

Home Sweet Home

A house is just bricks and mortar, it's a home that's where the heart is, says health psychologist David Moxon

I'VE JUST returned from a short break after enjoying a truly wonderful time. I did all the things I like to do, but rarely have the time, and luxuriated in an environment that was a world away from home and required no housework. Bliss? Yes, for sure. Yet despite all the home-from-home comforts I was definitely pleased to be back home again. In fact I was smiling when I rounded the corner in my car and pulled into the drive. I looked up at my house and felt a warm sense of comfort and familiarity – and realised just how much of a 'home-bird' I am. I guess it's no big revelation that many of us feel like this. The evolution of the human race required shelter of some form or another. We all need somewhere to hang a hat, be it a cave or a castle. For a home not only provides security and protection from the elements it also gives us a base – a place to return to – and a settlement that is 'ours.' I often marvel at just how attached to bricks and mortar we can become. We lavish attention on it as if it were human, investing a high proportion of our income and savings on it, and taking the time to acquaint ourselves with all its quirks and odd

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characteristics. Funny really when you think about it – after all it is little more than breezeblocks, plasterboard and half a ton of cement isn't it? So what is it about a building that creates this attachment? Well, psychoanalysts often use a technique known as word association to get to the root of questions like this. Patients are encouraged to speak aloud the first thought that enters their minds when prompted with a trigger word from the analyst (i.e. when the word "mum" is suggested the patient may respond with "dad"). In therapy sessions the word "house" often triggers the response "roof",

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"window" or even "tree". The word "home", however, is a different kettle of fish entirely. Patients often struggle to respond when prompted – due, largely, to the fact that it is a word with huge emotional ties. Generations of songwriters have featured the power of the home in their lyrics, 'I'll take you home Kathleen', 'the green, green grass of home', 'home is where

the heart is', and where ever I lay my hat, that's my home' – it is a pretty emotionally loaded term isn't it? It engenders memories and feelings of childhood, security and being loved – and that might just be the key. Metaphorically home is where we return to and it's not just the physical place that we find comforting and reassuring but it's a 'psychological place' where we can go, to be ourselves and feel protected from the outside world. Yet it is important to remember that a home doesn't need to be a lifelong friend. Even a brand new home can offer instant familiarity and a sense of attachment despite its lack of shared memories. Most of us would admit that it's the 'feel' of the place that matters most – not the make of the tiles in the kitchen. Choosing where we live is more about gut feeling that most of us ever divulge, but understanding why (and going with it) can count for a lot when house-hunting – especially if you're looking for a Home Sweet Home.



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