



After first focusing on price, men tend to consider peripheral issues, such as whether their TV will fit on the family room wall

Picture: Dulux

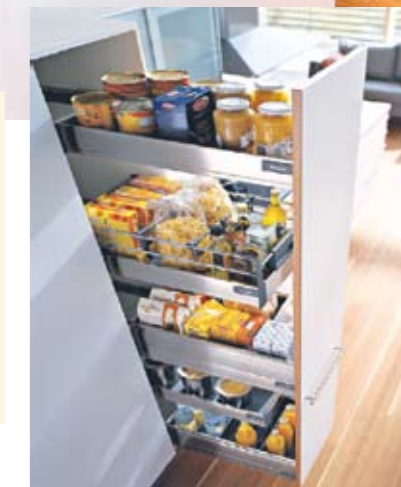


"Women look at the detail when inspecting a home and see it in terms of a nesting place"

Picture: Dulux



Women like kitchens to be family areas, so large bench tops with seating are perfect for conversation and casual meals. Low maintenance is essential, so glass splashbacks instead of tiles make for easier cleaning. Pantries, including walk-in styles and others such as the Blum pull-out pantry from Kitchener's Kitchens (right), are increasingly popular



Adding a feminine touch to interiors can be as simple as buying new cushions, lamps, bed linen or furniture, such as this range from Freedom Furniture

What women want, women get

Vendors, designers and agents need to focus on females, writes Katrina Creer.

IF you want to sell a home quickly, it pays to think like a woman.

This doesn't mean floral drapes and sewing rooms. What the modern female house-hunter really wants is a sleek but low-maintenance property that works for her family.

A good kitchen, cupboard space, floor coverings, energy-saving devices, neighbourhood friendliness and proximity to schools and shops rate highly on her checklist.

Men, on the other hand, are more focused on the price, then peripheral issues kick in, such as whether their TV will fit the large wall in the family room, if there's enough parking space for their vehicles and whether there's room for their hobbies or "escapes".

Gender differences expert Dr John Gray, the author of the bestselling *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, addressed this topic during a recent visit to Sydney for the Australasian Real Estate Conference, saying: "Agents should sell particularly to women, because if they are happy then the men are more inclined to pay the extra money to make her happy."

It's not a radical concept. Builders, architects and real estate agents have long suspected that it is women they have to impress.

An online poll by Archicentre, the building advisory service of the

Australian Institute of Architects found that in 62 per cent of cases it is the woman who makes the final decision on buying a property.

Men account for just eight per cent of the final say, according to the poll, while another 30 per cent say it's a joint decision between couples.

The poll sends a clear message to vendors as to who they need to woo when selling their house.

Real estate agents, too, are adapting. Helen Lowy, relationships manager at Total Real Estate Training, says the industry recognises that the decision maker is often the woman, and agents need to be conscious of that when talking to couples.

DESIGNS ON COMFORT

BUT only in the past decade have women openly influenced design, sales and marketing of new homes. Now kitchens are not hidden away from high-use areas, but are central to the life of the home; storage has improved; and what were once considered luxury items, such as ensuites, deep soaker tubs and walk-in wardrobes, are included in house designs to entice female buyers.

Garry Worthington, business development manager of leading home builder Masterton Homes, says men, for the most part, are unaware that it's the women who have the final say.

"Women sometimes let us think that we are in charge, however they are really making the decision," he says.

His claim is backed up by auctioneer Kate Lumby. Her cautionary motto of "happy wife, happy in life" comes from

watching couples at auctions and noting that it is women who are nudging men to bid: "You can see it on their faces that they want the property and are making the decision."

Women, she says, look at the detail when inspecting a home and see it in terms of a "nesting place".

So what are the preferences that sway a woman's decisions?

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

WOMEN still do most of the housework, spending six times as long as men in the laundry and three times as long doing chores such as cleaning, according to a report on social trends released this year by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Since having a cleaner or children who tidy up after themselves remain fantasies for most busy mothers, design choices at the building phase can make life easier.

Zoe Condoleon, director of home builders Cosmopolitan Living, says women want plenty of storage to conceal clutter. One linen cupboard is no longer enough, bedrooms need a double robe and family rooms work better when there is fixed joinery.

"Forget glass shelves or open bookcases - they want to be able to shut the door on it," Condoleon says.

Many women also insist on large (600mm x 600mm) tiles in both the main area of the house and bathrooms. This means less grouting and, ultimately, less time spent cleaning.

Debbie Donnelly, from eastern suburbs-based goodyer/Donnelly estate agents, says women with

children are looking for houses with playrooms "where all the toys and paraphernalia can be kept but where no one can see all the mess."

"And women like pools if they can view them from the house, as they are a great child minder - depending on the age of the children, of course."

And what about men? When it comes to interiors, Donnelly notes, men want to know if a property has parking or a wine cellar.

HEART OF THE HOME

THE ABS survey found that while men are increasingly helping to prepare meals, women still do most kitchen work. But they don't want to work in isolation and this has changed the layout of the modern home.

When Masterton Homes created their current top seller, Villina, they kept this in mind. The kitchen overlooks a large multi-functional family area where youngsters can do homework, have a snack or watch the telly, all under the eye of mum.

"Women feel strongly about keeping the family together, and not in different areas of the home," says Worthington.

Hand in hand with the changes has been a resurgence in home cooking, influenced by the economic downturn and the success of cooking shows such as Channel Ten's *MasterChef*. This, in turn, has resulted in increased sales of kitchen products, mostly bought by women.

It's no surprise that the majority of shoppers are women, and at IKEA around 75 per cent of shoppers are

female, with most looking for a cheap and easy way to refresh their homes.

"There is a focus on making the home comfortable, as people are spending more time there, so beds and mattresses are also big sellers," says IKEA's Jude Leon.

"TV benches are big news, too, maybe because people are watching more movies at home rather than paying to go to the movies."

Like cooking shows, home improvement shows are good for business, as they show how a new look need not cost a fortune. Grouping frames on a wall, adding a few impact pieces of furniture, changing paint colours or adding shutters, blinds or curtains to update a room can do wonders.

PAMPERED BUT PRACTICAL

LUXURY is important to many women, and bathroom and kitchen designer Michael Manzi, of Fluid Design, says bathroom wish lists often include an ensuite with a bath and soft lighting for relaxation, good task lighting for make-up, and underfloor heating.

Yet even in the bathroom, common sense rules. "Women tend to be quite practical," says Manzi, reiterating that most women feel "the less grout the better" when it comes to tiles.

"And they're aware that you need basins large enough to have a 'put down' area, so not every item has to be put away."

But they still want plenty of storage space, along with towel rails and robe hooks. "They can never have too much storage, but it must be as well hidden as possible. Women like clever things."



Wish lists for bathrooms include an ensuite with a bath, and softly lit for relaxation, as shown in this Reese bathroom