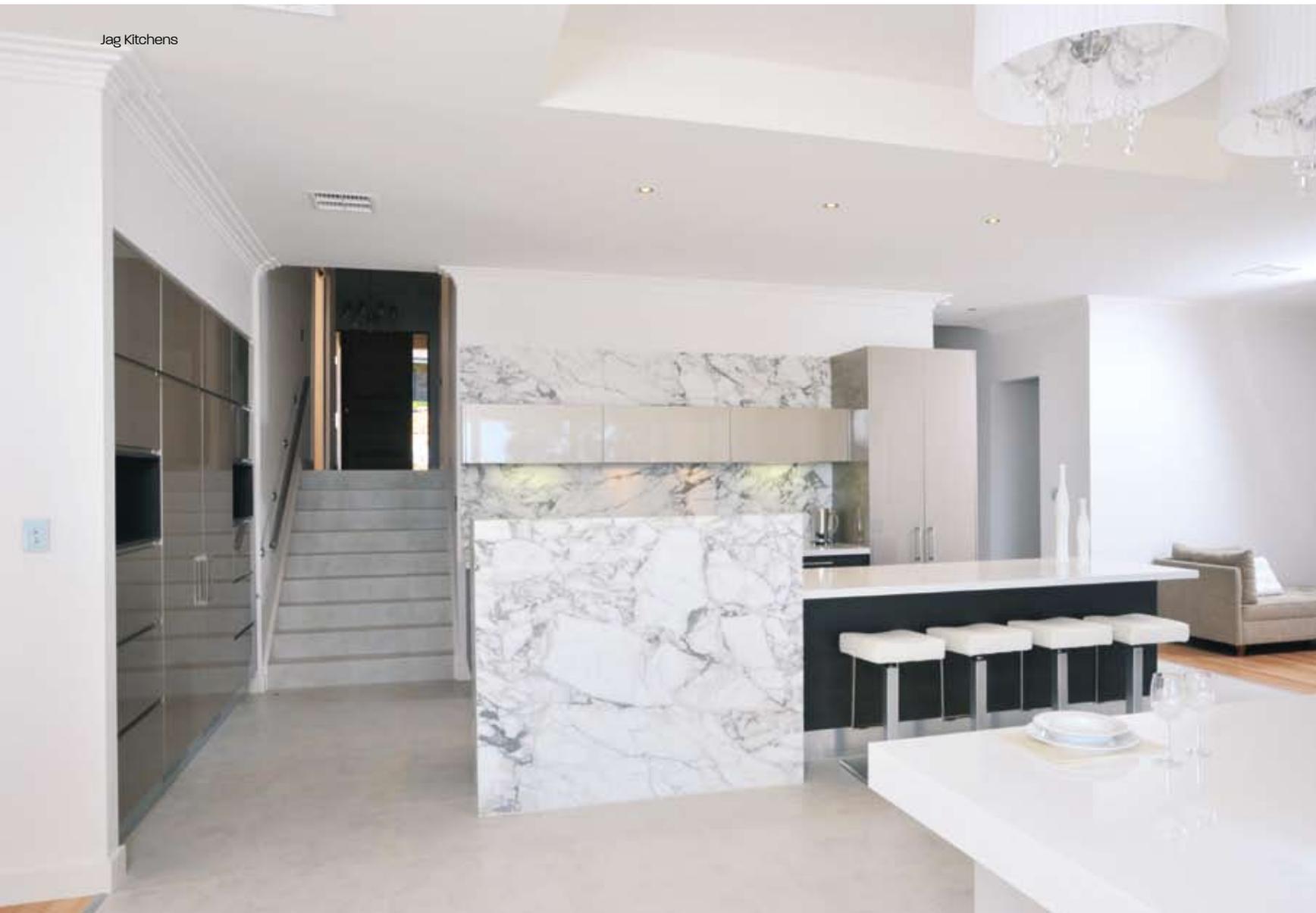


Jag Kitchens



# Renovating for a growing family

“Here’s the story of a lovely lady, who was bringing up three very lovely girls...” We all know how this familiar theme song goes. So your family isn’t quite **The Brady Bunch** — but perhaps it’s not far off.

When embarking on renovations it’s important to consider what your family’s needs will be in 10 years or more, regardless of whether you are renovating a long-term family home or for re-sale in the short term

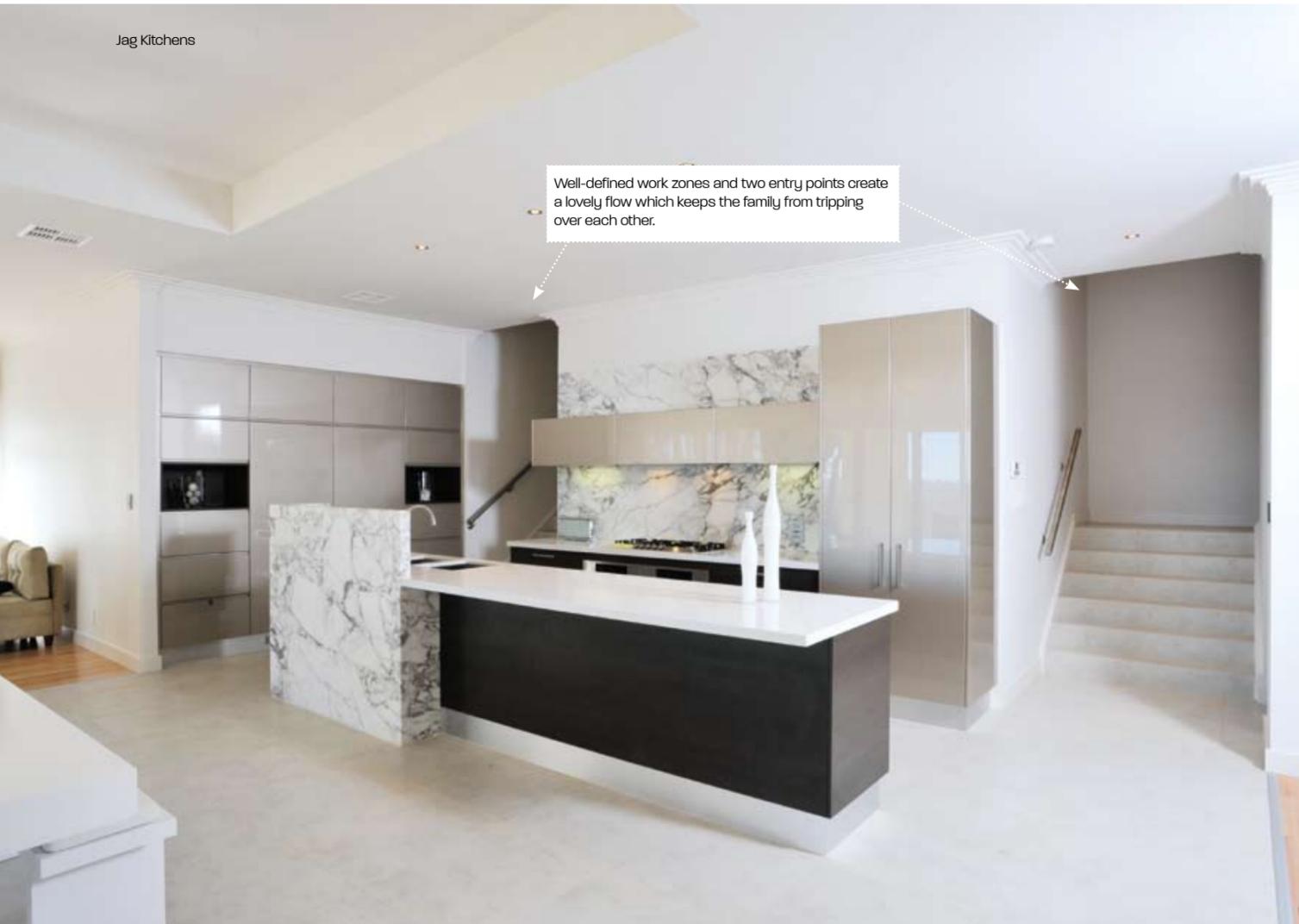
---

By Karina May

## Flexibility is key

Flexibility is crucial to the functional approach of a home design. “A three-year-old might want to be around their parents a lot while a teenager will have totally different leisure and study needs,” explains Melonie Bayl-Smith of Liquid Architecture. Creating a large, flexible space that is closely associated with, or is part of, the main open-plan living area and can “grow” with children, is highly recommended.

Visual security is also an important aspect. “As children grow and their play/activity/homework needs change, the space can serve various needs while keeping them near to parent activities,” Melonie reasons. “Most parents are involved with their children’s homework and it really is best for parents to be able to see what their children are doing on computers etc.” Alternatively, if you are renovating a multi-storey dwelling, you can incorporate a totally separate



flexible play/study area adjacent to the upper-level stair landing that still has the openness and accessibility that parents are happy with but has more privacy as children get older.

Chris McSteen, from McSteen Tan Architects and a regular speaker at Arhicentre seminars, believes sound insulation is also a top priority. "This includes the separation of living areas from bedrooms and study areas and sound deadening between the ground and first floors."

Whether it is a crying baby now or the blaring music from a teenager's iPod later, you will be incredibly thankful you've sound-proofed your home. It is for this reason too that the relationship between the children's and parents' bedrooms should be considered. This relationship changes over time — for example, once the children have grown up it may be preferable to have some distance between the master bedroom and children's rooms. Be prepared to play a few games of "musical" rooms in the coming years to get the dynamics right.

### Quality over quantity

When it comes to renovating for an expanding family, most people's initial reaction is "the more and the bigger the bedrooms, the better". However, Chris tells us that this is not always the best solution. According to him, the living space is the most important space for a family residence. "The relationship of the meals, kitchen and living areas should be the starting point for any renovation. Once these areas have been finalised, the addition of bedrooms and study areas should be addressed."

Melonie tends to agree. "I generally advise clients to have moderately sized bedrooms and larger or additional living spaces," she says. "I also work really hard on having all the children's bedrooms the same size — if you have two larger bedrooms and one really small bedroom or study this tends to affect resale, and with the growth in home office usage, people generally don't want their study where the bedrooms are either." At the end of the day, bedrooms are for

## KITCHEN DESIGN IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF SUCCESSFULLY RENOVATING FOR A GROWING FAMILY. SIMON PETROU FROM JAG KITCHENS BELIEVES THE ORIENTATION OF THE KITCHEN TO THE FAMILY MEANS AREA IS CRITICAL.

sleeping and some play/homework activities and this should be reflected in the size in relation to the overall size of the house and living spaces.

### Kitchen dynamics

Kitchen design is an important part of successfully renovating for a growing family.



## Design safety checklist

- \* Consider minimising horizontal surfaces that accumulate dust, especially high, hard-to-reach surfaces.
- \* Orient living areas north for maximum solar heating.
- \* Design to maximise flow-through ventilation with few still air pockets, which accumulate condensation.
- \* Orient kitchens and living rooms to overlook indoor and outdoor playing areas for supervision of children.
- \* Ensure the design of the kitchen minimises the size of the "hazard triangle" between stove, sink and refrigerator.
- \* Shower taps should not be placed directly below shower roses.
- \* Select non-slip bath and shower bases or add rubber grips. Clean these surfaces regularly to reduce slipping.
- \* Light switches should not be accessible to children.
- \* Try to eliminate blind spots when locating driveways, and install a child-proof gate to prevent access to the driveway from the backyard.
- \* Be aware of gas heaters which exhaust combustion gases and moisture into the house and can lead to asthma and mould.
- \* All heaters should have guards around them to prevent burns or clothes igniting.
- \* Use grab rails instead of towel rails.



A skylight, strong colour and a new stair/balustrade make a huge difference to the circulation spaces

Liquid Architecture



Liquid Architecture

**TIP**

Don't be scared to incorporate some fun colours into the house. Children respond strongly to colours and not just as feature walls in their bedrooms. Be bold and think creatively about how you can introduce colour in everyday spaces — remember, it's only paint!

playroom in one bedroom and putting two children in bunk beds in one bedroom is also a good idea. This works particularly well if there are distinct differences in the bedroom sizes. To free up more space, Chris also suggests considering cupboard laundries, study nooks located within oversized passages and window seats, particularly on stair landings.

Simon Petrou from Jag Kitchens believes the orientation of the kitchen to the family means area is critical. He advises opting for an open-plan design which flows onto an adjoining living area where possible, as enclosed kitchens make it difficult to interact with children who might want help with homework — or simply attention.

Other elements to consider include the number of people who will be in the kitchen at the one time, the number of access points and the amount of seating. "If there is a large family it's important there be designated areas for specific tasks to take place, such as a lower section of the bench for homework," Simon explains.

For a young family the placement of appliances at a higher level is also a must to prevent accidents. For this reason the fridge and pantry should also be located at exit points of the kitchen to minimise traffic congestion.

Maintenance and serviceability of materials in the kitchen — and throughout the house — is also an important consideration; an easily cleaned floor that hides dirt is a must for small children.

**Space maker**

There are many design strategies which can be utilised by families which are renovating for their growing brood but don't have the extra space to

**A SINGLE, WELL-DESIGNED DINING AREA CLOSELY CONNECTED TO THE EXTERNAL LIVING SPACES WILL WORK WELL NO MATTER THE OCCASION**

extend. The first tip involves doing away with any formal dining rooms. "These are only for people with large houses and lots of space — a single, well-designed dining area closely connected to the external living spaces will work well no matter the occasion," Melonie suggests.

She also suggests creating a highly useable, covered outdoor play and entertaining space fitted with a barbecue and other functional items such as speakers that will become more of an outdoor "room", which can be used all year round, as opposed to a space which can only be used in good weather.

Better storage also helps with the usage and overall organisation of valuable space in a dwelling. Smart storage solutions in the living area for toys and books is a must so they can be easily accessed by children but quickly tidied away when required. Creating a dedicated

**Safety first**

Apart from the compulsory rules which must be adhered to in the BCA standards and various building codes, there are some additional things to consider when renovating for a growing family. Kidsafe and Archicentre have put together a comprehensive home safety checklist that includes all the things which should be given careful attention. These include selecting materials which reduce the potential for allergies or asthma attacks, assessing the risks of staircases and landings and installing handrails and balustrades or non-slip treads on polished stairs if required, and positioning potentially hazardous fixtures such as light switches, blind cords and door handles away from curious little people. Check out our handy design safety checklist or visit [www.archicentre.com.au](http://www.archicentre.com.au) for further details.

**Stress less**

Before embarking on renovations, it's important to map out a plan of action to limit the impact they will have on the family. Both Melonie and Chris agree it's best to incorporate as much into the renovation at the outset instead of staggering the process in stages. "Renovating in one hit tends to be easier and cheaper and although it is painful during the process, the discomfort disappears sooner," Chris concludes. **r&e**