

HOME FURNISHINGS

## Homeowners seeking luxury amenities that bring enjoyment

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More luxury homes are starting to incorporate solar energy. Image credit: Christie's International

By ELLEN KELLEHER

NEW YORK Affluents are seeking more cutting-edge amenities in luxury buildings and homes as they invest in home furnishings while marooned at home during the global pandemic.

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Speaking at the State of Luxury Real Estate eConference on Jan. 14, interior decorators and luxury specialists elaborated on the ways in which their clients are pouring money into their living spaces. Interest in upscale interior design has grown after months of confinement and the rise of remote working.

"People are more willing to spend more money on their homes," said Susan Brunstrum, founder/principal at **Studio Brunstrum**, Chicago. "The idea of how we live in our homes has really shifted."

*State of Luxury Real Estate was produced by Luxury Daily in association with Luxury Portfolio International*

Hyper-personalization meets minimalism

Faring best amid the pandemic are the wealthy, as many have capitalized on the strength of real estate prices and low mortgage rates to sell more expensive homes and replace them with spacious, cheaper properties.

Among high-net-worth individuals, owning vacation homes near airports where private planes can land is a more popular choice than renting since affluents want "everything at their fingertips."

"I have a client with 12 different properties and he wants to have immediate enjoyment," said Corinne Brown, principal designer, **Brown Design Group**, Los Angeles. "The greatest luxury is time and these people have figured out how to use it to enhance the enjoyment of their life."

According to panelists, other must-haves are Teslas, yachts, cars to store at private air landings and other adult toys, plus large garages and mud rooms for storage.

"Everything is designed to make it easier to use their properties," Ms. Brown said.



*Private air is becoming increasingly popular. Image credit: Michael Kors*

Properties are being increasingly tailored to the needs of individuals.

Consultants are being recruited to ensure spaces meet different requirements. For instance, chefs check that kitchens have the proper appliances and personal trainers may help organize home gyms.

In the past year, homes have become our castles and our prisons, Ms. Brunstrum explained.

Ms. Brunstrum also noted four interior design trends.

The first is simplified living as people want privacy and minimalism to some extent. Hyper-personalized homes are also coming into vogue as more affluent are looking to curate their spaces with unique art and furnishings to express themselves emotionally.

Connected living is a must as Zoom and other technologies play an important role in making sure affluent work and socialize during lockdowns.

Lastly, Ms. Brunstrum notices more examples of healthy living and sustainability on the rise as people grow more socially aware. Clients are embracing more responsible lifestyles, participating in activities such as gardening in higher numbers.

"People are focusing more on the needs of people living in their homes and there's more of a focus on self care," Ms. Brunstrum said. "People also want to be better stewards by repurposing and reusing things."

Antiques are more in fashion too as recycling efforts gain acceptance and craftsmanship is more valued.

The division of homes into defined areas such as quiet and private spaces, work zones and educational and communal areas is also on the rise.

As the idea of wellness evolves and relaxation takes precedent, people who live in apartment buildings are becoming particularly vocal about amenities. More apartment residents are looking to buildings to provide quiet and private spaces, saunas, pools, rooftop gyms, steam rooms and year-round access to outdoor areas.



*Many affluent are ditching cities for more spacious suburbs. Image credit: Luxury Portfolio International*

"Amenity spaces themselves have to be really cutting edge and you cannot just tick the box anymore," said Maggie McDaris, vice president of wellness at [LulaFit](#), Chicago. "We're all coming out of a bit of a traumatic 2020."

Affluent also want to reside in buildings that rely on natural materials, such as using circadian lighting systems to

create warm and grounded environments. Virtual amenities platforms to set up swim bookings at the pool or exercise sessions are also becoming popular at luxury buildings.

Kristin Schloemer, owner of Chicago's [Calia Stone Boutique](#), added that demands are becoming more specific and more upscale but in a minimalist way.

In nine out of 10 homes when affluents want to change their kitchen countertops, they are looking for something that is unique rather than a commodity. No expense is being spared in many cases, with clients opting for marble and quartzite while tile work has fallen out of fashion, per Ms. Schloemer.

Home improvement game here to stay

A lasting consequence of the COVID-19 crisis is that affluents are now aficionados at the home improvement game and this means the current boom in home furnishings is set to continue in 2021.

Thanks partly to COVID-19, the market for online home decor, which reached \$98.4 billion in 2020, is likely to balloon to \$348.3 billion by 2027, according to forecasts released last year in the report "Online Home Decor: Global Market Trajectory & Analytics" ([see story](#)).

Video conferencing and webinars through Facebook Live, Instagram Stories, webinars, WhatsApp and Zoom are making people's living rooms their new offices and social hubs, and many people are hoping to spruce up their surroundings to impress the people on the other end ([see story](#)).

At day's end, industry experts agree that the pandemic is encouraging affluents to pay close attention to their so-called lifestyle return on investment. The focus is no longer on price points, but on the happiness factor that a particular renovation or amenity will provide.

"The discussion we're having is how much do people enjoy their home," Ms. Brunstrum said. "The focus is on their enjoyment and we're talking about our lifestyles differently."