

**Isn't it great when things just click...**

We need to build homes the Netflix generation actually want

3 November 2015 | By Amanda Baillieu

Amanda Baillieu welcomes Venice's focus on the housing of the future



In 2008 we were gripped by a housing panic. The homes we were building were too small. The British Pavilion at that year's Venice Architecture Biennale highlighted the dangers and "Rabbit Hutch Britain" was born.

Now we're gripped by a frenzy of even bigger proportions. We're not building enough and this is causing mayhem to property prices in the capital which, according to the Swiss bank UBS last week, peaked as the most over-valued in the world.

So Generation Rent will continue to grow until at least 2025, adds recent research by PwC.

It's no surprise policymakers are keen to debate the housing crisis and architects are duly asked to come up with ideas on how to help solve it.

The results are patchy. The latest of these is the [NLA's ideas competition](#). Some are charming, including homes that float or are squeezed between existing blocks, but none are radical, perhaps because it's hard to image a future when you are so constrained by planning and by clients reluctant to build these new ideas.

Another constraint is one of our making. We believe that the millennial generation, those born between the 1980s and 2000s, aspire to the traditional things when it comes to choosing where to live – like high ceilings, a large main living room, flexible space, storage, and access to green space – and will be prepared to move further out of the city to get it.

But the evidence suggests their priorities are rather different.

Some clues are in new start-ups, such as The Collective, a co-working and "housing on demand" specialist whose bedrooms are tiny but which provides communal space and activities, or Pocket Living, which builds small homes, but in central London boroughs.

James Scott, the Collective's 23-year-old chief operating officer, told the FT: "My parents have a bookcase full of books and DVDs; I have a Netflix account and a Kindle. We're far more experience-based and less possession-based."

And I bet he also works in a different way to his parents, for whom home was a refuge from a formal office environment if it was anything like my first job – a desk, a phone, a subsidised canteen and a tealady who arrived with a trolley at 11 and 4. There was nowhere to get to know colleagues and meetings were held at your desk perched on swivel chairs.

Now where I work is like my home, complete with a kitchen, ping-pong table, Apple TV, beanbags and a professional coffee machine. The experience is the same for many people. The office has become a "second home" – hence the name of London's most successful co-working space.

Yet co-living is in its infancy because the government believes there are only votes in transforming Generation Rent into Generation Buy.

Maybe. But are the homes the government has promised – all one million of them – actually the homes that people like James will want to buy?

This is one reason that [next year's British Pavilion](#), curated by Shumi Bose, Jack Self and Finn Williams, is revisiting the housing debate with a different twist. The exhibition's name – Home Economics – says a lot, but as well as numbers it promises an investigation into how the "social and technological changes are collapsing the patterns of domestic life".

It is a timely and complex subject, and much overdue as we scramble around for ideas about how to dig ourselves out of the current panic: not just where to build homes, but what are the new business models that will prevail and what the design should be.

Postscript: The Venice Architecture Biennale runs from May to November 2016.



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Stewie | 3 November 2015 9:46 am

Would be surprised if the ping pong table and bean bag office culture lasts long term or becomes wide spread. Seems more to do with the trendy image companies like Facebook and Google want to project while the office norm for many is still unfortunately the bland phone, desk, computer, battery hen existence.

The same battery hen existence is a threat with housing so a decent amount of space still needs to be found whilst keeping an eye on land value. These days I do think many people are content with smaller homes, those who don't want a trek to do everything and those that spend a

lot of time on Netflix/Internet etc who are oblivious to any space outside the screen area while on there. Personally I've never been taken by high ceilings – to do what in exactly float up there, just inefficient wasted space and a pain when hanging the Christmas decor. I do think though housing nears to be more exciting both internally and externally on the budget market rather than the blandness of much of today's house building.

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