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Sunken Living Rooms Are Back—but Will the Trend Really Last?

BY JILLIAN PRETZEL

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“From the 1960s through the 1980s, the sunken living room was the ultimate hallmark of ‘cool,’” says [Denise van den Bossche](#), an associate broker at Realty Executives [Arizona](#) Territory. “It added drama and brought a sense of architectural flair to the mid-century modern home.”

Sunken living rooms, also sometimes known as “conversation pits,” became less common as trends moved toward open-concept living spaces, with one flooring and level throughout. But lately, they’ve been making a comeback, says [Alex Platt](#), a real estate broker in [Florida](#). He explains that designers and homeowners are influenced by retro designs, and the feature has been popping up in [luxury homes](#) and even on [the big screen](#).

But not everyone loves the trend.

“In Boca Raton, the reactions are mixed,” says Platt. “Some buyers love the style and the sense of separation it creates in an open layout. Others see it as a safety concern, especially families with young kids or anyone who wants a more streamlined flow.”

But Platt says the way a sunken living room is designed, and staged, can make a big difference to buyers.

“When it’s done well, it adds character. When it’s not, it becomes another item on the renovation list,” he says.

Here’s what you need to know about the revival of the sunken living room.

Sunken living rooms can be a statement design piece

[Debbie Pisaro](#), a real estate agent in [Los Angeles](#), says buyers love sunken living spaces because they can help divide big living rooms into smaller, more intentional spaces. She says buyers are tired of the “big, echoing” open-concept designs that have dominated the

market and are now “desperately craving architectural intimacy and intentional, cozy spaces.”

She says it’s all part of a shift toward “broken-plan living,” which uses features like conversation pits, strategic half-walls, and interior glass doors to separate the noise and function, while keeping light flowing from room to room.

“The sunken living room isn’t just a fun throwback; it’s a brilliant architectural move that anchors a space and gives a home character,” Pisaro says.

Arthur Kulchitskiy, an interior designer and the Founder of JDI Construction, based in Vancouver, WA, agrees that buyers are craving cozy spaces. He says sunken living rooms are great because they create a “snug, cocoon-like area that seems like a whole other world from an open plan living area.”

But beyond a feeling of intimacy, Kulchitskiy says sunken living rooms provide great architectural interest, affording a visual break in a flat floor plan that buyers enjoy. As an added bonus, a lower floor typically means higher ceiling, which he says can add to the aesthetic, especially when the room has big windows.

"A sunken living room can be a statement design piece when done right," Kulchitskiy says.

Safety concerns can overshadow aesthetics

While some love sunken living rooms, others aren’t so charmed.

“They interrupt flow, complicate mobility, and present a fall hazard,” says van den Bossche says of the feature.

She explains that while age-in-place designs were originally targeted for the older generation, the philosophy has evolved to influence all buyers.

“Many buyers know you don’t have to be old for life to throw you a curveball that leaves you in a wheelchair or using a walker, even if only temporarily,” she says.

So, perhaps it's no surprise that **Yoni Asulin**, owner of [ASL Remodeling](#) in [San Jose, CA](#), says he gets way more requests to fill sunken spaces in than he gets to create new ones.

“People want them gone because of safety and accessibility issues,” he says.

“While it’s tempting to romanticize the entertaining style of decades past, today’s buyers know better,” van den Bossche says. “We value open, continuous spaces that make movement effortless and safe. Nostalgia might tug at our hearts, but practicality wins the day.”

She adds: “The sunken living room belongs in design history, not in the homes of today.”

The cost to create, and remove, a sunken living room

Asulin says costs vary by location, but in his area, creating a sunken living room typically runs \$10,000 to \$30,000—though he’s seen it reach over \$60,000 for complex projects.

“Big costs are foundation work, rerouting HVAC, plumbing, electrical, and finish work,” he says.

Meanwhile, he reports filling a sunken space costs \$5,000 to \$25,000, with the average project costing \$12,000. A lot goes into filling sunken living rooms, he says, including adding structural fill, putting in new subflooring, and matching existing floors.

But if you’re interested in adding one to your home, the first step is consulting a structural engineer, who can assess if your foundation can handle it.

If you move forward with the project, Asulin says to consider safety. “Invest in good lighting, clear visual markers, and railings if needed,” he says.



The centerpiece of this Los Angeles, CA pad is the sunken conversation pit. MARCUS MARTINEZ OF MARCUS ANDREW PHOTOGRAPHY

Full article: <https://www.realtor.com/advice/home-improvement/sunken-living-rooms-are-back-is-that-good-news/>

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