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# All I want for Christmas is a brand new home: how developers are catering to children to appeal to their parent buyers



The Landmark Pinnacle aims to bring the classic London square indoors CREDIT: DBOX

By **Liz Rowlinson**

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**W**restling the iPad out of your child's hands is always a challenge – particularly when there are no playgrounds or trees nearby to tempt the more intrepid youngsters.

It's a hot topic for many parents. As children today spend more time watching television, playing computer games and tinkering on phones than previous generations, there's a growing concern about the developmental problems that can be caused by lack of stimuli from the outside environment.

Bear Grylls, the adventurer and television presenter, has spoken of the need to strike a balance between “Minecraft and bushcraft”, while in August, Facebook's co-founder Mark Zuckerberg published a heartfelt letter to his newborn child: “The world can be a serious place. That's why it's important to make time to go outside and play.”

The tech titan's call to discover a “magical” childhood outdoors is at odds with not just his digital media empire but also a society in which more people now live in cities than in the countryside. With a fast-growing urbanised population and shrinking homes, how can we reconcile this need for families to enjoy outside space?



Spring Park at Woodberry Down is open to the local community

Property developers increasingly have children and families in mind when designing their new homes. “We feel very strongly that today’s children do not get the same life that we had and in a crowded city it’s difficult to create outdoor space,” says Rami Atallah of Chalegrove Properties, the developer behind the Landmark Pinnacle in the Isle of Dogs, east London.

The 75-floor tower is designed to bring the “classic London square” indoors, with a lush garden on the 27th floor that has a specially regulated environment to nurture plants and trees not normally found inside to create the feeling of being outside.

“It’s a space where children can build tepees, play hide and seek and navigate the space as if they were in a park, and where their parents can chat as they watch over them,” Atallah adds. The 725 homes in the building, which also has a rooftop garden, are priced from £425,000.



Lincoln Square has a 758 sq ft playroom split into different zones by rope screens

Building child-friendly homes is vital if cities want to remain competitive, according to a report published this week by Arup, the urban planning consultancy. As well as air pollution, traffic and crime, it blames high-rise living for restricting children's independence and ability to play, and calls on developers and civic leaders to introduce pedestrianised "play" streets, intergenerational spaces such as urban gardens and open-air swimming pools, better traffic controls and wild outdoor spaces.

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“We have to ask ourselves, are we building homes to suit people’s needs?” says James Fenner of Silk Road, a property marketing company. “Along with good Wi-Fi, parking and a facility to accept deliveries, we’ve found that people looking for an apartment prioritised a communal garden. More people were keen on integrating nature in the home than integrating technology.”

Some housebuilders are a step ahead when it comes to incorporating child-friendly green spaces in their schemes. Lendlease is prioritising outdoor areas for under-sevens in its developments in London, Manchester and York.



The 110 homes at Cambium are built around an 'urban meadow' with play areas

In its Cambium scheme in Southfields, south-west London, 55 townhouses and 55 flats are centred around an urban meadow featuring an eco-play area – think ropes and timber rather than a bright plastic climbing frame – with logs to climb on and an oak tree believed to have been planted by the celebrated gardener Capability Brown.

Half of the houses, which start from £1.5 million for three bedrooms, have been bought by families, says Richard Cook, head of residential at Lendlease. “It’s essential that we recognise that families are moving back into cities at an accelerated pace and that we build homes that facilitate children’s play.”

Other developments with outdoor play areas for children include St James’ Fitzroy Gate in Old Isleworth, west London, which has a wooden climbing area and a wild flower field, with homes available from £1.4 million.



Chess boards, ping pong tables and badminton nets help keep older children busy as well at Fulham Riverside CREDIT: MATT LIVERY

There's also Prospect East from L&Q, which pits itself as a “new urban community” in east London's Stratford. Its child-friendly spaces have jumping logs, a climbing wall and table tennis, with prices from £789,950.

And it's not just about building play areas for young kids; to appeal to older children and encourage intergenerational play, Barratt has included badminton nets, ping pong tables and chess boards among its two acres of outside space at its Fulham Riverside development in south-west London. Prices start from £3.25 million.

Other housebuilders have gone for something a little more imaginative. Over in south-east London, Telford Homes' Bermondsey Works development, which has one of the longest rooftop terraces in London, offers a fun space with grass-covered seats, swivel chairs, Teletubby-esque mounds and telescopic speaking tubes sprouting out of the ground. Three-bedroom homes cost from £655,000.



Bermondsey Works has filled its rooftop terrace with grass-covered seats, swivel chairs, Teletubby-esque mounds and telescopic speaking tubes

The need for child-friendly spaces is not limited to city centres. At Cane Hill Park, a joint venture by Barratt and David Wilson Homes on the edge of the North Downs in Coulsdon, near the Surrey border, the play area has balancing beams, log features, rope climbing frames and a “trim trail” obstacle course.

This was a big draw for Ian and Jurgena Biggin, who bought a three-bedroom townhouse in July. “We moved here from a flat with no garden in nearby Cheam so the big, attractive green areas were very important to us in bringing up a young child,” says Ian, 44. “Our 19-year-old son uses the running trail while our two-year-old, Noah, uses the playground. Their cousins, aged between five and 12, come over and they can all play together in a safe, friendly environment, along with our neighbours’ children.” Prices start from £584,995 for three bedrooms.





Ian and Jurgena Biggin (with son Noah) bought at Cane Hill Park for its green spaces and play areas

Family-friendly environments outside the inner cities are also provided by Berkeley Homes in schemes such as Royal Wells Park in Tunbridge Wells, where prices start from £715,000, and Ryewood in Sevenoaks, where £545,000 will buy a three-bedroom home. “Having green open spaces in close proximity is a top priority for buyers, especially those with young children,” says Karrina Oki, sales and marketing director at Berkeley. At Royal Wells Park, she adds, children are always drawn to the timber play area.

Building child-friendly spaces that are not restricted to residents of the development can boost parents’ views of the neighbourhood and help children make friends in the area, too. At its Woodberry Down scheme in north London, Berkeley is building Spring Park. The first of four parks for the local community, it will have 4.5 acres of open space overlooking the West Reservoir, including a play area.



Lillie Square in Earl's Court offers children a bright and colourful playroom full of fun furniture and a range of toys and games CREDIT: IAIN LEWIS

Of course, it's not always practical to send the children outside to play. A few developments now offer eye-catching indoor play areas for those rainy days. At Capco's Lillie Square in Earl's Court, south-west London, where prices start from £775,000, residents of the 808 homes have access to a children's playroom with fun furniture and a range of toys and games.

Alternatively at Lincoln Square, a five-star development by Lodha UK in central London's Holborn, where homes are available from £990,000, there's a 758 sq ft play room. Designed by award-winning designer Patricia Urquiola, it is a vibrant space separated into different zones by unusual rope screens. There's a slide and ballpit section for younger children, a table tennis area, and for the inevitable moment of parental weakness, a television and video games area, too.