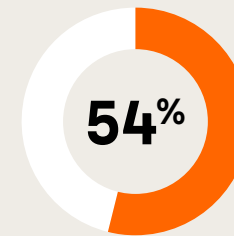
The appeal is felt more strongly by younger generations, with a particular appeal amongst men, who are drawn to tech that offers playfulness, control and moments of surprise. Lights that respond as you walk into a room, softly glow at night or impress visitors turn everyday moments into small performances.

In this context, smart lighting isn't about intelligence – it's about theatre. Subtle moments of novelty, repeated daily, that feel clever, entertaining and quietly satisfying.

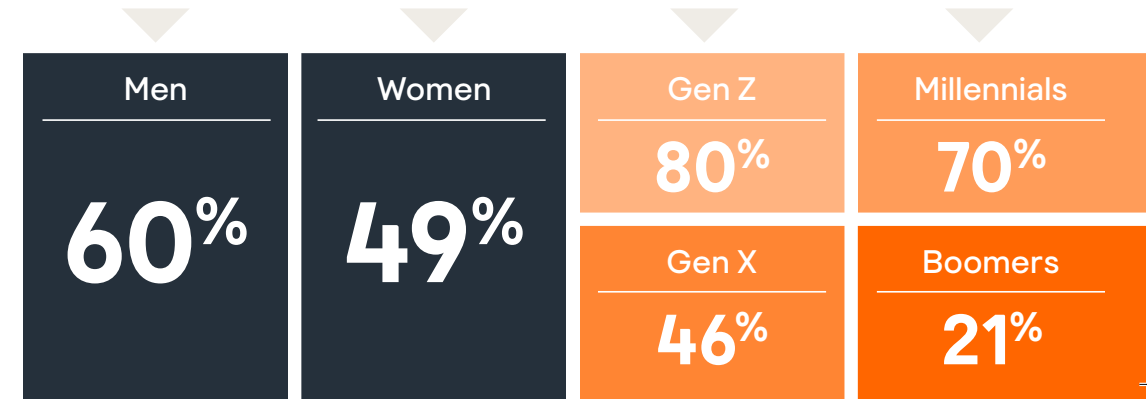
Smart additions people desire:



Alexa speakers built into the ceiling provides voice control of lights and speakers



like the idea of the home responding to them
(e.g. music playing when I ask or lights coming on when I clap)



Home Improvers are buying for the 'wow' factor

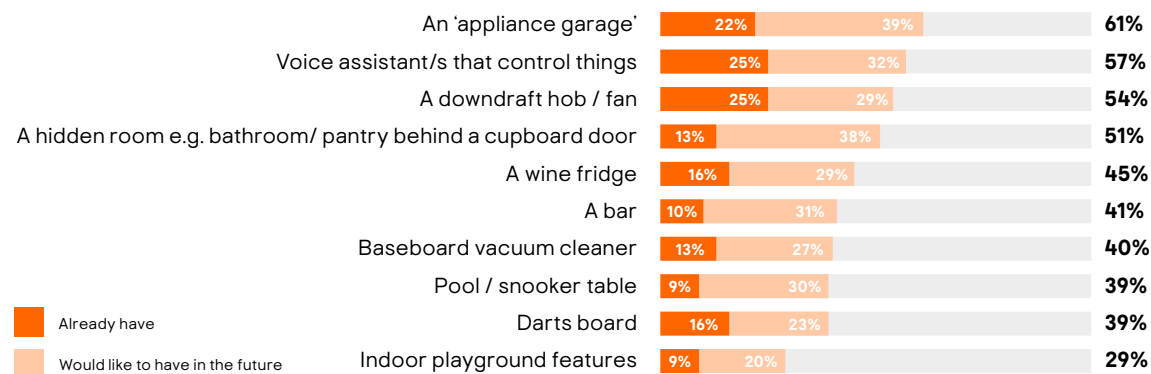
Alongside smart lighting and hidden rooms, other playful upgrades sit comfortably in this space: wine fridges, downdraft hobs, baseboard vacuum cleaners.

Owners describe them as "cool", "slick" or "a bit unnecessary but brilliant". They become talking points, flexes, and moments of pride - not essentials, but pleasures.

Functional, yes, but talked about with joy.



JoyMaxxing additions people desire



There is a clear generational divide in who has made fun-driven changes in their home in the past year

48%

have made changes to home in past year just because they seem 'fun'

Prioritising 'joy per square foot'. As fewer people in younger generations can afford larger homes, the emotional impact of small spaces is being carefully optimised

Gen Z

71%

48%

Millennials

64%

41%

Gen X

42%

23%

Boomers

17%

8%



People want homes to feel distinctly their own

80%

say they don't want their space to look like everyone else's. Instead, there's a clear shift towards individuality, with over half (52%) rarely checking what's trending when decorating

03

Togetherness

Togetherness

Homes are being redesigned to bring people closer as households rediscover the value of togetherness

After years of living as collections of individuals – separate screens, separate rooms, separate routines – we are seeing a shift where they are actively choosing closeness again.

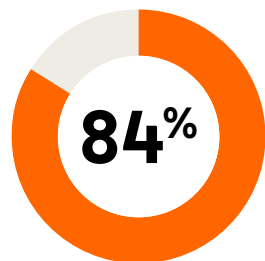
Enforced togetherness during Covid prompted a phase of carving out personal space, but that period has given way to a renewed desire to come back together.

At the same time, there's a growing awareness that tech-led habits have quietly pulled us apart, prompting a deliberate move back to shared living, collective time and genuine togetherness.

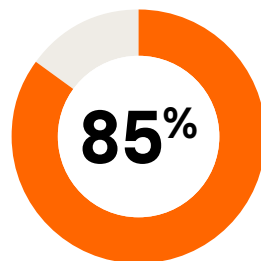
Togetherness is becoming a defining home trend, reshaping how spaces are organised and how people want to live.

Homes are being redesigned with connection in mind – layouts, rooms and features increasingly geared toward shared moments, collective time and the feeling of being “in it together” at a time when families need it most.

Togetherness is becoming a priority in everyday home life



say that spending time at home with family has become more important to them in recent years



value rooms or areas in their home that make it easy for people to gather and spend time together



CASE STUDY

Maia & Ben

The heart of the home is the kitchen – and in this house, the open plan kitchen has been rethought as both a working space and a place to live. Anchored by a large central island, it replaces the traditional dining table and has become the focal point for eating, working and homework.

Designed to bring the family together, the space supports shared routines throughout the day – from breakfast and coffee to evening catch ups. A large TV reinforces its role as a social hub, shifting the kitchen beyond cooking alone and into a space for connection and informal entertaining.

To make this work, the living room has been repurposed as a dedicated children's playroom, allowing all family life to remain downstairs. This deliberate zoning means bedrooms are protected as sleep-only spaces, reinforcing a clearer boundary between activity and rest. The result is a lively, welcoming kitchen led home where togetherness is prioritised – and everyday family life naturally converges.

80%

try to eat all their meals together as a family.

Togetherness

The kitchen remains the heart of the home, with spaces designed to encourage connection and shared moments

For younger generations, the kitchen is being reimagined as a space designed to encourage connection and shared moments. While the idea resonates less strongly with older generations, younger adults are far more likely to see the kitchen as a social and emotional centre of daily life.

Among these groups, the kitchen is no longer defined by cooking alone. It is the space where everyday routines intersect – eating, talking, working, hosting friends and spending time side by side.

Kitchen islands, in particular, have become powerful anchors of modern togetherness: informal, flexible gathering points that invite people to be a part of the moment. At the same time, kitchens are increasingly doubling as entertainment hubs with the biggest screens – previously reserved for living rooms – increasingly being placed in the kitchen. Larger screens turn viewings into an event, drawing people in and keeping them there longer.

For younger generations, this marks a clear shift. The kitchen has become the social engine of the home – the place where daily life intersects, conversations flow and togetherness comes naturally. It has truly reclaimed its role as the centre of gravity for modern family living.



57%

already have or would like to have a kitchen island

62%

think of the kitchen as the heart of the home

Gen Z

69%

Millennials

70%

Gen X

57%

Boomers

50%

60%

like the idea of the kitchen being the main social space in our home

Gen Z

70%

Millennials

66%

Gen X

56%

Boomers

45%

CASE STUDY

James & Alexandra

For James, the kitchen was always going to be the heart of the home – even when space constraints and practical limitations suggested otherwise. Determined to create a place where family life could properly come together, he designed his own kitchen island and found a way to make it work, despite being initially told it wasn't possible within the footprint of the room.

Even in a relatively small kitchen, the island became the defining feature. It acts as the main surface for eating, working, homework and socialising – anchoring daily life around one shared space. James knew that if people gathered naturally here, the kitchen would become the home's social core.

That instinct has paid off. The kitchen now functions as an **all day** living space, supported by a large screen alongside integrated music and lighting that help shape the atmosphere from morning through to evening. It's a space designed for hosting, conversation and spending time side by side – not just for cooking.

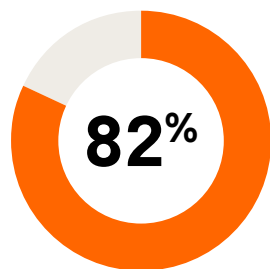


Play zones bring children back into the heart of the home

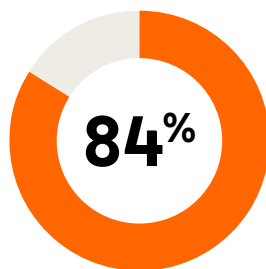
As bedrooms increasingly return to calm, sleep-only spaces, children's play is moving back into shared areas of the home.

Also motivated by growing concern of screen isolation and online risks, parents are intentionally creating play zones and family-friendly spaces that keep kids closer and provide more opportunity to interact.

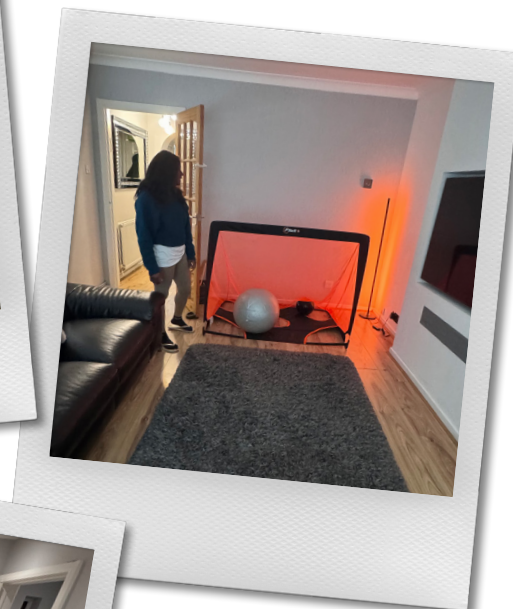
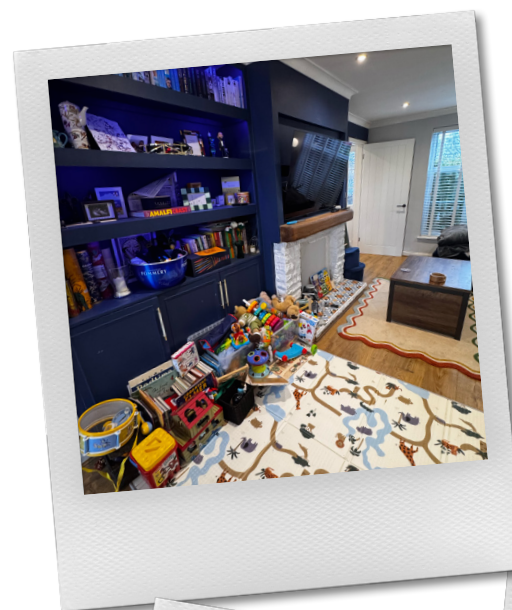
These play zones are becoming a natural extension of the home's togetherness trend: open areas – often in the heart of the home rather than behind a bedroom door – means that kids are present and involved in the day-to-day, reinforcing the reassuring feeling of being together.



encourage children to play / hang out in the living areas rather than the bedroom



try and spend as much time together as a family in the kitchen / lounge area as they can



04

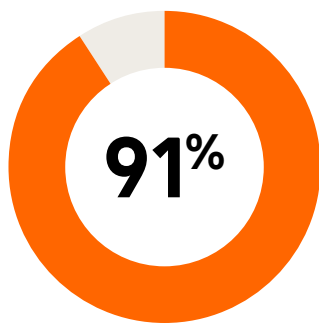
Trade Evolution

The trade sector is entering a new, more competitive sales cycle

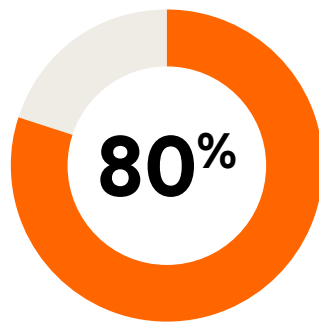
How tradespeople communicate their expertise and professionalism is becoming just as influential in winning work as the quality of the job itself.

As spending tightens, competition for work is intensifying. Homeowners are increasingly taking time to compare options and apply pressures on trade quotes. In response, trades are becoming more strategic, clearer and more customer-focused in how they win work.

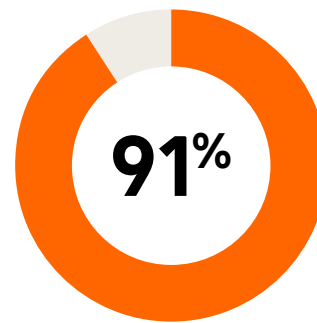
As expectations rise, the way expertise and professionalism are presented matters just as much as the work delivered. Clearer pricing, stronger correspondence and a more consultative approach are increasingly becoming the norm, as customers actively seek tradespeople who articulate their expertise openly, confidently and with credibility.



say their experience with tradespeople in the past year have been positive



claim tradespeople seem more professional than they use to be



say most tradespeople take pride in doing high quality work



“ We charge £4,500 for an up and over if it's mid terrace in a specific part of town because we know that's what it costs. We know the houses, we know the work and to be honest by being so clear on price we have won loads of jobs. It's like they're buying a product off us. ”

Driving authenticity through social

Social media is increasingly recognised as a powerful way for tradespeople to showcase, build trust and win work in an increasingly digital world.

The shift is being driven largely by younger consumers, who place significantly greater importance on a professional online presence when selecting a tradesperson, reflecting the value they place on frictionless, digitally-led experiences when choosing who to hire.

In response, social media has evolved from marketing into a trust-building tool. It allows tradespeople to make their standards, approach and pride in work immediately visible, helping customers make faster, lower-effort decisions.

The demand is being met instinctively by a new generation of digital native Millennial and Gen Z trades, who understand the importance of always-on communication and customer experience.

The most effective content is simple and skill-led: clear before-and-after shots, satisfying process videos and calm, confident-building explanations of how the job was done. It's this combination of craft, clarity and credibility that resonates most with potential customers looking for someone they can trust.

Gen Z and Millennials are **3x** more likely than Boomers to prioritise a tradesperson's professional online presence when choosing who to hire.

Most important factors driving a tradesperson selection (% agree)

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Visual examples / case studies of previous work conducted	20%	21%	12%	11%
Professional online presence	20%	18%	11%	6%



CASE STUDY | Jack Gash

At 29 years of age, Jack is already an entrepreneur fuelled by his passion for building. He runs his own business specialising in dry stone walling, general construction, and landscaping, taking pride in delivering work of the highest standard.

Highly motivated and hands-on, Jack is dedicated to maintaining quality and consistency, encouraging his team to consistently maintain the standards of the Guild of Master Craftsmen, of which he is a member.

Known for his honesty and transparency, he aims to stick closely to budgets and timelines, ensuring clients can trust both the process and the outcome. While he is exploring social media as a way to showcase his work, he approaches it cautiously, aware of the more performative side of the industry and sometimes feeling uneasy about the "on the tools" culture.

Most importantly, Jack is driven by a genuine pride in his craft and a commitment to doing things properly.

Methodology and credits

This research was conducted by The Source, an independent research agency.

41 in-depth UK home visits, focus groups and interviews were conducted as part of this research in November 2025.

2,000 members of the UK public, aged 18+, were surveyed in March 2026.

The Way We Live Now: 2026



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