

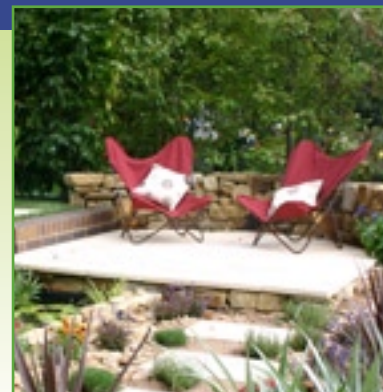
NURSERY PAPERS

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Home is where the heart is

The Ipsos Mackay Report is Australia's longest-running program of social research. Founded by noted social researcher and author, Hugh Mackay, the report helps marketers and retailers understand the mind and the mood of the Australian consumer.

In this month's Nursery Paper, the principal author of the Ipsos Mackay Report, Randall Pearce, portrays 'home' as the ultimate expression of who we are. However, he makes the point that the home should be as dynamic as its occupants and that it should reflect the various states and stages of our lives...both indoors and outdoors.



Home is where the heart is

'Borrowing' trust – the Ipsos Mackay method

The Ipsos Mackay Report is based on the listening method. Ipsos researchers fan out across Australia to listen to Australians chatting with friends, neighbours and work-mates in the relaxed environment of their natural habitat (homes, clubs, and work-places). This method of research through discussion with trusted peers in a comfortable setting encourages participants to focus upon and explore issues within a topic that are of interest and concern to them. This approach harnesses the dynamics of spontaneous interactions between people who already know and trust one another. The research 'borrows' that trust.

The fieldwork for 'Mind and Mood' was composed of sixteen such group discussions with Australian men and women ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-60s in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Geelong, Goulburn and Wollongong.



The garden is a favourite Australian 'home within a home'; a retreat from the stress, buzz and chaos of the household.

Home is a state of mind

Home is 'within us'. It is more about our state of mind and our personal relationships than about bricks and mortar. Nostalgia provides the reference points. When we talk about 'home', our minds often fly to childhood and the ambience of our childhood home(s). All the other accommodation we occupy over a lifetime can be expressions of a deep yearning to recapture that original sense of home. Indeed, some people consciously set out to recapture the feeling of that environment...inside and out.

For example, people who grew up in the country may become 'tree changers' later in life, settling in a rural area and cultivating large gardens on their properties. People who grew up in cities may feel more at home by tending a courtyard garden nestled behind a terrace house in one of Sydney or Melbourne's inner city suburbs. Such emotions are particularly powerful among immigrants, who associate 'home' with their birthplace in some other part of the world. So, while 'native' Australian gardens may be the current fashion, there will always be room for a diversity of plants and garden designs in this country of migrants.

A garden can be a strong rebuttal to the harshness of the Australian landscape and climate; a precious green jewel set against a sprawling brownness.

Home is an expression of self

Home ownership is still one of Australia's most powerful symbols of success, security and peace. It is a key ingredient in the dream of an egalitarian, middle-class society in which material comfort and prosperity are available to all. That reality may be fading for the rising generation (partly due to rising costs of home ownership – particularly in our capital cities) but the dream is as strong as ever. Home ownership also expresses our desire to relieve some of our long-standing Australian insecurities associated with feelings of remoteness, transience and the need to carve out a life in an environment that often seems hostile or fragile. In this context, a garden can be a strong rebuttal to the harshness of the Australian landscape and climate; a precious green jewel set against a sprawling brownness.

But the symbolism is not only material: home ownership also stands for emotional security and peace of mind.

The safety and security of home is both physical and psychological. Whether Australians own or rent their homes, the sense of safety/security is closely related to the sense of comfort that derives from the knowledge that, when we are at home, we can be more truly ourselves than at any other time. A significant contributor to this sense of comfort is the feeling that you are more in control at home than in any other aspect of your life. You can decorate and furnish your home however you please... and your garden can become an expression of your true self.



Don't just direct customers to the latest 'fad'. Get to know your customers so you can help them to express themselves through their garden.

Key Point

At home, we are not only 'in control', we are also creating a living artwork. We use home to express our character, our values, our heritage and our aspirations. Gardens can be the most malleable of all artistic mediums since they can be re-shaped with much less effort and cost than major home renovations.

Implication

We are all home decorators, in the broadest sense, and we need inspiration and guidance. Rather than directing customers to the latest 'fad', get to know your customers well and assist them in expressing themselves through flowers, plants and landscaping.

Your garden can become an expression of your true self...Gardens can be the most malleable of all artistic mediums since they can be re-shaped with much less effort and cost than major home renovations.

The garden: a 'home within a home'

Since home is a place where we expect to be able to be ourselves in peace, it follows that certain parts of a house can feel more like 'home' than others. Although it is still common for parents to claim that 'children make a house into a home', there is also a strong sense of home needing to provide a place where we can be alone. It is perhaps this motivation that drives the present trend towards larger homes, even while households themselves are shrinking. People often report that their particular 'cocoon' within the household allows them to retreat from the stress, the buzz, the chaos or the mess that is to be found in the rest of the household. The 'home within a home' can range from a favourite armchair to a studio in an attic, a shed or a garden. One of our participants put it this way:

Somewhere between the shed and the back door is where I like to sit down quietly, look at the garden and have a bit of a think. It's just a nice peaceful spot.

Whether it is the backyard, the deck, the patio, the courtyard or the balcony, Australians find it hard to conceive of 'home' without some space available for outdoor living. 'Bifold doors' seem to be one of the most common terms used whenever

people speak of the need to renovate; they are regarded as the magic ingredient in the process of bringing the outside in. The more people can blur the distinction between outside and inside, the more they feel their home has approached the ideal. Another participant described how the outside can be the heart of a home:

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Whether it's the backyard, deck or patio, Australians find it hard to conceive of 'home' without some space for outdoor living.



Gardens are an extension of the home...and you can decorate and furnish your home however you please.

Key point

'Outdoors' is often the best part of home. 'Big' is good in contemporary housing and the development of outdoor space is often the cheapest and most effective way to expand a house.

Implication

Australians are keen to blend the outside and inside: backyards, balconies, patios, decks, courtyards, bi-fold doors...give us anything that increases the sense of space and informality.

'Empty nest' or fresh canvas?

As long as children are present in the household, outdoor space is regarded as not only desirable but essential. For many families, a backyard swimming pool is the quintessence of 'outdoor living'. Although pool owners sometime complain bitterly about the responsibilities and inconvenience of pool maintenance, pools are regarded as the most reliable of all 'kid magnets' in summer, and one way of ensuring that the children will invite their friends home. But what happens when the children grow and leave behind an 'empty nest'?

Considering that, for many parents, it was the arrival of their children that converted a house into a 'home', the departure of children is like another twist of the emotional kaleidoscope: deep questions are often raised about the new meanings of 'home', and practical challenges arise. The most immediate practical question facing empty-nesters is, 'What shall we do with the children's space... indoors and outdoors?'

Parents differ widely in their response to this sense of an emotional vacuum having been created. Some grieve for the departed children and insist on leaving their bedrooms and play areas exactly as they were – almost as a kind of shrine. Other parents can't wait to seize on the space that has been 'freed up' by the departure of their children. Landscapers and retailers can help empty nesters through this painful transition, if handled delicately. If the swimming pool is ancient, might it be better to replace it with a shallow lily pond or water feature? Can the veggie garden be replaced by a flower bed? At the end of the day, can the garden become a fresh canvas upon which to paint a new, more mature personality for parents nearing retirement? If the character of the neighbourhood is changing from one of young families to one of semi-retired adults, it could be that these changes will enhance the re-sale value of the property if the parents ultimately decide to join the growing number of Baby Boomers who are 'downshifting' and moving into more modest accommodation.

The dynamic home

If our homes really are expressions of our true selves, then there is little argument for them remaining the same generation after generation. Our living environments – indoors and outdoors – should be as dynamic and changing as we ourselves ultimately are.



For some Australians, 'home' may be associated with a birthplace in some other part of the world. Like our community, Australian gardens can always be enriched by diversity.

The most immediate practical question facing empty-nesters is 'what shall we do with the children's space... indoors and outdoors?'...

Landscapers and retailers can help empty nesters through this painful transition.