

OXFORD AUSTRALIA
**WORD
OF THE
MONTH**

December 2011

Parents' Retreat

– noun: A part of a house where parents can have privacy from other family members

Forthcoming edition of the Australian National Dictionary

The story behind the Word of the Month

In 2010 the Daily Telegraph reported on a real estate trend that involves the creation of a private space within a house for the use of parents:

Main suite bedrooms are no longer just a place to drop into bed after a long day, they can now offer a space to escape to and unwind. There was a time when an ensuite off the main bedroom was considered a luxury, even a bit of a novelty, but these days it is almost mandatory. This is all part of a growing trend that sees the main suite, or **parents' retreat**, becoming increasingly opulent. Besides the ensuite, main bedrooms today are just as likely to include a walk-in-robe, a sitting area, flat-screen television and a balcony or courtyard. Interior designer Glenda Barnes has noticed **parents' retreats** becoming more popular and encourages her clients to incorporate them. ... To create privacy it is essential that the retreat is kept separate from the rest of the house and that there are delineated spaces within the area. It also helps to have the main bedroom located in an area of the house that is away from the other bedrooms. 'I try to encourage an entire zone, so the entrance door actually closes off the retreat', Glenda says.

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Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary
5th Edition



The compound **parents' retreat** is occasionally heard in the real estate jargon of other countries, but most of the evidence is Australian.

An early example of the compound appears in the Australian Women's Weekly in 1957. In an article that is jocular in tone, the writer refers to a home advertised in Sydney with '**a built-in husband's retreat**', a term for what was once called a 'den' or 'study'. The writer continues: 'Every evening my wife and I shut the children out of the kitchen and have a game of Scrabble. That turns the kitchen into a temporary built-in **parents' retreat**, and I must say it's good.' By 1972, the **parents' retreat** is not just a temporary place of temporary escape, but has become firmly associated with the master bedroom: 'A special luxury in one of the two houses is a **parents' retreat**' (Sydney Morning Herald). For some time, the **parents' retreat** seems to have been made up primarily of bedroom and ensuite, but by the 1980s it could be much more elaborate, as delineated in the 2010 quotation above.

This sense of **parents' retreat** needs to be marked Australian in our dictionaries.