

# VILLES EN TRANSFORMATION:

DÉFIS, (PRÉ)VISIONS, PERSPECTIVES

# CHANGING CITIES:

CHALLENGES, PREDICTIONS,  
PERSPECTIVES

Sous la direction de

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# CONTEMPORARY MULTILEVEL LIVING ROOM SPACE

*Kliment IVANOV*

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## ABSTRACT

The living room space on several levels is a manifestation of design excellence within the constraints of a house. I have researched the multilevel living room space during the last decade throughout the world. My aim is to take a snapshot of the contemporary notion of this space and its role in the modern dwelling. I investigate the frequency of execution and the geographical distribution of the houses with such space in comparison with the ordinary ones. I consider these two aspects of importance because they indicate the popularity of and the demand for the multilevel living room space. I rely on two main sources of scientific information: professional periodicals (magazines) and professional publications (books) from the end of the last century till now. I also speculate about the selection of the examples for these publications. In addition, I propose an illustrated classification of the multilevel living room space according to the height of the space.

**Keywords:** *Multilevel space, Living room, Interior, House, Loft*

*“Place ... contributes to our identity, it is where  
we can dwell rather than merely reside.”*

(Buchanan, 2012)

This paper presents a research on the living room space on several levels during the last decade. Its aim is to take a snapshot of the contemporary no-

tion of multilevel living room space throughout the world and its role in the modern dwelling.

The paper is part of an on-going research on the topic which I have been carrying during the last several years. It is focused on the multilevel living room space in houses (single-family residential buildings) only. Initially I had the intention for a wider scope that encompasses this kind of space in all types of residential buildings. However, during the process I concluded that the problems were far too complex for a single study and that the apartment buildings (multi-family residential buildings) should remain a subject of a separate research.



**Image 1.** Marcio Kogan (Studio MK27) – Gama Issa House, 2001, São Paulo, Brazil © Arnaldo Pappalardo

*Source:* [www.yatzer.com](http://www.yatzer.com)

## Living Room

The living room has always been a subject for research merely as one of the many rooms in the house. Nevertheless, it is the most significant place in the dwelling, “often thought of as the centre of the home” (Schittich, 2005, p. 15) and needs to receive more attention. The living room space provides the greatest opportunity for architectural expressiveness in the house and I believe it deserves a separate research.



## Multilevel Living Room Space



**Image 2.** Olson Kundig – Meg Home, 2016, Seattle, USA © Nic Lehoux  
 Source: discoverbrombal.com

The living room space on several levels is the most impressive form of living room space. It is a manifestation of design excellence within the boundaries of a residential building. This spatial scheme has enormous potential for improvement of the quality of the dwelling experience.

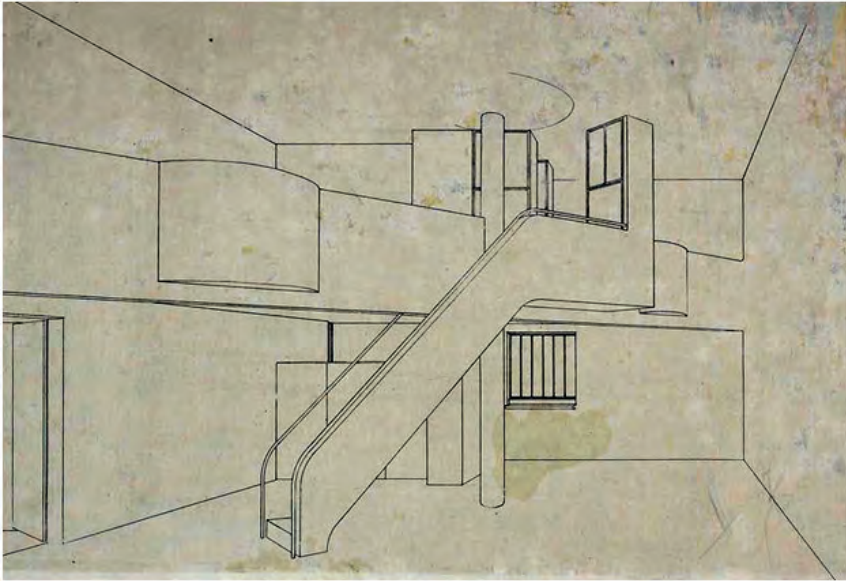
This type of living room space can be characterized in several expressions:

- Space on several levels
- Multilevel space
- Multistorey space

*Space on several levels* is an elaborate expression that is not suited well for frequent use. I attempted to coin a term to make it shorter and more convenient. Initially I chose the term *multistorey space*. But during my work I determined that it would be more precise to use the attribute *multilevel* instead of *multistorey*. *Multistorey* presupposes that there are at least two storeys in the space of the living room, and at least one of them has the full-height of a storey. In many of the cases in the living room space, there are one or several levels with intermediate heights, which do not correspond to the heights of

the storeys of the house. *Multilevel* provides better general description that encompasses all the cases and can be used as the main term.

## History



**Image 3.** Le Corbusier - Maisons pour Artisans, 1924,  
not located © Fondation Le Corbusier

Source: [www.fondationlecorbusier.fr](http://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr)

Multistorey living room space has existed since the beginning of Modernism. The grand master of contemporary architecture Le Corbusier was one of the first architects who experimented with it. He used it both into small houses for artisans and massive residences for upper class representatives. In the beginning, he dreamed of it as an instrument to design inexpensive dwellings for workers, which can be mass-produced by industrial means. Later, when he better understood its spatial qualities and design potential, he implemented it in the grand modern mansions for his richer.

At the same time in the former Soviet Union multilevel living room space was tested as a solution to the housing crisis after the Revolution. “In 1926, the Soviet architectural journal *Sovremennaiia Arkhitektura* (SA, “Contemporary Architecture”) announced a “Comradely Competition for

Communal Housing” and invited architects to design highly efficient and mass-buildable buildings to facilitate communal living.” (McKay & Perunkov, 2015). Again, it was used with the intention to save space in the design for communal dwellings for ordinary people.

Nowadays we understand much better both the potential and the shortcomings of this spatial scheme. It is a grand, luxurious, and opulent solution. In this capacity, it has to be used not when we try to save space, but when we have an ample amount of it. Le Corbusier imagined and designed houses with multilevel living room space for the poor people but ended up building such houses only for the rich ones. In my opinion, this is the main reason today we associate this type of space with only with houses of rich people. This inherited misguided association often predefines a negative choice of the client for this spatial scheme.

Multilevel living room space occurs in great variety of types that can be classified according to different criteria. Here, I present an illustration of the most important of these criteria – **according to the height of the space**. It includes three possible cases:

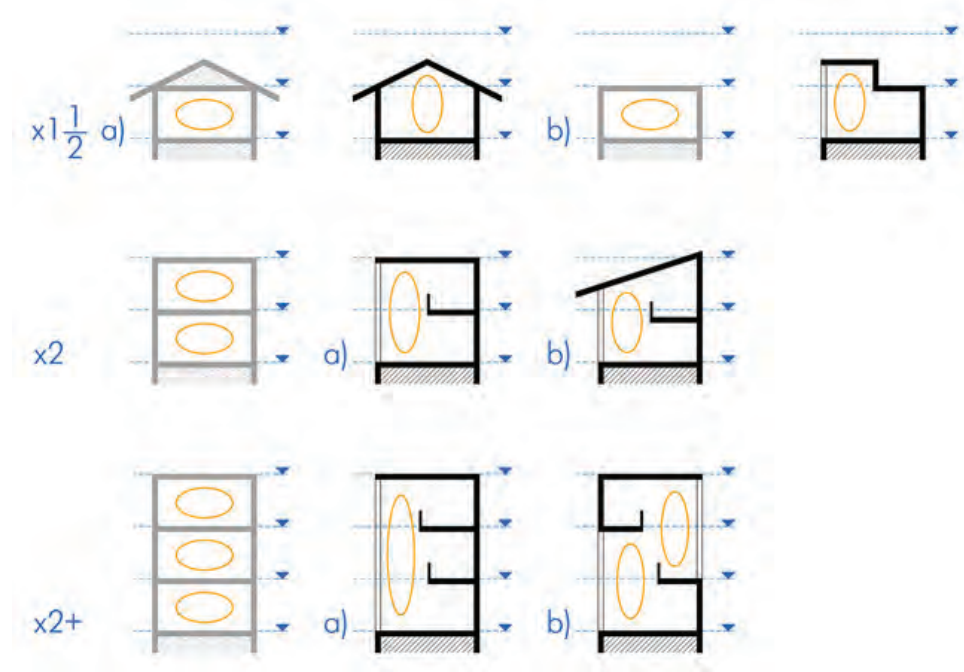
One and a half storey high –  $x1\frac{1}{2}$

Two storeys high –  $x2$

More than two storeys high –  $x2+$

In the first case (**One and a half storey high**), the height of the living room space does not reach the height of two storeys. It is typically formed by a utilized pitched roof space or a raised flat ceiling over (the main) part of the living room. There is no gallery and in most occasions, the house is a single-storey building. The case can be marked up for short as  **$x1\frac{1}{2}$** .

## Types according to the height of the space



**Image 4.** Multilevel living room space types according to the height of the space © Kliment Ivanov

In the second case (**Two storeys high**), the height of the living room space matches the full height of the two storeys. With a flat roof scenario, the two-storey-high area covers the entire living room. With a pitched roof scenario, the two-storey-high area is above the gallery and the height varies over the other parts of the room. Usually there is a gallery. It can be marked up for short as **x2**.

In the third case (**More than two storeys high**), the height of the living room space spans several storeys. There is a distinct area, called *void*, with the height of all the storeys (atrium type) or several areas with various heights (ladder type). There usually are several galleries or platforms. It can be marked up for short as **x2+**.

The above is just one of the classifications of multilevel living room space. A detailed study of all the classifications by different criteria is a subject of another paper that I am working on.



## Research

The paper presents a survey of houses which have a multilevel living room space throughout the world. Its aim is to examine two important aspects for these houses, in comparison with the other (ordinary) houses:

Frequency of execution – popularity;

Geographical distribution – according to countries and continents.

The survey does not claim to be a statistical investigation. It does not try to retrieve definitive statistical information. Its aim is to identify attitudes and tendencies among the general public, i.e. clients. It is an overview for architectural practitioners that will inform them about the popularity and distribution of multilevel living room space in the present housing market.

The scope of the survey comprises two main sources of scientific information:

- Professional press and periodicals – magazines;
- Professional publications – books.

All of them are dedicated to the theme of houses, and precisely – single family detached houses. They provide coverage of countries worldwide, with a focus on the developed countries in Europe, the Americas and Japan.

The period of the survey comprises the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The magazines cover a period of exactly 10 years up to the present year. The period of the books is extended with 5 to 10 years back due to the delay, necessary for writing and publishing the books.

## Publications

The *Architectural Record* magazine is one of the most renowned professional architectural periodical in the world. It is a USA magazine and is closely related to the *American Institute of Architects (AIA)*. It is issued monthly and each issue is dedicated to a specific topic.

The magazine has an annual themed issue, *Record Houses*, dedicated to houses. It has world coverage but oddly – without Germany and the UK. About 30% of the houses are in the USA.

I have reviewed a period of exactly 10 years, from 2008 to 2019.

## Magazines



**Image 5.** Publications – Architectural Record Magazine © Kliment Ivanov

## Architectural Record Magazine

**Table 1.** Architectural Record Magazine – Houses throughout the world

issue	theme	houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
05/2018	Record Houses 2018	6	1	17%	5	Brazil, France, Japan, Mexico, USA
06/2017	Record Houses 2017	8	4	50%	6	Canada, Chile, France, Japan, Spain, USA
04/2016	Record Houses 2016	8	2	25%	5	Canada, France, Japan, Spain, USA
04/2015	Record Houses 2015	8	2	25%	4	Italy, Japan, Spain, USA
04/2014	Record Houses 2014	8	4	50%	4	Brazil, Holland, Spain, USA
04/2013	Record Houses 2013	7	2	29%	6	Argentina, Japan, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, USA
04/2012	Record Houses 2012	9	4	44%	6	Belgium, Canada, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, USA
04/2011	Record Houses 2011	6	3	50%	4	Brazil, Japan, Portugal, USA
04/2010	Record Houses 2010: A world of the Unexpected	7	2	29%	4	China, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, USA
04/2009	Record Houses 2009: Blurring the Boundaries	8	4	50%	5	Japan, Malaysia, Spain, the Netherlands, USA
	Average	75		37%		

**Table 2.** Architectural Record Magazine – Houses in USA

issue	theme	houses	multilevel living room space	%
05/2018	Record Houses 2018	2	1	50%
06/2017	Record Houses 2017	3	2	67%
04/2016	Record Houses 2016	4	1	25%
04/2015	Record Houses 2015	4	1	25%
04/2014	Record Houses 2014	4	4	100%
04/2013	Record Houses 2013	2	0	0%
04/2012	Record Houses 2012	4	3	75%
04/2011	Record Houses 2011	3	2	67%
04/2010	Record Houses 2010: A world of the Unexpected	3	1	33%
04/2009	Record Houses 2009: Blurring the Boundaries	4	2	50%
	Average			49%

**Table 3.** Häuser Magazine – Houses throughout the world

issue	theme	houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
05/2018	Mehr Wohnlichkeit	7	2	29%	5	Australia, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain
06/2017	Helle Freude	7	3	43%	4	Canada, Germany, Spain, USA
/2016						
/2015						
/2014						
/2013						
01/2012	"What I'd do differently next time"	6	1	17%	3	Germany, Portugal, USA
03/2011	Exemplary Scandinavia	7	3	43%	7	Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, USA
02/2010	The Best of Today's Houses	7	3	43%	6	Belgium, Chile, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, USA
02/2009	The Houses of the Year	7	2	29%	5	
05/2007	Living in the Landscape	7	3	43%	6	Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Uruguay
02/2006	Inexpensive Buildings	6	2	33%	4	Germany, Italy, Switzerland, USA
04/2005	New Dream Villas	7	2	29%	4	Canada, Germany, South Africa, Spain
	Average	61		34%		

**Table 4.** Häuser Magazine - Houses in Germany

issue	theme	houses	multilevel living room space	%
05/2018	Mehr Wohnlichkeit	1	0	0%
06/2017	Helle Freude	2	1	50%
/2016				
/2015				
/2014				
/2013				
01/2012	"What I'd do differently next time"	3	0	0%
03/2011	Exemplary Scandinavia	1	0	0%
02/2010	The Best of Today's Houses	2	1	50%
02/2009	The Houses of the Year	3	1	33%
05/2007	Living in the Landscape	2	1	50%
02/2006	Inexpensive Buildings	3	1	33%
04/2005	New Dream Villas	3	1	33%
	Average			28%

## Häuser Magazine

The *Häuser* magazine is a specialized professional periodical for “international architecture, design and lifestyle” (*Häuser*). It is a German magazine and is part of the *Schöner Wohnen* group. It is a bi-monthly magazine, dedicated exclusively to houses.

It has world coverage and about 30% of the houses are in Germany. Thus, it will compensate for the lack of German houses in the previous magazine.

I planned to review a period of exactly 10 years starting from 2018 but I was not able to secure issues from 2016 to 2013. That is why I extended the period with three years back till 2005, because I had a lot of issues from that period. I am convinced this subtle shift will not affect the result of the survey.

The books are selected from renowned professional publishers. All of them are on the theme of houses. They were printed from 2010 to 1999, spanning a period of 11 years.



## Books



**Image 6.** Publications – Books © Kliment Ivanov

In this paper, I review only houses that are designed by architects and possess sufficient architectural qualities to be published in a professional magazine or album. These “hi-end” houses bridge the boundary between architecture and art. Alas, there are many other examples, which do not belong to this category, as “over 80 per cent of all private houses in Germany are built without the participation of an architect. The figure is probably similar in most other European countries.”. (Schittich, 2005, p. 9). I am certain that in my country, Bulgaria, the percentage is also similar or even larger. Such buildings should not be regarded as architectural designs but as mere construction, utilitarian or survival projects.

## 1. Construction and Design Manual: Single-Family Houses

The book by Hans Hoffmann and Werner Huthmacher was published in 2010 by *DOM Publishers*. It is intended as a manual for design and construction, as its title states, under the motto “Freedom to stay”. It includes a dedicated selection of “villas and residences as prototypes of single-family houses” (Hoffmann & Huthmacher, 2010: 8), arranged according to the type of their construction.

**Table 5.** Construction and Design Manual: Single-Family Houses

houses	multilevel living room space	%	coun- tries	countries
21	11	52%	4	Germany, Ireland, United Kingdom, USA

### • Modern House Three

The book by Raul Barreneche was published in 2005 by *Phaidon Press*. It reflects and documents the contemporary notion of the Modern house. The houses featured in the book “deal with innovation in all its forms ... they integrate architecture and landscape, negotiate difficult urban sites, and explore with new materials and energy-saving technologies” (Barreneche, 2005: 7).

**Table 6.** Modern House Three

houses	multilevel living room space	%	coun- tries	countries
33	15	45%	16	Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Liechtenstein, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Spain, United Kingdom, USA

### • Houses Casas Häuser

The book by Alejandro Bahamon was published in 2005 by *Köneman*. It “offers unique insights into more than 40 unusual and quite different examples of residential architecture from around the world” (Bahamon, 2005:

back). It is an extensive study on the theme of the dwelling, divided into four categories: houses, attics, apartments and lofts. For the purpose of this paper, I have taken into account the houses only.

**Table 7.** Houses Casas Häuser

houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
13	10	77%	7	Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, USA

### • Single Family Houses (in DETAIL)

The book edited by Christian Schittich was published in 2005 by *Edition DETAIL* and *Birkhäuser*. As an edition of *DETAIL* magazine, some of the projects had been published in the magazine before but they had been fully revised and expanded. The book is “organized according to construction materials [and] each house is presented in detail from the foundation to the roof” (Schittich, 2005: back). It is a valuable source of knowledge for the architects both on preliminary design and technical documentation.

**Table 8.** Single Family Houses (in DETAIL)

houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
22	6	27%	10	Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, USA

### • Modern House 2

The book by Claire Melhuish was published in 2000 by *Phaidon Press*. It “comprises a survey of privately commissioned, architect-designed houses across the world, most of which have been featured in the pages of international magazines. Many of them have been designed ... by architects ... [with] transnational reputations” (Melhuish, 2000: 4). In my opinion, the book contains many of the houses that have become the architectural icons of our time.

**Table 9.** Modern House 2

houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
30	14	47%	17	Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA

### • Single-Family Housing: The Private Domain

The book by Jaime Salazar and Manuel Gausa was published in 1999 by *Birkhäuser* and *ACTAR*. It is an attempt to take “an alternative look at the issue of individual housing, understood as a privileged “laboratory” of new architectonic ideas and experiments” (Salazar & Gausa, 1999: 6). It contains an impressive amount of houses that are built and under construction, but also of unbuilt house prototypes and personal study projects.

**Table 10.** Single-Family Housing: The Private Domain

houses	multilevel living room space	%	countries	countries
64	23	36%	12	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, USA



## Outcome



**Image 7.** OHLAB - MM House, 2015, Palma, Spain © José Hevia  
*Source:* [www.archdaily.com](http://www.archdaily.com)

When I started the research for this paper I had a preliminary idea about the dissemination of the multilevel living room space in the contemporary architectural practice based on my broad and long-time observation on the professional press and periodicals. My initial expectation was that about 30% of the houses today did have such a space. The results show that the percentage of houses with multilevel living room space is higher than my initial forecast.

### **Häuser Magazine**

Number of houses reviewed: 61

Percentage of houses with multilevel living room space: 34%

### **Architectural Record Magazine**

Number of houses reviewed: 75

Percentage of houses with multilevel living room space: 37%

According to *Häuser* magazine, representative for the whole world and in particular of Europe, the percentage of the houses with multilevel living room space is 34%. Only in Germany, it drops to 29%. According to *Architectural Record* magazine, representative for the world and in particular of North America, the percentage is higher and is 37%. In USA, it reaches up to 49%.

I admit that these results came as a surprise to me. I have always thought USA had less houses with multilevel living room space than Germany. Obviously, these overall impressions can be misguided. This adds one more reason for carrying out the research.

## **Books**

Number of houses reviewed: 183

Percentage of houses with multilevel living room space: 47%

According to the professional books, the percentage of houses with multilevel living room space is higher than according to the magazines – 47%. I recon one of the reasons is the more uniform world coverage in the books. With the magazines the attention is more focused on the country of origin of the publication (correspondingly on the continent) because they rely to a large extent on the local audience. The books, on the contrary, are published by international corporations, and they rely more on the international audience. Another reason is the difference in the process of selection of the examples for publication. The ones in the magazines are selected by much more people than these in the books. With the magazines, there is a large editorial body, while with the books there are only the authors – usually one, two or three people. Thus, the magazines present a more general view on the topic, whereas the books reflect the personal preferences of the authors, who are usually trained as architects and are naturally in favor of the high-quality architecture.

The paper is not intended to provide a statistical investigation of the subject. Its purpose is to present an assessment of the current situation and inform the general public and the architectural community. I expect that it will serve as a basis for continued scientific research of the multilevel living room space. I also hope that it will contribute to a more frequent future implementation of it in the design practice and the actual construction.

The living room space on several levels in the houses is the epitome of the “cool space” in our dwellings. It may sound like a slang expression and probably not very scientific, but it is true! Regardless whether we talk about

an imposing posh mansion or a humble two-bedroom house, this type of space is impressive and leaves long-lasting memories in those who visit it.

## Acknowledgements

- All citations are in the original spelling.
- All translations are the author's, unless otherwise stated.
- All images are processed via editing and post-production software by the author for the purpose of this paper.
- An early version of this paper in the form of a conference report, named "Contemporary Multistorey Living Room Space", was presented at the bi-lingual International Conference "Villes en Transformation: Défis, (Pre)visions, Perspectives / Changing Cities: Challenges, Predictions, Perspectives" at the New Bulgarian University (NBU), Sofia, Bulgaria, on 18-20<sup>th</sup> October 2018.
- Additional images of houses with multilevel living room space have been presented in the conference report:

Bates Masi + Architects – Underhill House, Matinecock, 2015, USA  
© Michael Moran / source: [www.archdaily.com](http://www.archdaily.com)

Studio Gang – Brick Weave House, 2009, Chicago, USA © Steve Hall  
/ source: [www.architecturalrecord.com](http://www.architecturalrecord.com)

Jakob + MacFarlane Architects – The Connected House, 2016,  
Boulogne-Billancourt, France © Roland Halbe / source: [www.jakob-macfarlane.com](http://www.jakob-macfarlane.com)

Scadaval & Solà-Morales – Sunflower House, 2014, Port de la Selva,  
Girona, Spain © SandraPereznieto / source: [www.ca-so.com](http://www.ca-so.com)

Andrés Stebelski Arquitecto – House with Four Courtyards, 2013,  
Mexico City, Mexico © Onnis Luque / source: [www.archdaily.com](http://www.archdaily.com)

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson – Lightbox, 2015, Point Roberts, United  
States © Nic Lehoux / source: [www.archdaily.com](http://www.archdaily.com)

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