Crime writer Erin Kelly on writing thrillers in the living room while the kids watch TV

Bestselling crime fiction writer Erin Kelly explains how she makes her living room work for the whole family

Catherine Hufton
26 July 2019 • 9:00am

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A place for everything: crime writer Erin Kelly makes the family living room work hard | CREDIT: Ben Anders

London-based author Erin Kelly is a force to be reckoned with. Her first novel The Poison Tree became a major ITV drama and best-seller, while her subsequent critically acclaimed novels – including The Sick Rose and The Ties That Bind – have been translated into 25 different languages.

Today she lives in North West London with her husband and two daughters – the place where most of her writing takes place including her latest psychological thriller Stone Mothers.

"I live in a 1930s semi with pebble dash and it's one of those houses that looks nothing like it does on the inside as it does on the outside. There's lots of bare wood, white wash walls, original prints and loads and loads of plants. It's a bit of a North London cliché really – three bedrooms and a loft conversion".

Easy does it: a comfortable sofa and a well-placed table lamp makes this a versatile space | CREDIT: Ben Anders

Flexible living

North London cliché or not, it's a flexible space that works brilliantly for the whole family; whether she's writing and researching a new chapter while the kids watch a film, cooking in the kitchen or enjoying a good book in the solitude of her bedroom. Surprisingly Ms Kelly doesn't usually write in an office, favouring the main living area of the house.

"I still have a dedicated study with a desktop PC but I can shut it down and go into the living room and work there, on a linked laptop," she says. "We only moved into our new house a couple of years ago so our living room has very minimal furniture in it, which is lovely. There's no clutter, lots of plants, a sofa and a TV".

This free way of working and writing is something Ms Kelly has always liked. "I've never worked in an office and don't understand how people can do that when you can't even make a cup of tea without a group of people wanting to join in," she says when asked how she manages to maintain focus.

"Compared to the distractions of an office, two children and a husband seems like nothing. I do also wear ear plugs. The other day my children were watching the film Sing at deafening volume in the living room, and I was able to carry on working on a section of my book while I sat with them".

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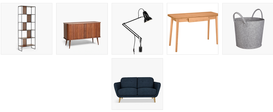

Time for work, time for play

But how does she manage to separate home life from work and make that all-important switch at the end of a busy day? "I find cooking helps me transition from work to relaxation mode. Otherwise I find it hard when the children come home and I haven't had time to wind down. I might be holding a really complicated plot in my head and crime fiction isn't something I really want to talk to them about".

A side table with a plant on top by John Lewis & Partners

Recharge: a muted palette accessories with plants will help create a relaxing vibe in the living room | CREDIT: Ben Anders

Erin also utilises her time wisely, opting to rise early to make the most of the peace and quiet in her home. "I can't work in the evening, so I get up early in the morning and do two hours before everyone else gets up. That's probably when I do my best writing. Not only is there no distraction from anyone in my house but there's no digital distraction either".

She also ensures that she keeps work strictly out of the bedroom. "My favourite part of my house is my bedroom that sits right at the top of the house, and I deliberately never bring work into it," she confesses. "Work bleeds into every other room in the house – the living room, the kitchen and the study – so that's sacred. The kids don't come in it very often either, so that's somewhere I keep purely for relaxing".

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