

REAL ESTATE

At-home comfort becomes the ultimate luxury

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Image courtesy of Timothy Corrigan Inc.

By SARAH RAMIREZ

The meaning of home has fundamentally changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and affluent consumers' changing relationships with their residences will influence design trends for years to come.

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Architects and interior designers believe that the desire for comfort and security will drive luxury home trends such as multifunctional rooms, entertainment space, and warm colors and fixtures. Greater appreciation of sustainability and the outdoors will also be part of the luxury home of the future.

"The pandemic has really served as a kind of reset button for the way that we live," said Timothy Corrigan, interior designer and principal at **Timothy Corrigan Inc.**, Los Angeles.

"We're seeing actually the biggest home improvement resurgence in history," he said. "I think that people are going to see the importance of home and it's going to become even more important in the years to come."

Mind the gap

COVID-19 has fundamentally changed consumers' everyday lives, forcing them to spend unprecedented amounts of time at home. Between travel, work and entertainment, many affluent homeowners are not spending much downtime at home, according to Mr. Corrigan.

"I personally espouse to my clients that their homes should be their sanctuary, their special place where they could go and recharge," Mr. Corrigan said. "I don't think people really had as much opportunity to really appreciate and experience our homes the way they have in the last year-and-a-half."

Alessandra Branca, principal at Chicago- and Rome-based interior design firm **Branca**, agrees that her clients' mindset has shifted.

"The big thing that's changed is people are now engaging with their homes at a much higher level," Ms. Branca said.

After families spent the bulk of their work, school and social time at home, consumers have a newfound appreciation for privacy rejecting open floor plans that became ubiquitous in the 1990s and multi-use spaces.

"If you're a family, open living is complicated when you don't have a delineation of tasks and you have a difficulty in having privacy respected," Ms. Branca said.

Different home trends have also emerged based on demographics, according to Chuck Hilton, principal at [Charles Hilton Architect](#).

"Parents who are busy professionals really see their house as an investment in their family and quality of life, and for their kids who are equally active and busy these days," Mr. Hilton said.

Families' luxury home priorities include having space for studying and remote work, as well as room for socializing and sports practice for children's prospective collegiate athletic careers.

Meanwhile, empty nesters or retirees have a different approach to their homes.

This group tends to emphasize enjoyment, particularly as consumers live longer and continue to prioritize health, wellness and longevity.

Gyms, indoor pools or spaces to practice yoga or Pilates are popular among affluent empty nesters as well.

"They all want some kind of aspirational amenity or feature that they may not have had in a previous house," Mr. Hilton said. "Whether it's focused around entertaining, cooking and wine or a car collection, some kind of sports or an interest in hunting.

"There's providing facilities for guests both family and friends and entertaining whether it's at their primary house or a vacation destination where it's the primary focus," he said.

Second thoughts

For many affluents, second homes are also an opportunity for self-expression.

"Something that I've seen is that people are putting more of their hearts into their second residences," said Brittany Chevalier McIntyre, executive editor of design magazine [Luxe Interiors + Design](#), New York.

"While a primary home asks, how do I present myself to the world, that second home is all eyes off," she said.

"People want more of that they want comfort, they want beautiful casual spaces that speak of humility."

Ms. Chevalier McIntyre has also seen more emphasis on what she describes as "the workhorses of the house," such as mudrooms, destination kitchens and defined dining rooms.

Dining rooms, in particular, are seeing renewed interest as consumers spend more time at home and look forward to entertaining loved ones after holidays spent apart from one another.

"I really find all my clients are into multi-generational space," Ms. Branca said. "They want to bring everyone together."

Another way that homeowners are showing their personalities is through art, as the industry is booming, whether that is through hand-painted murals or mini galleries at their homes.

"[Consumers] are really reimagining their spaces and making them more refuges in their own way," Ms. Chevalier McIntyre said.

The desire for personalization is also influencing how homeowners rethink individual rooms.

"These are the ways that we can help you function best in your home and have your whole home function for you," Ms. Branca said. "And that's the home of the future, that's this home now."

For instance, Mr. Corrigan worked with clients who converted a living room into a wine cellar by lining it with refrigerated wine coolers so that they would get more use out of the space. Ms. Branca noted her clients have added large screens to their workout rooms to facilitate Zoom workouts.

Those who have been in a home for decades are also changing rooms that no longer suit them, as both trends and lifestyles have evolved.

"It's so important to really encourage clients to use their rooms fully, and use every room fully," Mr. Corrigan said.

Old is new

As architects and designers encourage their affluent clients to enjoy their homes from top to bottom, rather than purchasing larger properties that sit unused, the luxury home itself is being rethought.

"We in luxury are trying to live more honestly, with less pomp and circumstance," Ms. Chevalier McIntyre said. "That doesn't necessarily mean that we're downsizing our spaces or using cheaper materials or this or that, but I think that we are living with materials and items that really provide comfort rather than ego."

In terms of fixtures, one new trend is mixing materials such as stainless steel, brass, copper and bronze for looks that are cohesive without being uniform.

Cool colors, including gray, are fading in popularity as designers and homeowners embrace warmer tones and metals.

Overall, the value is in making homes last longer and being easier to live in and maintain. As Ms. Branca explains, homes are meant to be lived in and worn out.

"If the soul that is in that residence is uncomfortable with what it takes to maintain and live in that home, then it doesn't matter," Ms. Branca said. "That's where luxury is not luxury, it's a waste."

For furniture, supply chain issues exacerbated by COVID-19 have designers working with local craftspeople with shorter turnarounds.

Similarly, there has been an upsurge in vintage and antique furniture sales as well as transitional pieces that can be used in different spaces, in part from a sustainability standpoint.

"[In buying vintage] there is a sustainability aspect in that you're not taking new materials to make something new," *Luxe Interiors + Design's* Ms. Chevalier McIntyre said.

The importance of sustainability and connecting with nature is also driving one of the decade's biggest trends: outdoor spaces and outdoor living.

From terraces and verandas to gardens and outdoor kitchens, demand continues to grow for green spaces and more interaction between the indoors and outside.

These outdoor spaces are also reflective of homeowners' individual interests, from adding pizza ovens or vegetable gardens for those who love to cook, or landscaped areas for meditation and family sports.

Even as consumers return to offices, whether in hybrid models or full-time, COVID-19 has reinforced the idea of home as an investment in a healthy, productive life where consumers can relax and de-stress.

As a result, the demand for comfort will not fade away as society's new-normal emerges.

"I think that the biggest change is really this increased understanding of the importance of our homes, and the role that they play in allowing us to feel centered, feel safe," Mr. Corrigan said. "And our houses really can be a place that allows us to be our very best selves."

This article is based on a roundtable conversation hosted by Mickey Alam Khan, editor in chief of Luxury Daily and president of Luxury Portfolio International