

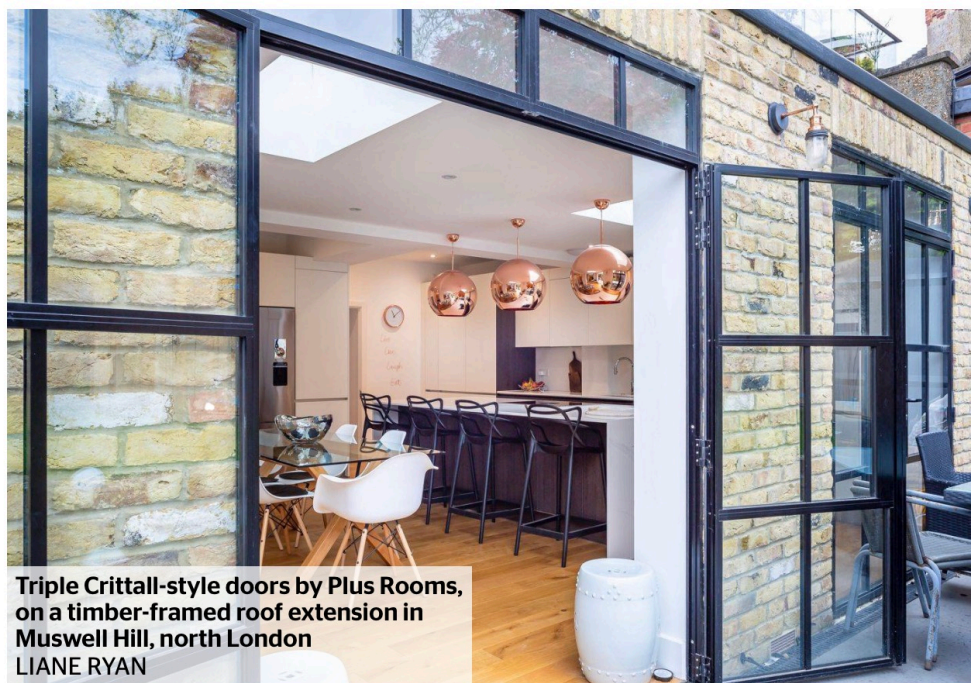
Why it could be curtains for bifold doors

Too hot in summer and too cold in winter, bifolds may have had their day. There are other options, says Jayne Dowle

The Georgians had symmetry and fancy fenestration; the Victorians gave us red bricks and William Morris; the postwar movement brought us sleek architects and furniture to match. Yet when historians come to refer to 21st-century domestic design, it will be defined by the glass box extension and bifolding doors.

Typically found on the back of a period terrace or 1930s semi that has been knocked through to create “open-plan living space”, it might have its roots in balmy Californian beach architecture. Yet it has evolved into a peculiarly British innovation encapsulating several national obsessions: bringing the “outside in”, so you have an unfettered view of next door’s shed; entertaining, although often the most entertaining aspect is wrestling with the bifold mechanism when the heavens (inevitably) open; and adding all-important value, or at least appealing to potential buyers who fancy themselves as cutting-edge.

The reality, though, as many a bifold owner will admit, is not so aspirational. Too cold in winter, too hot in summer, and rarely opened to their full extent, is it time to call it curtains for the bifold trend? There are concerns about eco-efficiency and heating bills because the number of frames



Triple Crittall-style doors by Plus Rooms, on a timber-framed roof extension in Muswell Hill, north London
LIANE RYAN

in a typical bifold door means more potential for thermal bridging, leading to energy loss. There are also issues with privacy and general practicality — when unfolded, bifold doors take up a lot of space indoors and out. It could all mean that these once fashionable extensions may soon be going the way of daily meat eating and the diesel car.

“Bifold doors have been on the out in high-end residential for a long time,” says Rebecca Clayton, the communications director at IQ Glass. “Architects and their clients want clean lines and the connection of inside to outside even when the doors are closed, which in the UK is most of the time.”

To achieve a happier indoor/outdoor transition, Clayton recommends slim sliding doors or a frameless structural glass window. “This will provide the same visual trick, making you think that the glazing is not there and that the living space opens up to the outside,” she says.

Top tip? It’s disruptive to fully open bifolds every time you need to step outside, especially when it’s cold and dark. Include a “traffic” door in the design, Clayton says, so it’s easy to put the cat out.

[A guide to stylish alternatives to bifold](#)



doors

Crittall

Top of today's wish list, elegant black steel-framed Crittall or Crittall-style doors have relatively slim frames, so they bring in a decent amount of light and make a strong industrial-style statement. The drawback is the cost. Genuine Crittalls are expensive; see crittall-windows.co.uk for guidance. There are alternatives such as Climadoor, from £2,899 for a 2,090mm x 2,090mm external door.

Sliding doors

The return of the Seventies sliding glass door has undergone a stylish slimline update that allows for large glazed panes that can be fitted with no frame at the base or head. According to Clayton, this takes the eye line straight through the glass to the outside. For James Bernard, the director of Plus Rooms, a design and build company, sliding doors are ideal for smaller gardens. However, Mark Hood, a designer and technical manager at the architectural practice Resi, warns that sliding doors can be restrictive because some of the glass must be fixed in place unless you opt for pocket doors — sliding glass doors with inner pockets built into the wall that allow the doors to slot away completely to create an open space. A number of manufacturers offer these, including Sunflex, with cost depending on size, specification and installation.



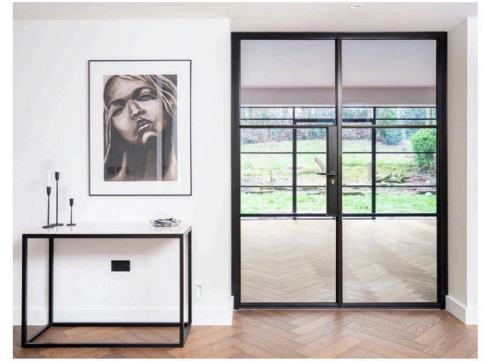
An Origin OB-72 Bi-Fold window, which retails for between £1,200 and £1,500 per sash (plus VAT), on a property in Bath
ANDY SHENNAN

Picture windows

Estate agents bandy about the term “picture window”, but for the avoidance of doubt, it's usually larger than an average window and will normally have no opening mechanism. “This means that a picture window is often less costly than a traditional window and provides better insulation,” Bernard says. “It is ideal for homeowners looking to frame a fantastic view and gain natural light as well as keeping their energy bills down.”

They are also easier to maintain thanks to their simple frames, without the parts and nooks of other windows.

There's a trend, especially along the back walls of houses, to pair a picture window with separate doors. This allows a view to be framed succinctly, perhaps with a built-in window seat, and gives more scope with furniture. A picture window can also be designed, oriel-style, to jut out slightly from the wall, creating its own architectural feature. Building Supplies Online has an oblong grey



a Crittall door, with a streamlined shape that makes it suitable for indoor use

aluminium fixed window, 620mm x 2,090mm, for £513.

Pivot doors

This is a large-scale solution for deep pockets. A pivoting door turns through 90 degrees and can open internally or externally. Easy to operate because it doesn't have hinges, it works by swinging on a single point or axis. However, you need to take specialist advice on insulation and preventing water ingress. The interior designer Katie Thomas, the founder of KTM Design, says: “These can be sized up to 3m in width and height for a wow factor.” There's a range of pivot doors at IQ Glass, from £1,200 a square metre.

Slide and stack

Finally an option that suits families, especially those with young children. “Using independent panels which slide along the track and only fold once they reach the end, these doors allow for easy ventilation without being fully open,” Thomas says. “This means you can create airflow through your home while also keeping your



children safe from wandering outdoors unattended.” The 1,200 mm XP-Glide range from Express Bi-Folding Doors can be configured to stack and slide, from £3,500 plus VAT.

Another option is tilt-and-turn doors. They can be opened like a normal door but also tilt to provide an opening at the top. Thomas adds: “Again, this allows for airflow without the worry of your children roaming. These types of doors and windows can come in larger sizes, which means you can still maximise on natural light and flawless views.”

French doors

And let’s not forget classic French doors, says Adam Pawson from the door and window company Safestyle. “French doors — meaning two slim doors fitted side by side with glass running the entire length or halfway — provide a sophisticated charm with a simple installation process,” he says. “Since they’re so versatile in design, they cleverly utilise space, light and ventilation while never compromising on the standard of security and efficiency.” B&Q has a good



Express bifolding doors, from £6,700 (plus VAT)

budget option: £497 for a set of grey full-height double-glazed uPVC 2,090mm x 1,190mm French doors.

Touch of glass

All that glass may make you feel exposed to the neighbours as well as rising energy bills. The most important thing to ask about is the u-values — how effective a material is as an insulator — of the product, says Victoria Brocklesby, the chief operating officer at the door and window company Origin. “This is the best way to ensure a home doesn’t compromise on thermal efficiency. For example, our doors can be made to accommodate double or triple glazing, and when using triple glazing can achieve a low u-

value of just 1.2 to ensure maximum thermal efficiency.”

Also check that the door has a thermal break and weathertight seals to ensure thermal efficiency and protect it — and your home — from the elements.

In summer glass can make a home unbearably hot. Consider a solar reflective coating on the outer pane to reduce heat coming through. Or pull down the blinds, which will of course mean you can’t see the garden.

In winter blinds are a must for warmth and privacy. The best option, says Steve Bromberg, the managing director at Express Bi-Folding Doors (expressbifolds.co.uk) is integral blinds that sit within the glass. “They never need cleaning and are a contemporary way to screen off the glass as they literally fold away with the door when the door is open.”

Integral blinds are available with manual operation or remote control, powered by a solar battery or hard-wired electric operation. Internal or external roller blinds that drop down from inside the frame or from the ceiling are also an option. ■