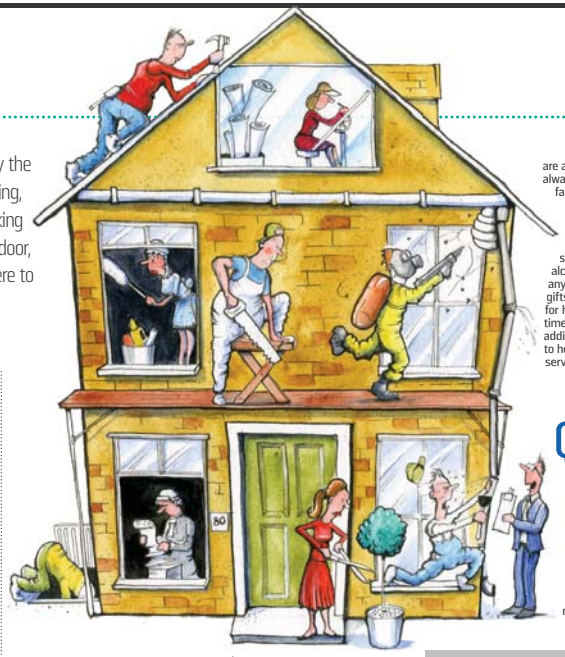
Home help

If you're baffled by the fad for 1970s styling, or choked by cooking smells from next door, our experts are here to offer advice



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

CAN 1970S INTERIORS REALLY BE COOL AGAIN?

Q I keep reading that 1970s interiors are back, to replace midcentury modern. But for me these eras all blur together into a vague retro mishmash. What are some key pieces specific to the 1970s for an authentic look, and where can I buy them?
DB, Marylebone, London

A Many cringe at the memory of 1970s decor, but there are several design classics and distinct pieces that set the era apart. A palette of avocado green, harvest gold and Tupperware orange coloured the decade. These hues work best on walls when paired with crisp white or charcoal woodwork. Alternatively, introduce texture with woven grasscloth-style wallpaper in natural, earthy tones. Harlequin's Bakari is a good example (£45 a roll; harlequin.uk.com). Swirly psychedelic wallpaper is very 1970s, but keep it to places where you don't spend a lot of time, such as a hallway or a downstairs loo. Check out Trippy (£15 a roll; grahambrown.com) and Tarovine (£165 a roll; houseofhackney.com).

Armchairs and love seats were low and curvaceous, in plush fabrics; sofas were large and snakelike, coiling into corners and sunken seating zones. Big names were Milo Baughman and De Sede: look for them at 1stdibs.com, on eBay and at the Old Cinema, in west London (theoldcinema.co.uk). In 1973, Michel Ducaroy designed the Togo pleated corner sofa for Ligne Roset: it looks like a crumpled, upholstered cloud (£6,116; heals.co.uk).

Coffee tables were large, low and rectangular, often with chrome or steel tubular legs and glass tops, designed by Italians such as Romeo Rega (£1,171; pamono.co.uk). For a funky cocktail feel, 1stdibs.com has dramatic 1970s smoked-glass console tables from £1,000. They should hold their value.

Murano glass dripped from chandeliers; smoked amber discs or cubes hanging from polished brass were also in vogue, while Sputnik designs continued into the early 1970s. Alfies Antique Market, near you in Marylebone, is a great source for these (alfiesantiques.com). The Le Klint 172 pendant light, made from folded plastic and resembling a pleated snowball, was designed by Poul Christiansen in 1971 (£304; cloudberryliving.co.uk).

Browse eBay for thick, shaggy rugs by Desso, often with funky brown and orange swirls. A cork floor is more subtle (from £23 a sq metre; corkfloor.co.uk), as are cork cushions (from £95; mindthecork.co.uk).

A circular bed may not be practical, but a pair of round plastic bedside tables by the Italian architect Anna Castelli Ferrieri would do the trick, even if the Componibile design, made for Kartell, actually dates from 1969 (£72 each; madeindesign.co.uk).

Heal's stocks pieces by Ligne Roset, Kartell and the fabric designer Marimekko; the Conran Shop has classics of the decade, including Richard Sapper's Tizio light (£250). Designed for Artemide in 1972, it was a forerunner of today's streamlined desk lamps, a more subtle nod to the era than Graceland and jungle rooms.

Hannah Cork, interior stylist; hannahcorkinteriordesign.co.uk

TOP TIPS

Drying clothes on radiators can cause mould, so use a proper airer. We tested 25 to find the best.

WINNER
Lakeland Deluxe Easy Up Concertina Indoor Clothes Airer, 98/100
£48; lakeland.co.uk
Drying space: 15 metres.
Dimensions when closed: 59cm x 82cm x 8cm. Unheated.
✓ Easy to open and close, sturdy
✓ Safety locks when open
✓ Net bag for delicate items.
✓ Eight anti-crease drying bars work well
✓ Four corner hooks for hangers

RUNNER-UP
Dry:Soon Standard Three-Tier Heated Tower Airer, 87/100
£110; lakeland.co.uk
Drying space: 21 metres. Dimensions when closed: 73cm x 75cm x 8cm. Power: 300W.
✓ Big surface area, making it easy to lay items flat
✓ Dries clothes evenly
✓ Light and easy to move
✓ Costs approximately 4p an hour to run
× Fiddly to open and close

Good Housekeeping Institute TRIED & TESTED

■ ***goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute***

Q We share a party wall with our neighbours. When they cook, the smell comes into our house, making us choke, and it contaminates our bath linen. We suspect they have drilled a hole in the cavity of the party wall and ducted the extractor hood into it.
Who can we complain to or contact to see if this breaches building regulations?
Danton Bruce-Tagoe, via email

A If the neighbouring property is commercial, such as a restaurant, the local authority might investigate whether a statutory nuisance is being caused. For residential property, however, you must pursue a private remedy. Speak to a surveyor to find out if your suspicions are correct. If you own the wall, wholly or partially, the works might represent a trespass. The cooking smells might represent a private nuisance, for which you could take legal action. Keep a log of when the smells occur and how they affect you.

That said, legal action is expensive and uncertain: you should approach your neighbour informally to explore practical ways of solving the problem. It might be cheaper to carry out works in your own home to block the odour than to go to court.

Ed Cracknell, senior associate at Russell-Cooke; russell-cooke.co.uk

Q Are timber-framed houses structurally sound? Three lenders have said they won't give me a mortgage on one, or require a full structural survey at my expense before they'll lend. I don't need a mortgage, but if a future buyer requires one, it might be difficult for me to sell.
Name withheld, via email

A Panel timber frames have been a standard construction system in much of the world for decades. In the UK, however, there is no consistency in the way such homes are classified by lenders or in the way they are valued by surveyors. As a result, while most big lenders treat a modern timber-frame home clad in masonry as standard construction, and make no distinction when lending, some class them as "non-standard" and unsuitable for mortgages.

Some lenders take a conservative approach due to the lack of historical data on resale values, rather than any reflection on the structural soundness of a timber frame. This is all likely to change, as the government wants to increase the number of homes built using "modern methods of construction".

For now, I advise instructing a surveyor to undertake a full building report to assess its condition for your own peace of mind. You could ask for a valuation, too, if you are concerned about reselling the house. If the property has been completed within the past 10 years, make sure it has a guarantee such as the NHBC Buildmark, as all lenders insist on a structural warranty.

If you do decide to take out a mortgage, there are lots of options. We asked BuildStore, which helps self-builders find mortgages, about the lenders to approach. They include Halifax (Lloyds Banking Group), Nationwide, Santander UK, RBS (NatWest), Barclays, HSBC, Coventry Building Society, Virgin Money, Yorkshire Building Society and Clydesdale Bank.

Michael Holmes, spokesperson for the National Homebuilding & Renovating Show (March 23-26, NEC, Birmingham). Claim two free tickets worth £36 in total via homebuildingshow.co.uk/tst by 3pm on March 22

Do you need help from one of our experts? Email your questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk **Advice is given without responsibility**

Q My sister has sisal matting and off-white sofas in her flat. Whenever she throws a party, her invitation asks people to bring clear/white drinks only — no red wine is allowed for fear of stains. Is this bad manners?
TL, south London

A It may be easier for your sister not to have parties at all — or to hire a private room in a restaurant or hotel. Then there will be no chance of her furnishings getting stained, soiled or sullied. That said, I am a great believer in "your party, your rules", and guests who are addicted to merlot and pinot noir can always decline the invitation if they can't face an evening off the *vin rouge*.

Is your sister a student, though? I suspect not — few students have off-white sofas, or even know what sisal matting is. If she isn't, why is she asking guests to bring alcohol? At a proper party, any bottles brought are gifts for the hostess, meant for her to consume another time. She should hold off adding any such wording to her invitations and serve white drinks only.

William Hanson, etiquette coach; williamhanson.co.uk

Q I found this little house guest in my bathroom yesterday — 3mm, any ideas?
Ron Baynes, Derbyshire

A Though it has the wonderfully friendly name of "woolly bear", this is the larva of a real nuisance: the carpet beetle, *Anthrenus verbasci*. In the rug-free millennia before humans, it was a carrion feeder, arriving at a corpse when it was just dry sinew, feather, fur and bones. It now digests the animal fibres in clothes and soft furnishings: wool, silk, fur, leather and feather or horsehair stuffing. It's a real problem in museums, feeding on stuffed animals and insect displays.

In homes, it's a rival to clothes moths. It chews holes in carpets, leaving threadbare patches dusted with powdery droppings. The vacuum cleaner is its enemy. Check under sofas and armchairs, where hoovering may be sporadic. Check for missed carpet fluff in under-stairs cupboards or behind the hot water tank.

If you have an infestation, dust or spray with a proprietary insecticide — something containing permethrin or another pyrethroid. Carpet beetles can survive in bird and wasp nests in the loft. They will even eat dead flies in the tray of an electric insectocutor. The globose, mottled adults fly well (they visit flowers to feed on pollen), so can easily reinvade homes.

Richard Jones, author of House Guests, House Pests (Bloomsbury £9.99); bugmanjones.com

■ ***In last week's Home Help, we recommended a company for DIY solar-control window film. In fact, CSC Window Films & Blinds Limited does not advise DIY installation. Instead, it installs bespoke window film and specialises in solar filters for listed properties. It also has a range of products that avoid the mirrored finish; cscwindowfilms.co.uk***

SAVE & SPLURGE

Marble has become the kitchen material du jour, but it's budget-busting and high-maintenance. So seek out an inexpensive marble board from the high street. Debenhams has a J by Jasper Conran white marble pastry board for £30; Dunelm does something similar for half the price. Create a rustic luxe look by mixing with artisanal chunks of timber: splurge on a 71cm-long London plane platter from Hampson Woods (£145) or an oak carving board for Sunday roasts from the Oak & Rope Company (£235).

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READER CLINIC

Calling all houseproud — and practical — readers. Can you help each other?

Next month, we're launching a readers' clinic where you supply the answers that you know have worked for you. Topics will include "How do I get rid of dog hairs on my sofa?" and "How do I stop my neighbours parking in front of my garage?".

Email your tips and tricks to **property@sunday-times.co.uk**

HOW TO...

STORE YOUR BICYCLE

Where you keep your bike depends on your postcode and the type of property you call home. If you're in a "we leave the door unlocked and the postman delivers to the kitchen table" rural area, good for you. The rest of us need secure storage. Those with outside space going spare, and multiple machines, might consider a variation on the school bike shed. There's the Bike Locker, with enough room for two cycles inside a green metal strongbox (from £576; cyclehoop.com), or the palatial double-doored Bicycle Store, from the Posh Shed Company (£5,015; theposhshedcompany.co.uk). Those with limited room outdoors, and a tighter budget, could try the Absco powder-coated steel bike shed (£164; homebase.co.uk).

If you must keep your bike inside, there's no longer any need to leave it in the hallway or propped against the piano. New racks and hooks have been created to hang your transport on the wall and make it into a design feature. Cycloc has launched smart, simple coloured mounts (from £60; cycloc.com). Cactus Tongue's stainless-steel hangers have colourful leather sleeves (from £90; cactus-tongue.co.uk/shop). Or display your bike with pride, using the Trophy Bull bicycle-holder from Outline Works: it's shaped like a steer's head (£89; amara.com).

Katrina Burroughs

OnTheMarket.com
savills
savills.co.uk

POOLE, BRANKSOME PARK
Stunning contemporary house ◆ close to beach ◆ award winning gardens ◆ 3,981 sq ft ◆EPC=B
Guide £2.225 million
Savills Canford Cliffs 01202 708888

CORNWALL, RIVER FAL
Beautifully refurbished ◆ 3 bedrooms ◆ water access ◆ private jetty ◆ scope to extend ◆ EPC=E
Guide £800,000
Savills Cornwall 01872 243200

BERKSHIRE, WINKFIELD
5 receptions ◆ 7 bedrooms ◆ 7 bathrooms ◆ 3 vehicle carport ◆ garden ◆ paddock ◆ EPC=C
About 8 acres Guide £3.95 million
Savills Windsor 01753 834600

CUMBRIA, CLIBURN PENRITH
Grade II* Edwardian mansion ◆ 6 receptions ◆ coach house ◆ stables ◆ approx 18,470 sq ft
About 17 acres Guide £2.5 million
Savills Wilmslow 01625 417450

WEST SUSSEX, CHICHESTER
Stylish 2, 3, 4 & 5 bed new homes ◆ close to city centre, coast and South Downs National Park
Prices from £299,500
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BRISTOL, FLOATING HARBOUR
Overlooking Floating Harbour ◆ final 2 & 3 bed penthouses ◆ terraces ◆ ready Spring 2017
From £650,000
Savills Bristol 01179 100343

CAMBRIDGESHIRE, PILSGATE
4 receptions ◆ 5 bedrooms ◆ outdoor swimming pool ◆ tennis court ◆ 3 miles from Stamford town centre
Guide £1.55 million
Savills Stamford 01780 484694

SHROPSHIRE, BRIDGNORTH
Grade II ◆ 3 receptions ◆ 8 bedrooms ◆ 2 self contained apartments ◆ set in lovely gardens
About 6.3 acres Guide £2.25 million
Savills West Midlands 01952 239500