

The Shift Toward Family-Centric Condos

Amidst an ongoing pandemic and a booming residential market, designers reveal what buyers are looking for.

NOV01 2021

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The global health crisis has impacted all the facets of how people live, work and play, challenging well-grounded boundaries and rearranging households.

Since the spring of 2020, social dynamics have been altered—on both micro and macro scales. New regulations forced home-bound parents and children to spend more time together, while older family members were either safely distanced or invited to live closer to children and grandchildren.



The pandemic has altered buyer preferences, generating high demand for larger residential options with plenty of space for family members' diverse needs.

"Since COVID-19's onset, demand has been crazy high and the supply low, resulting in bidding wars," Rocky Berg, principal at Dallas-based firm three: living architecture revealed to *Multi-Housing News*.

While the initial trend was to move away from urban cores toward [single-family-style living arrangements](#), as people return to work, families are on the lookout for a good condo deal in more dense areas. What are these buyers looking for?

LIVING UNDER ONE ROOF

In the past year, many families have spent a lot of time together, under the same roof, so they've started to recognize the importance of smart space planning, flexibility and adaptability, according to Matt Duggan, project manager at The Architectural Team.

Units that have more social and activity spaces, such as media rooms, children's rooms or studies, have been in high demand lately. Also, so-called "flex spaces" are particularly popular, according to Nancy Ruddy, founding principal & executive director of interior design at CetraRuddy Architects. These small rooms, located adjacent to the main living space, can be used as a work area, exercise room or infant room, among others, depending on family-specific parameters.

With hybrid working and learning situations still common, acoustical privacy has also gained increased attention, according to Ruddy. The use of acoustical materials on the floor and walls can help isolate the room so that higher levels of intellectual concentration can be achieved for those inside.



Additionally, families also search for units with bigger kitchens and more storage space. Families tend to cook more, so there is need for more pantry space, too, larger refrigerators and a multitude of appliances.

“With dining islands, banquettes and eat-in capabilities, the kitchen can become an alternative work, homework or socialization space,” Ruddy said.

Another aspect that is important to families is location. According to Berg, families look for properties that are in proximity of schools, shopping, dining, cultural and religious sites, as well as parks and other wellness-related opportunities such as exercise and sporting venues.

SHARED AMENITIES

The common-area amenities provided within a family-oriented property are in some ways different from those offered by a usual condominium building. In addition to the traditional fitness/wellness spaces, pet spas and [music practice rooms](#), family

buildings provide children’s playrooms, “tween” rooms—for older children 13- to 16-year-old—and mini sports courts. Generally, outdoor spaces include more leisure areas and an active play area for children to climb and explore.



Indoor/outdoor playroom at Dahlia. Image courtesy of DDReps Photography

According to Berg, shared amenities should offer a balance of private and communal spaces. “Think clubhouses with gaming and outdoor venues for activities and gatherings, organized around water features or a pool,” he said.

And if prior to the onset of the global health crisis shared amenities were usually concentrated on a single floor, the new social distancing recommendations have prompted designers to create a series of smaller, interconnected spaces that can accommodate smaller groups, Ruddy noted.

FOCUS ON HEALTH, WELLBEING

Health and wellness have taken center stage of everyday life and in the post-pandemic chapter of home-building, a rising number of residences are designed with extra focus on resident wellbeing.

Private outdoor spaces not only serve as an expansion of the living space, but they also provide better interior illumination and ventilation, Ruddy notes. In dense urban areas such as New York City, zoning regulations call for setbacks in tall buildings, allowing natural light to reach the streets. These setbacks can be used as private or shared terraces.



For The Archer Residences—an adaptive-reuse project in the historic Beacon Hill district of Boston—The Architectural Team created a top-floor addition setback from the lower roof parapet. The approach not only limits the addition’s visibility from the street, but it also creates space for roof gardens.

As individuals are more focused on personal and global health, environmental systems within buildings are becoming more sophisticated. Greater air and water filtration, larger windows, more efficient ventilation, independently controlled heating and cooling systems are some of the elements that are becoming increasingly attractive.

“We believe that sensitively designed buildings can promote health and wellbeing,” Ruddy commented.

BUILDINGS OF THE FUTURE

There is no doubt that the ongoing health crisis will leave its mark on where and how people will choose to live. Berg believes that an increasing number of families will be choosing vertical living options within urban areas due to their central location.

“As they graduate to ownership, condos are often an affordable option in those same neighborhoods,” he added.



The challenges created by COVID-19 have sent many people toward appreciating the basics—nature, neighborhoods, homes and families—Duggan noted.

“Connection to the outdoors through large windows and outdoor spaces will be high on families’ wish lists, and having flexible spaces within the home to both have a quiet moment with yourself and to gather with friends and family will be a must,” he said.

Ruddy agrees that creating connections to nature and engaging amenity spaces for both children and adults—in both individual residences and in public spaces—will be among the elements that will define the [**buildings of the future**](#).