

Christmas isn't a good reason not to downsize



Retired empty-nesters are often reluctant to part with the family home, despite the fact that downsizing offers a property that's easier to run, while releasing equity that can be used for exciting and interesting adventures in later life, or to help children take their own steps on the property ladder.

Richard Williams of Cognatum says, "There are numerous advantages to moving to a smaller property in later life, but when a property has been the hub of the family for decades, the idea can be met with resistance. While some objections are practical ones, some of the most frequently quoted reasons for staying in the family home surround the emotive issue of Christmas.

"There's a belief that hosting Christmas requires space – space for family to stay, space for entertaining, space for a tree, space for extensive food preparation. But eighteen months of on and off lockdowns has made us a flexible species – some of the best parties of 2020 and 2021 were held outside in questionable weather conditions with a picnic or takeaway food. The idea that the lack of a dedicated dining room could spoil a family Christmas feels like a quaintly pre-pandemic notion.

"If festive anxiety is stopping the retired from taking the plunge into a more practical property, they should be reassured that Christmas can be happily accommodated without square footage that isn't used for the other 364 days of the year.

"The difficulty of fewer bedrooms to accommodate all the family can be overcome by pre-planning and booking up local Airbnbs, or hotels. This does require forward planning, but if the exercise is done early enough in the year, there should be no problem in having all the family close by.

"Cognatum retirement estates have guest accommodation that residents can book on behalf of family and friends.

"We're no longer wedded to the idea of formal sit down meals in a dedicated dining room, pretty much anything goes. Eating in the kitchen is the norm; eating outside with firepits, barbecues, heaters, umbrellas, gazebos and blankets has become mainstream, and there are numerous ways in which outside space can be turned into useable year-round space.

"Of course, if what you are really after is a quiet Christmas, or possibly even an escape to some winter sun, then by all means spread the notion that you couldn't possibly have the space to host this year. But small kitchen or dining tables can be turned into big tables with the employment of a large piece of plywood and a pretty cloth. Alternatively consider local communal spaces that could be used for large gatherings – many of Cognatum's retirement estates have communal space that can be booked by residents; or Christmas dinner in a restaurant which someone else has cooked – an increasingly popular option.

"Covid has made us realise that it's the simple pleasure of being with family and friends that's important – the space in which we do it is almost irrelevant.

"Big properties mean big heating bills (that are set to rise), big maintenance bills, and a reluctance to 'lock up and leave' because it's too complicated. Hanging on to an overlarge property when it's long been grown out of is rarely wise; those who make the move to a more compact property rarely in our experience ever regret it, even when Christmas is around the corner."

Cognatum, an independent not for profit company, has 60 retirement estates across central and southern England. All are in prime locations within vibrant market towns or villages, within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Each estate benefits from thoughtful architecture, landscaped grounds, and a dedicated estate manager.

www.cognatum.co.uk
01491 821170

For press information, interviews and high res jpgs, contact Amanda MacCaw, 07977 238175 / amanda@wildmaccaw.co.uk