



GREEN LIVING From left, Toby, Ian, Fleur, Jenny, Joyce, Jeremy, Jamie and Justin at Ballyvolane House

# ALL TOGETHER NOW

THERE'S A LOT TO BE SAID FOR LIVING WITH YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY. **FLEUR BRITTEN** VISITS A HOUSEHOLD WHERE OLD AND YOUNG HAPPILY MUCK IN

PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES FENNELL

If your parents become too frail to care for themselves, what will you do? Is such a thought conveniently buried in the sand? Perhaps it's because the options — a care home (morbidly depressing), home nursing (prohibitively expensive) or you as the carer (bye-bye, life) — are easiest left in the sand. But there is another option: the multigenerational household, or a return to the fabled extended family, where the caring is shared.

Justin Green, 41, lives with eight other family members, with some 97 years' age gap between them. There is his wife, Jenny, 36, their three children, Toby, 9, Jamie, 6, and Fleur, 3. There is his father, Jeremy, 76, his grandmother, Joyce, 100, and his mother's parents, Ian, 90, and Wendy, 91. At Christmas, it's dinner for 20, when Justin and Jenny's brothers and broods descend. Running a country hotel, Ballyvolane House, near Cork, which Green inherited from Jeremy while the hand was still warm, so to speak, there's room for all. Joyce has her own apartment — while she's incredibly healthy, she's growing forgetful and is "like a fourth child", Jenny says. She needs a lot of minding as she might forget to put another log on the fire or feed herself (Jenny gives her a hot meal daily). Meanwhile, Wendy and Ian live in their own house on the estate.

Green, whose previous job was running Babington House, Nick Jones's private members' club and hotel in Somerset, returned to the

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## COHOUSING, THE EASY WAY TO LIVE IN A COMMUNE

Imagine if you could choose your neighbours. Imagine splitting the swimming pool costs with them, or if they'd baby-sit your kids, or share the gardening and harvest with you; if they cooked you the odd meal. Previously, the only route to this was to live in a commune.

Now, with climate change, pinched purses and a renewed hunger for community, a new utopia hovers on the horizon: cohousing, or the cul-de-sac commune. From the safety of your own home, cars, gardening equipment, pools and so on are shared, as are chores, skills and the occasional meal. The idea originates from Denmark, where, in 1964, the architect Jan Gudmand-Hoyer dreamt up "a more supportive living environment": 12 terraced houses with a common house and pool. The model has travelled throughout Europe (there are eight cohousing communities in Britain) and America (where there are some 120).

"People find us by Googling 'community'," says Sarah Berger of the UK Cohousing Network. "People want to invent a family or network. They're increasingly aware of living longer and that living alone is not good for you." The key difference this time around is your own front door and a degree of autonomy. "They want privacy," Berger acknowledges, "but they want safety; they want their children to grow up with other children; they want an end to mindless materialism; they want to be more meaningfully connected."

And unlike communes, they are not populated by sweaty anarchists, but "creative people, those in the arts, in education, people with mainstream jobs", according to Berger. "You don't have to sign up to a credo or a philosophy," she adds, "but you do need a basic shared vision of living more sustainably." That means being willing to share and care.

An example is Springhill, near Stroud, Gloucestershire, established in 2003. It has 35 homes, from one-bed flats to five-bed houses, for some 82 occupants, aged from 0 to 73. People buy or rent the leasehold homes (one four-bedder recently sold for £399,000), and bills are separate. There is a car-share, ping pong, a laundry, a film projector, as well as solar heating, rainwater collection, triple-glazing, and so on. "The community is very stable," says one resident, Natalie. "It's like old-fashioned village life, in a more structured sense."

[cohousing.org.uk](http://cohousing.org.uk)

fold after his mother died. "The main reason was to ensure the older generation was happy," he explains. And, he adds, it's wonderful for the children to see the whole process. "I think it's very important to see the older generation respected." What's more, the children get to reap all those years of wisdom, as well as training in old-fashioned manners and, no doubt, some toffee-pushing to boot. "The children learn a lot from them, and the grandparents get a huge kick from being able to provide that," Green says.

Yet supporting the older generations is not easy: they may have the rambling property, but, financially, "everything is against us", Green says. They've also sacrificed their own personal space. Green could, he says, return to Jones's empire and "shut the door, but it's not about the bottom line — I feel I have a responsibility to do this".

Of course, life at the Greens has its "moments" — but, despite it all, they say that the rewards more than compensate. "It's very satisfying to see everyone being looked after," Green says. "We're all great friends — it's a social life to us. I hope the kids will do the same for us." Would you? ●

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