



**HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION**  
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

# **Home Renaissance Foundation**

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The Home of the Future

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## **The Home of the Future** by Charles Handy<sup>1</sup>

My basic thesis is very simple: work has always been the main thing that shaped our lives over time and economics and technology are the main things that shape work. I have been writing for many years now trying to guess what those changes will be as work changes and technology changes work. It seems to me that at the moment everything is coming together. Economics has been going through some dramatic changes, as you may have noticed, and technology has been equally dramatic in its changes, which I think changes work. So work will, in due course, if not already, change the home. I will discuss this and what it means to the family further on. In a sense it is all very obvious, but when we are in the middle of things that are very obvious, we do not always see them and so I would like to try to tease them out for you.

If you think about it, in the agricultural age all work was within reach of the home. I grew up in the rural part of Ireland, in the days when there was a world war on, which we called 'the emergency' because we were neutral. We were very agricultural and everybody I knew went home for lunch. Just think about that: the family was there every day, having lunch together – except for when I was away at school, which was rather more often than I wanted. Then, of course, even Ireland came into the industrial age. When that happened, work moved from the home to the cities or to the factories and the assumption was then that you had to have all the employees in the same place and at the same time in order to get work done. People had to leave the home to go to the place of work. Then of course offices replaced factories, but we still ran offices as if they were factories. The mindset was still the same.

I was one of those people. I left home at seven o'clock, before the children were awake, and I came back about eight o'clock, when the children were nicely tucked up in bed. I kissed their brows and sat down with my wife. It was very nice for me, but not so nice for her. Naturally, this had consequences. I remember how our daughter, when she was about 19 or 20 said one day – I hope she was teasing – 'Dad, until I was 12 I thought you were the man who came for lunch on Sundays.' She may have been teasing me, but she also might have had something of the truth there. Another time, when our son was seven, he was told to write a little essay entitled, 'What Does my Dad Do?' When I asked him what he had written in his essay, he answered, 'I said you were a painter!' I was rather pleased at that and continued the conversation by asking what sort of things I painted. He looked at me in a puzzled way and said, 'walls.' All he had ever seen me do was paint the walls of the house! It did explain why the headmaster of the school treated me with some disdain. I told him once that I was off to run a study centre in Windsor Castle, and he said, 'I thought you were a decorator!' So you see, I was largely absent from my family's home in all those days of the, as you might call it, industrial age.

Things are changing now. Twenty years ago I was writing about the possibility of telecommuters: people who would sit at home with their computers and would link in with the office. This idea did not take off as fast as I thought it would, we do not talk about telecommuting anymore, but we do talk about techno-Bedouins and nomads. The nomads or the techno-Bedouins,

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are the people who carry their workplace with them. It is not very bulky – it is called an iPhone or Blackberry. These days, if you want to carry your little laptop around, you will have a dongle that allows you to connect to the Internet whenever you please. The result is that if you are in the knowledge world – essentially, processing data, information, or images – as more than half of the working population are doing all the time, you can actually work anywhere. Of course, if we are managers (a term that I think will disappear very soon), we all still like to have people where you can see them because then you know that they are working. I was interviewed, not so long ago, in Arizona by a woman from the local newspaper. They were still working in a great big room, with all the journalists there, and I had to perch on the edge of her desk while I was being interviewed. The noise was deafening and it was dreadfully uncomfortable which seemed to me, a very inadequate place for a proper interview. I said to her, ‘couldn’t we have done this somewhere else? Couldn’t we have done it at home?’ She answered, ‘oh my goodness, I could do all my work at home and just send it in. It would be so much more productive without all this clutter going on and all these dreadful men all around me.’ I asked her why she did not and she pointed down to the end of the room where there was a great cubicle with two big glass windows and two very large sweaty men in their shirt sleeves inside. ‘Because,’ she said, ‘they won’t let me. They don’t trust me when I am out of their sight.’ I am afraid that is still true, but it is getting less true because economics and technology combine to change work.

More and more people now are living their lives in thirds. They spend one third of their time working in the office, one third working at home, and one third working in intermediate spaces, called third places. These third places could be Starbucks, an airport, a train or, as is increasingly the case, a specially designed hub or networking place which is either midway between the home and the office or even nearer to the home than the office. In all sincerity, who wants to sit or stand on a very crowded train, commuting into an office where you talk to your neighbour by e-mail or telephone, when you could do the same thing perfectly without being on the floor below. Therefore, you now have offices in which people only spend one third of their time. If people are spending a third of their 40 hour – 45 if they are overworked – week, then they are only spending about 15 hours a week in an incredibly expensive building in the middle of a city. What a waste! I was walking around in *The Economist* building in St James’ one day. It is a very classy building, or was once, but I was struck by the fact that most of the offices were empty. I expressed my surprise to the supervisor who was showing me around, assuming they had had to lay a lot of people off due to the recession. He told me that they still had the same number of people, but they are out, doing what they should be doing, namely, gathering information to put in a newspaper which is published on Thursday. What is more, nobody comes in on Friday anyway, because the paper’s gone to print. I replied, ‘what an extraordinary waste of space!’ which made him look at me as if I was mad, because, obviously everybody has to have a little home away from home. Indeed, if you looked into the offices, they were all personalised with photographs here and there. What an extraordinarily expensive way of catering to people’s egos and little vanities.

It is clear, then, that offices are changing, and to my mind, will change much more radically. I foresee offices becoming, in a way, like clubs. Think about a club: you cannot get in unless you are a member or a guest of a member. In other words, you need to have a pass to get in. Once you are in, however, the space is allocated to functions, not to people, with very few exceptions. The house manager and, maybe, the accountant will have their own space, but everywhere else is for eating,

for meeting, for playing, for reading, for studying and there might even be one or two little secluded places that can be booked for personal use for a day or half a day. This kind of commonality of space is much better than the personal, private spaces which, when you think about it, are incredibly expensive. With the new technologies available, it is now possible to tell employees that they are going to spend a third of their time in the office, because they need to meet people for social reasons and for business purposes. This might happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the rest of the time you will be trusted to be beavering away. Whether you beaver away in the middle of the night, in the afternoon or whether you are half fossil during the day and on your best form at two in the morning, is up to you, as long you deliver the work on time. Personally, I do reports and pieces of writing for various people and they have not got the impertinence to ask me when I do it, where I do it or how I do it as long as it is delivered to them down the line on the due date. I am convinced that this shift will take place and although some people will not want to work like that, I promise you, they will have to do it.

Why am I saying all this? It is mainly because I think this is going to have a major impact on the family. Families, though, are also changing. It is fairly obvious to you all, but it is changing rather dramatically.

It seems to me that we need to re-connect our families if we want to make the most use of it now that people are going to spend at least one third of their time at home. This is something we need to think about when we are doing urban planning. Sadly, the world seems to be moving the other way. It is occasionally encouraged, I am afraid, by the architectural profession, who are making ever smaller units because that appears to be what the market wants. Still, one needs to know what the market should want as well as what it does want. One of the interesting things one discovers in business is that marketing is not about finding out what people want but what they will want in about five years time and meeting the demand ahead of the time when it appears. In other words, you create your own demand. Who would have ever thought that you wanted to carry a little thing around that plays your favourite records? When the Sony Walkman was created everybody thought they were absolutely mad and then, of course, came the iPod and now everybody is walking around with little things in their ears. Nobody ever said that they wanted that. You had to anticipate what they might want, and these days we will have to think ahead as to what we might want. To my mind we want two things: separateness and togetherness. We have all kinds of new families springing up. There are couples now who live together but apart. We have some friends who are married and have two homes. She has the big home and he has the small home. They do not meet during the week but on Thursdays he comes to live with her, and goes back to his own house on Monday morning. They both live separate lives during the week and they are together on weekends. There is a whole category of people called 'living together apart' which you might think is rather extravagant, but I think there might be something in it. In a way I think that is what families want to do.

We can connect with our families in all sorts of ways in this modern world. I heard a lovely story the other day when we were over in Ireland at another conference about the future of the family. There was a man there whose son and his American wife live in Southern California. This man was in Kerry, where he lives, and he was ringing his daughter-in-law of Southern California. Actually, he was not ringing her, he was Skyping her, and they were both using their cameras. At one point she said to him, 'Oh, the doorbell's rung, I have to go downstairs to answer it. Could you keep an eye

on Little Billy here, [who is four years old] and if you see him get up to something naughty ring my mobile and I will dash back up and deal with it.' So this man was baby-sitting through Skype across continents. This is 'separate but together' in a way.

On the other hand, as you all know, technology works best when it is complemented by a little physical proximity. Videoconferencing is wonderful, but only if you actually meet the people beforehand or afterwards. I find it very interesting when I talk with big corporations and, yes, they do all this technology stuff, but they also spend an enormous amount of money having what look like ridiculously unnecessary conference strategies and so on American golf courses. It is really not about the strategy, it is about seeing whether this person you are e-mailing really is male and not female and not a goat, and that you can actually relate to him when you see him around a table in a videoconference. You need the technology, but you also need to have high touch as well as high-tech. I think the same goes for families. They are going to be spread all around the world, and, of course, we will communicate with them, but we do need high touch if we are going to stay together. The family home, then, starts to need all this sort of stuff.

Stimulated by the Home Renaissance Foundation, we thought that we should investigate how typical families are living today to see whether they are living in these wonderful architectural spaces or not.

My contention is that the most important schoolroom in your life is the home. You learn useful things at school – you learn bits of knowledge and one or two skills – but you learn the important things in the home, from the family. You learn consideration towards others in a way that binds and links autonomy with responsibility, and care with consideration for others. You also learn about self-discipline in the family much more than you do in school. You learn about responsibility. You learn about what risks there are: do you cross the road? Do you jump from high heights? Do you climb ladders without somebody there? You learn these things, not at school but in the family. Regardless of how many lessons you may get about the stock market and so on at school, I am afraid that where you really learn about money is in the family. You learn the truth about spending and saving money in the family. You learn about deferred gratification and about the merits of saving: if you invest in something, spend time on it or learn something now, it will repay you later. We automatically assume that everybody understands when they are children that learning mathematics will be useful in 25 years time. Most of us did not have this understanding when we went to school, but the family can teach you a bit about deferred gratification, though they probably will not call it that if they are wise. These things you learn in the family. You learn about love in the family, both giving and receiving it. You do not learn it at school. You do not learn it in an organisation when you start working there, but in the family, and it is the most incredibly important thing you can learn. You learn here about caring for others and how people look after each other, as you can see in this picture where they are all helping each other in their different ways. There is this togetherness that all families have – they may be as separate as they like, but they share some things.

I think homes will increasingly have to take into account that the possibility of older generations living alongside the younger generations, because it can be very expensive and, perhaps, undesirable to shove them into their specially secluded kennels, usually called 'Old Folks Homes'. I do not actually think it is right and proper, but we have to make proper provision for them

to be there. My wife, for instance, is very insistent that our architects make the doorways wide enough for my wheelchair to go through, when the time comes. It is very important, actually – otherwise I will be pushed out! In one research project on the third age that I was engaged with, the medical panel said the main thing is that you should be able to go to the toilet without assistance because when you need assistance to go to the toilet you will need to go into a home. Have you designed your bathrooms so that you do not require assistance when you are older? It is very important, actually, because I am sure that the three generation home is going to be increasingly necessary. Unfortunately, this change will be driven by economics rather than by morality.

Family is beginning to be redefined as not just the nuclear blood family or even the halves and the steps, but also the very close friendships that build around families. Nuclear families are very dangerous places, really, because there is nobody to share the responsibilities with and so on. Homes have had to start making provision for that and they are opening up the local neighbourhood which is very necessary.

I wish somebody had told me when we started having children that we were the most important teachers in their lives. We treated them as a rather necessary nuisance and we got on with our own lives. It was only later we realised that in spite of all the things we told them, what they learned from us was what we did, how we behaved, how we treated each other, whether or not we shouted at each other and how we kissed before we went to bed or whatever. It is no accident that for all the time the children have known us, Elizabeth and I have worked from home on our own things. Now both our children have married somebody who shares their enthusiasms and both of them work from home. Our son has never seen or met anybody who works in an office. I remember when he was 15, we were walking through the city with him and, pointing at all the skyscrapers, he asked, 'what happens in there?' I told him it was office-space where people went to work. He said, 'You mean that people actually go in there and sit behind those glass windows all day and then go home in the evening?' I said yes and told him that I used to do it once too. He answered, 'Good heavens! Well, thank goodness you grew up, Dad.' They had never met these sorts of people. They had only met us, so that they learned from us, for good or for ill. Of course the trouble is that many families are not good schools and the parents are not good teachers. Most of them are, though. In fact, I think most families do their best. I rather hope that through the work of the Foundation and so on we can share more messages of what a good family is and what a good home is so that more people realise, earlier than we did, what our responsibilities are and how the way we live is actually going to put big messages in the hearts and minds of our children.

While our children were growing up we had the biggest apartment in the building, but later we swapped with our daughter. We have had the kitchen in seven different places over the 35 years that we lived in that apartment. As the family changed in shape and size we changed the kitchen from one room to the other. We ended up building our own kitchen to make it the family room because we reckoned that the kitchen should be the hub of the home.

We are very lucky because various Americans started buying my books, so later on we were able to design the place we had in the country, which originally were two little labourer's cottages, and escape from the hubbub of London. We were able to design a home that would exemplify what we regarded as the ultimate of separateness with togetherness. We turned the labourer's cottages

into four bedrooms, we built on a living space about 12 meters squared, roughly, with a kitchen, a dining area and a sitting area with a fire. It is a wonderful convivial place with a wooden ceiling— as I said, we are very fortunate. There is a door you go through and into a sort of the waiting area or conservatory area which is a foyer to the individual workspaces of Elizabeth and myself.

While I acknowledge that we are very lucky and very privileged, the point I am trying to make is that we decided that we were not going to be dictated to by the shape of our house. We would make the house work for us. We would make our home be the kind of home that suited our combination of separateness and togetherness; of work and caring and play. Before we had money we played around with the kitchen and when Americans bought my books we were able to add on. What I am saying is that we really need to take more responsibility as clients – not just as architects – and as ordinary people to make the home work for us and for the family. We should make it include separate spaces, so that we can be separate, and together spaces so that we can be together. Of course, if the togetherness also includes some of the surrounding community, so much the better.