

AD

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

These Are the 7 Requests Clients Will Make Post COVID-19



Appearing in *Vogue*, this home by architect Howard Backen, framed by gardens designed by Miranda Brooks, features a sitting room designed by Atelier AM and embodies the post COVID-19 request for indoor-outdoor space. Francois Halard

How the world will change post-COVID-19 remains to be seen. But one thing is for certain: The way we create live-work spaces will be drastically different than the way it was pre-pandemic. "Design is going to be much more personal and in some ways technical, as people use their homes for work, school, and beyond," says designer Christiane Lemieux. "Designers are going to have to be very conscious and thoughtful about how to make people's lives better in the spaces they have." What are the key features clients will ask for in their homes in the near future? AD PRO evaluates.

1. Reimagined layouts

Flexibility is key in space planning, as is designating areas based on specific function. “We can expect to see a shift back toward a more traditional floor plan style. Modern open-plan living is popular for many reasons, but during this period, we are realizing it can be a hindrance when our work lives merge into our living spaces,” says New York designer Daun Curry. “A surprising advantage of historic homes is that the spaces are clearly defined by separate rooms—allowing for a distinct demarcation between home and work life.”

2. Clearly defined spaces

Taking the concept of reconfiguring the home a step further, clearly delineating space is of utmost importance in terms of establishing efficient spaces in which we live, work, learn, and play within one residence. “Moving forward, there will definitely be a trend and acceptance towards more working from home. A thoughtfully designed home can foster increased productivity, balance, health, and pleasure,” says Max Strang, founder of Miami design firm Strang.

Mom’s home office can’t intermingle with Dad’s workout space—in the same area as the makeshift homeschooling spot that’s also the playroom, which is all smack in the middle of the living room. “How do you create a modern home, a modern floor plan for a modern family?” posits Jim Westover, partner-principal at William Duff Architects. “The open-plan concept probably doesn’t work so well if more than one person is working from home or if the kids are being noisy, so that concept may be refined with partitions to dedicate space for working/home office—or some hybrid where the communal spaces are open concept, but they are supplemented by adjacent spaces that can accommodate quiet, focused activities or work.”

Mobile partitions with acoustic properties could be a viable solution. While some movable walls and products to enhance acoustics are better suited for commercial settings, Unika Vaev and 3form are two companies that offer mobile floor screens, partitions, and acoustical panels that lend a residential aesthetic with colors and textures. Westover also advocates for bringing back the Murphy bed, which neatly stows away when not in use, as a flexible solution to equip a spare room that can double as a guest room and home office. California Closets offers modern, updated versions of the classic space-saver.

3. WFH functionalities

Home offices now must be fully functional with proper seating, work surfaces, lighting, acoustics, and temperature control. “Rather than working from the dining room or family room shared with kids, by differentiating spaces we can empower people to be just as productive from home as they [would be] in an office setting,” San Francisco architect Andrew Mann predicts.

Amy Smith, director of high-performance task seating at Herman Miller, whose brand’s ergonomic task seating sales went up considerably following the shutdown, says, “Ergonomics in all environments has never been more important. People previously could get away with having a subpar chair at their house when they only worked in that chair one day a week, but if they’re going to be working from home two, three, four days a week, they’re going to need to make sure both working environments, home and work, are fully equipped to support them.”

To accommodate home offices, some contract furniture manufacturers readjusted their business models to sell direct to consumers. Greg Hayes, CEO and cofounder of office furniture startup Branch, explains that while his company’s B2B business (which historically comprised 99% of sales) has come to a halt, they’ve found success by pivoting to selling direct-to-consumer. “The explosive consumer demand for office furniture, as people realize they need proper work-from-home equipment, has helped our business grow in an area that we didn’t plan on focusing on for another year or so,” he says, reporting that the number of individual transactions has skyrocketed—over 100% growth week-over-week.

Dedicated space for virtual meetings will also be paramount, and acoustics will become a higher priority. “A private communication room will be important moving forward...a space intended for anyone in the family to use for digital communications whether for social, business, or educational purposes,” says Strang, adding that the requirements of the space will include soundproofing and great lighting.

4. Working out at home

With gyms closed for months, people have resorted to at-home workout regimens. But where does exercise take place when a partner is on a conference call and the kids are on an all-class Zoom meeting? “Home gyms have become almost as important as the home office,” Westover says. “While a high percentage of home gyms may not have previously been used, they probably are now that wellness at home has become more of a focus.”

Take Peloton, whose bike sales have spiked. (The company’s Q1 revenue is up 66%, and it now has 2.6 million paying members.) That creates opportunity for designers. “Workout and home-gym opportunities

will be a big factor,” says Gretchen Krebs, principal designer at Medium Plenty, “so utilizing any outdoor space or available indoor nooks will be vital.”

5. Outdoor living options

Designing alfresco areas will take on renewed importance post-COVID-19. Clients will seek to carve out their own private outdoor space—balcony, patio, garden, or fully landscaped backyard—and many will look to design experts to create these fresh-air havens. Incorporating water, fire, light, and natural species are a few key elements, along with appropriate seating and in some cases a trellis or canopy. Clients will need to consider whether the space will be used passively, as an area to gaze out upon from inside; or more actively, as a space to sit and have coffee, work, do recreational activities, work out, and more.

6. Wellness and health integration

“As the global community at large has spent much more time at home these days, one thing has certainly come to mind: A home should be a sanctuary,” says Andrew Shead, marketing manager at luxury manufacturer True Residential. “Recent times have shined a light on the importance of fully decked-out master bedrooms, bathrooms, and guest rooms,” Shead explains. “In the guest room, a quarantined member of the household, or a guest in later times, can have their own dedicated fridge, contributing to a much more hygienic household overall, as well as creating a sense of comfort and privacy.”

Meditation areas and spa-style bathrooms with large soaking tubs, natural light, views to the outdoors, and integrated electronics will become essential. Kitchens will continue to, as well. “Kitchens and gathering spaces have always been priorities but will become especially significant moving forward in a post-COVID world,” predicts Mann. Beyond functioning as the hub of the home, kitchens regain importance as people are no longer eating out or ordering in, and cooking increases due to both necessity and enjoyment.

Hygiene products will also be trending: Antibacterial and antimicrobial surfaces, such as porcelain tiles, quartz, granite, solid-surfacing like Corian, or laminate countertops like Formica or Wilsonart, in kitchens and bathrooms; stainless steel for appliances; and copper and krion may become more common for countertops and bathroom finishes.

Touchless faucets are gaining popularity, with Moen, Kohler, and Delta offering highly rated automatic tap options. While touchless toilets are another way to promote cleanliness and reduce the transfer of germs. American Standard, Kohler, TOTO, and Duravit are among the manufacturers with top efficient touchless

models. Duravit also produces an innovative bidet, which is gaining traction at a moment when everyone is obsessed with sanitation and toilet paper is at a premium.

Other client requests may include setting up a sanitary station in the garage with disinfectant wipes, disposable gloves, mask storage, and a sink for hand-washing, and, at every entrance to the home, a decontamination zone. Mudrooms will convert from makeshift spaces to fully equipped transition spaces, and secure areas for contactless delivery of packages, groceries, and meals will become commonplace. Curry predicts “designers will incorporate this newfound focus on hygiene and ‘clean-ability’ in innovative and creative ways. Think an incredibly chic mudroom—guests and family members can disinfect outdoor gear in an environment designed to instill one with a feeling of beauty, health, and safety before transitioning into the home.”

7. Less becomes more

Many homeowners may have mastered the KonMari Method of decluttering their dwellings—or maybe they just had too much time on their hands and spring cleaning turned into a major purge. People have learned to live with less while on lockdown, and that can free up some space for post-COVID-19 living. “People will have a better sense of how they live in existing homes and what amenities and spaces they do or do not need,” Krebs says. “We think a major outcome will be people’s relationship to the things that populate their homes. Most houses have too much stuff, and sheltering in place has pushed people to purge unnecessary and unwanted things. We hope this encourages people to bring in fewer but better items when they do shop. Less is indeed more!”