

The Evolution of the Living Room: How TV viewing habits have changed in the past 50 years

A Report by Sony

with contributions from Italian design duo Stefano Mich and Alessandro de Pompeis and the Geffrye Museum of the Home, and former England international football player Steve McManaman

August 2019

- From the TV in a cupboard in the 60s and the iconic space design in the 70s to the home bar of the 80s and the modern-day minimalist look, our living rooms have continued to evolve due to the social changes and new needs influenced by technological progress
- Sony's poll of 6,000 Europeans show that the TV has and always will be the heart of the living room as it is one of its most important items, coming second only to the sofas people watch them
- Despite the increase in popularity of portable devices, TVs are getting bigger, with over a third of people now wanting a TV over 55 inches and 16% desiring a 65+ inch set.
- With the rise of streaming, on-demand and mobile, habits have changed and the 'prime-time' television hour is dying out, research from Sony has revealed

The living room has primarily been the place for spending leisure hours, it's the place that families and friends spend time together and where hosts entertain guests. Once with a simple and easy to define purpose, the living room has evolved over the years to be anything from a formal sitting room, to a casual place to watch TV, play video games and play with toys, and to even eat.

Throughout its modern evolution there has been one constant, the presence of a television as a focal point for entertainment, customised by the owner to match their needs and priorities for the space – whether it's to create a home cinema experience, enjoy gaming, sports channels or somewhere to entertain the kids.

This report examines how living rooms throughout Europe have adapted in style and purpose yet how the television remains the focal point of the space. It examines how technology has changed the way people choose a television for their living room and the role it plays in everyday living.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LIVING ROOM

The number of rooms in the typical European home has evolved over centuries. In medieval times, many Europeans cooked, ate, slept and socialised in one big room and for practical reasons of warmth, the central focus of the home was a hearth. Separate spaces that were used as kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms were only for the rich and were very rare.

Over time, as technology and building materials developed, alongside European attitudes towards cleanliness and privacy, walls were built and new rooms and a new way of living and relaxing was created.

In the Tudor period, wealthy aristocrats were the first to create living rooms. As we moved into the 17th century the middle classes had started to adopt the practice, whilst by the 18th century all social classes aspired to have a living room, a room for 'best' that was a sign of good tasteⁱ.

Inspired by the stately homes of Europe and fuelled by an increase in disposable income and leisure time, people began to invest in their living spaces. By the late 18th century, living rooms and social spaces in the home were being decorated by the owners to reflect social status and taste – curtains, fabrics, ceramic works were all an indication of the status of the owner and used to impress visitors.

Since its creation, the living room has been used to impress guests with the owner's taste and wealth. From the first gas lamps and electricity to 19th century trendsetters, to the flat screen TVs of today.

HOW LIVING ROOMS HAVE EVOLVED THROUGH THE AGES

By Italian design duo Stefano Mich and Alessandro de Pompeis, accompanied by imagery taken by Sony:



60s.

This decade was a time of experimentation all around Europe – even in the living room.

The colour palettes were often inspired by nature; greens, floral patterns and golds were plastered on everything from sofas to walls.

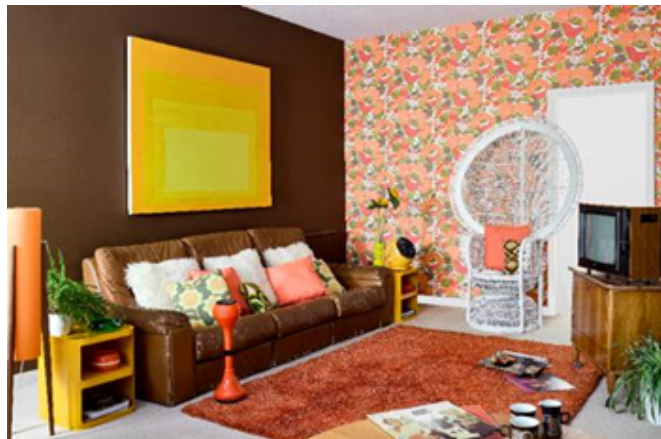
Towards the end of this decade the psychedelic style was to set wacky colours against each other, for example, a deep pink sofa covered in bright orange cushions.

Central heating meant that the fireplace, a typical architectural feature in the UK and in most of the north European countries, was not necessarily the focus of the room; its place was taken by the television and, with most homes owning one by the end of the 1960s, it became the vital piece of furniture in the home.

70s.

From the 1970s, it was fashionable to have chairs and sofas in an eclectic combination of styles and colours, although in more traditional homes the three-piece suite remained a dominant feature of the living room.

New materials for furniture, such as glass, aluminium and plastic, became increasingly popular. Orange and avocado green colours were key features all around Europe, as were tulip chairs, their clones and shag rugs.



Television sets and hi-fi systems became iconic design masterpieces to show-off. In most of the living rooms solitaire furniture was replaced with more modern and modular storage systems which consisted of shelves, space for TV, cupboards, drawers and pull-down cocktail units.



80s. - A lot happened in the 1980s: some cult classic movies were made and several timeless musicians rose to fame. Heavy wood furniture was back in and dusty pastels were huge, as were floral patterns. Every sofa, cushion and carpet in the living rooms across Europe was a sea of 'dusky this' or 'pale that'.

In this decade, televisions became more important because they were utilised as screens for the new videogame consoles and for watching VHS tapes. The new use of the TV greatly influenced the

furnishing of the living room. TV benches became bigger to fit and store all the new media and their accessories and it was very usual to find cabinets and shelves filled with stacks of VHS tapes and video games.

90s. - The 1990s restored a feeling of minimalism after the 80s - the interiors were designed to be clean and less crowded than in the previous decade.

White or beige furniture was what was on trend and considered cool. Ivy patterns on the wall and fake silk flowers were two minor details that were also big trends.

The silver TV sets, still bulky at the beginning of the decade, became flat and thinner towards the end, and VHS tapes were replaced with CDs and DVDs.



2000s. - During the transition to the 2000s, minimalism was beginning to be phased out as brighter and bolder statements came back in. Feature walls with floral and designer prints were popular. The continuous progress of technology spread the use of the internet and its integration in the home, together with the computer, televisions were no longer large bulky boxes but large flat screens to recreate the home cinema with wired speaker systems.



Flat pack culture became somewhat of a standard during this decade, bringing the desire for affordable, easy to assemble, kit furniture. After the 90s, people were trying to communicate their character through their decor, through their photographs and frames on the walls and more elaborate use of colour and wallpapers.

Present-Day

Recent years have witnessed a phenomenon called 'Urban living' in many European countries. There is a tendency to return to live in the centre of the big capitals where homes are becoming more expensive and spaces are getting smaller. Therefore, the need to transform the living room into a multifunctional space is even greater.

Technology is about to do even more as smart TVs with extra flat screens have a wireless connection to the Internet and through media-service providers people can easily access



huge libraries of movies and TV series. This means that there is no need to fill the space with bulky furniture to store DVDs, CDs and all the old recorders and players. Television becomes the new protagonist of the living room together with the sofa.

In terms of décor, nowadays, 'feeling good' at home is a real need, people desire to live in a space with a mood that is the unique expression of their identity. This allows different trends to co-exist, from a contemporary minimalism atmosphere to a more personalized and maximalist space.

Bringing the outside in is another huge interior design trend today, affecting everything in the living room from ornaments to wallpaper. Brass and copper finishes are also a big trend. Velvet is back and blue has become increasingly popular in its many different shades together with green and pale pink.

By Sonia Solicari, Director of the Museum of the Home:

'The history of the home is constantly evolving. How we use the rooms in our homes is influenced by our age, wealth, social and cultural background, fashion, taste and changes in society and the political landscape. With the increasing pressure on space experienced in many urban areas throughout Europe, there has been a rise in demand for flexible living – multi-purpose furniture and more relaxed, informal behaviours. Now, people sharing a house or flat can be cooking, eating, watching TV, doing their homework and even painting their nails in the same space – something that would have been unheard of fifty years ago in many homes.

This growing trend towards informality has been happening for decades - and can be traced back to at least the early 20th century when, for example, sofas became deeper and more plush, and people were encouraged to 'lounges' with a magazine and cigarette. This is in contrast to the 19th century, when furniture design and social convention required people to be more upright in their chairs, especially when guests were present.

The drive for greater flexibility has been fuelled by the digital revolution: mobile phones; watch-on-demand; virtual voice-activated assistants, have changed the way we live and eroded some of the boundaries in our homes. Open plan living is on the rise – with kitchen/diner/lounge areas increasingly popular.

For many people the ultimate in-home luxury is to re-create a more public or commercial leisure experience but behind closed doors. Sony's report on the rise in large televisions highlights the desire for a home cinema experience – whether you're binge-watching alone, or hosting an evening of film and popcorn for friends and family.

By the 1960s, in many households, the TV had replaced the hearth as the focal point of the living room. The mantelpiece was previously a prime space where you could showcase your most prized possessions and ornaments – a clock or a mirror for instance. Many people are still curating their shelves with books, objects and plants but the television can also be a way of expressing one's wealth and taste. With more opportunities for watching content on individual devices, such as phones and tablets, the television can increasingly be regarded as a symbol of communal activity – it dominates a room and forms a backdrop to our lives.'

HOW SOCIETY HAS SHAPED THE LIVING ROOM

Despite changing décor, family behaviour and streamed content taking a leap forward, the humble TV is still the heart of the living room according to the 'Evolution of the Living Room' report.

Since the first Sony TV was created in 1960, it quickly became a central and integral part of the living room as the popularity of TV grew – with a third (32%) of people saying it is the most important item, coming second only to the sofas it is watched on. This trend is showing no sign of slowing down either, as 64% of people said that they watch just as much or more TV now than they did ten years ago.

Not only has the TV continued to be the heart of the living room, but it has evolved to fit the needs of its viewers. In the early days, families huddled around an 8inch TV set but now, as cinema-style living rooms become the norm products such as the Sony XG95 have allowed bigger TVs to fit into roughly the same space thanks to their enhanced design.

As **Italian interior stylists Stefano Mich & Alessandro de Pompeis** comment, "*As televisions have changed from being big bulky boxes to just 10cm or less, with the XG95 being just 6.9cm deep, we have had to adapt the styling of our lounges to match. When people design a living room these days, one of the first thing they think of is where the TV will fit. It's gone from being hidden away in a cupboard, to being part of the décor.*"

Sonia Solicari, Director of the Museum of the Home said: '*For many people the ultimate of home luxury is to re-create a more public or commercial leisure experience but behind closed doors. Sony's report on the rise in large televisions highlights the desire for a home cinema experience*'.

As Takayuki Miyama, Sony's head of TV product planning and marketing in Europe highlights, "Sony has been at the forefront of innovation through the years with its televisions and the introduction of the XG95 shows a key point in time. We know the TV is the heart of the home and we wanted to offer the most versatile model yet complete with X-Wide Angle† making it ideal for viewers to sit anywhere around the room and still get the best picture. It also features Netflix Calibrated Mode and IMAX Enhanced – truly offering what the director intended you to see, putting you essentially on set."

STRESS FREE STREAMING

Despite TV being watched more than ever, with the average person watching over 15 hours a week, the 'prime-time' hour is set to die out as a mere 6% of people always watch a TV show live, instead preferring to stream or watch on catch up.

Research* carried out as part of Sony's 'Evolution of the Living Room' report has found that, whilst live TV is losing its relevance, the experience of sitting in front of the TV remains popular. Despite there being more ways and places to watch than ever before, 81% of people prefer to watch their favourite streamed programmes and movies on their TV over other devices, as it offers better comfort and higher sound and viewing quality. In fact, a third of people say their TV is the most important item in their living room.

The report also found that viewers now prefer streamed content over watching scheduled TV. The reasons given for this included the flexibility streaming offers rather than being restricted when a show is airing (50%), fitting programmes in around longer working hours (32%) and being able to watch with friends and/or a partner (31%).

The continued popularity has led to televisions adapting the functions they offer to accommodate streaming, with models such as Sony's XG95 and its Netflix Calibrated Mode allowing people to watch content as the creator intended.

Watching TV continues to be a shared experience too, with 48% of people sitting down with their families to watch TV together every day. This is now easier than ever, even for the biggest families, with features such as Sony's XG95's X-Wide Angle+ allowing picture to retain its quality regardless of the angle from which it is being watched.

As leading UK TV psychological expert and media commentator Emma Kenny comments: *"Television isn't simply a medium that enables you to enjoy a variety of content. It represents so many different variables, and reaches individuals in completely unique ways."*

Whilst society has changed significantly since the introduction of the first TV to the present day, many of our social behaviours remain the same. We're still social beings who value family time, and with a certain nostalgia linked to 'TV time' across Europe, it doesn't surprise me that families continue to enjoy TV together as a shared experience.

The TV is usually placed at the centre of the home, and whilst many people have multiple screens in one abode, there tends to be a 'main' TV that is surrounded by sofas and

central to the main living area. This represents connectedness on many levels. You are connected to the technology, to the characters and shows that you choose to view, but most importantly, you are connected to those around you, because often, you share the viewer experience with your friends and family. This communal experience encourages bonding and represents belonging, which is paramount in positive mental health and wellbeing.

Whilst laptops and phones enable their users to view programmes and box sets whilst out and about, the experience tends to be more isolated, missing out on the more important aspects garnered from watching TV.

The reward of sitting down to watch your favourite shows, whilst being able to fully relax on your sofa and having access to the comforts of your own home is a nurturing experience. Being able to fully switch off to life, and in turn switching on to your favourite shows enables an escape from reality, encouraging a decrease in stress and an increase in a positive mindset."

As Emma Kenny comments, "Binge-watching is a completely modern phenomenon that would have no meaning to people 50 years ago. Streaming services have led way for this 'Game of Thrones effect' to play on our addictive and curious personalities, allowing us to become fully immersed in a series we just can't stop watching. As we've seen with Game of Thrones, 'Fear Of Missing Out' also plays a major role in the success of streaming as our natural human instincts want to be part of the most exciting social experiences."

One area where live TV does still remain essential across Europe is sports, with almost two thirds highlighting they *have* to watch on time. The difference now compared to twenty years ago is the impact social media has on sport viewing, with Italians being more likely than all other countries polled, to comment on their own social channels during the football.

As **former England international football player Steve McManaman** says, "The one exception to scheduled content watching is sport. Sport fans can't wait to watch a match or sporting occasion as it will soon become old news. With the introduction of social media in recent years, we have to watch sport live or the results will be sent to us by friends or seen on a social platform before we know it! With features such as X-Motion Clarity on Sony's XG95, there has never been a better or clearer time to watch fast moving action without a judder."

SIZE DOES MATTER

Despite the increase in popularity of small, portable devices, the television set is getting even bigger – and showing no sign of shrinking down.

According to research carried out across Europe* by Sony as part of its 'Evolution of the Living Room' report, over a third of people (35%) now want a TV that is over 55 inches, with 16% desiring a massive 65+ inch set, such as the new XG95 TV. Having a big TV is so important, in fact, that one in ten people see it as a key status symbol, more so than smartphones and tablets (7%) designer clothes (7%) or expensive watches (6%). Leading almost half (48%) of people to want a bigger TV than the one they have now.

As technology has provided more and more ways and places to watch TV, viewers have increasingly appreciated the quality provided by watching on a larger screen over a smaller device – with a massive 80% still choosing TV as the place to watch for the best experience.

Psychologist Emma Kenny explains why people prefer big tellys, and see them as a status symbol: *'Like it or otherwise, we associate owning items that really 'stand out' as a marker of success. The market for large TV's has grown, and this has made it a competitive environment. This bigger is better belief system has never been so prominent than in the world of TV.*

Living rooms are transported into home cinemas, making the viewing experience the best that it has ever been. Whilst for many of us affording a season ticket to watch your favourite football team is out of reach, yet you can feel as if you are at the match when you have a large, quality TV screen in front of you.

Whilst this may simply seem to be about increasing egos, another likely reason is that television is often a shared experience. As opposed to a very expensive watch, or car, which is owned in a singular fashion, television is something that everyone who lives, or visits the home benefits from.'

Takayuki Miyama, Sony's head of TV product planning and marketing in Europe said: 'We've noticed a continued growth in popularity for bigger TVs over the years; factors such as the growing desire for a great home-cinema experience, possibly as an antidote to the emerging culture of watching things on the go, combined with the TVs becoming more and more affordable, have contributed to this.'

THE FUTURE OF THE LIVING ROOM

The advancement of technology has allowed people to start breaking down the walls in their home that they once built up. Advances in home heating technology and cooking equipment like extractor fans means that we no longer need so many walls to keep heat in and cooking smells out. And there are new ways to hide the latest mod cons like TVs and gaming consoles can be concealed in clever ways when they aren't in use.

Combined with a demand for space in many European cities, people are looking at ways to maximise the small amount of space they have. Unlike the past, it's no longer affordable to give one room an exclusive use, instead it's about making a room as versatile as possible. For many, the ultimate home luxury is having a dedicated room for lounging.

So, we will see a trend that actually is going back to what is actually medieval living, open-planned living in one central space that encompasses eating, drinking, entertaining and watching TV. Spaces that were once marked out for exclusive rooms are now being used for modern-day luxuries such as en-suites, storage and walk in wardrobesⁱⁱ.

ENDS

About Sony's XG95

Available now, the XG95 is a Full Array LED TV, delivering cinematic quality picture into the home.

Running on the powerful Picture Processor X1™ Ultimate, the XG95 provides a top-end 4K HDR viewing experience with an unmatched level of detail and clarity. The Object-based HDR remaster creates better depth, accurate texture and all-in-all more realistic picture.

The XG95's X-Wide Angle† ensures the picture retains its quality regardless of the angle from which it is being watched and provides improved picture quality beyond the normal capabilities of an LCD TV, thanks to Sony's original optical design and X-Motion Clarity™.

For even more immersive viewing, the XG95 series brings Sound-from-Picture Reality™ with Sony's innovative Acoustic Multi-Audio™ technology.

The XG95 TVs feature Netflix Calibrated Mode, IMAX Enhanced**, Dolby Vision™ and Dolby Atmos™** to deliver the viewing experience just as the creator intended

To make the TV and home even smarter, the XG95 has Google Assistant built-in*** as well as a microphone that will free users' hands. And a newly developed user interface brings seamless and quick access to favourite apps and settings.

About Sony Corporation

Sony Corporation is a creative entertainment company with a solid foundation of technology. From game and network services to music, pictures, electronics, semiconductors and financial services - Sony's purpose is to fill the world with emotion through the power of creativity and technology. For more information, visit: <http://www.sony.net/>

About the report

The report uses data from market research company OnePoll who conducted survey / data research across Europe. The statistics within the report are a collective of 6,000 respondents across the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium.

*Research of 6,000 Europeans carried out by One Poll in April, 2019. Breakdown of respondents:

1,000 UK
1,000 France
1,000 Italy
1,000 Germany
1,000 Netherlands
1,000 Belgium

**To be available via a future software update

***Availability varies by region

†Available in the 75" and 85" models

ⁱ 'If Walls Could Talk' bbc.co.uk

ⁱⁱ 'The Story of our Rooms' bbc.co.uk