

Our Future Homes & Offices

MAKE ROOM FOR POST-COVID-19 SPACES



BY DAVID M. BROWN

COVID-19 has transformed our lives and lifestyles, and the pandemic will also change our homes, our offices and how we think about our spaces. Those designing, building and buying commercial interiors are rethinking them for size, technology and healthfulness, and to create areas that encourage contact, socialization and huddling in smaller doses.

We're also rethinking our homes. If we work at our homes full-time or on a rotating schedule with office time, can we craft them to flex with our changing lives without losing the charm and warmth that makes home, home? How do we build and configure the post-COVID-19 house?

"Historically, as consumers accept and embrace change, it becomes normal, and temporary needs become permanent. The consumer is now used to working virtually from home, conducting meetings online, taking classes and going to school online, and even shopping for everything via live video or online meeting software and apps," says Todd Sumney, chief industry officer for Scottsdale-based HomeSmart International, whose HomeSmart is Arizona's leading brokerage.

"This isn't a fad," he adds. "Our needs, desires and even our culture have permanently changed."

THE RECONFIGURED OFFICE

At work, concepts such as size, space changes and technology are key.

Some companies are reducing their square footage or have stopped leasing commercial space completely because they have changed to a work-from-home operational structure, Sumney explains, adding that this may ultimately cause some properties to be rezoned to residential or adapted to a live/work hybrid.

Other companies want more square footage to provide social distancing between employees, he says.

Tim Thielke, AIA, LEED AP, workplace leader and principal for DLR Group from its Phoenix office, says that many clients are asking that their spaces be reconfigured



Above: A flexible workspace with multiple seating and working options in DLR Group's Denver Office. Photo by Ed LaCasse.
 Opposite: Indoor-outdoor space, A Finer Touch. Photo by Roehner + Ryan.

and their new offices designed considering post-COVID-19 needs. The employee-owned company, located in 29 offices nationwide, contracts architecture, engineering and interiors services.

“A lot of progressive companies are taking this time to look at permanent solutions rather than reduce space just because for the short term, they have had fewer employees at the office,” he explains.

For example, those large, often extravagant but infrequently used conference rooms may be replaced by larger individual workspaces that provide more space for focus work.

DLR Group calls these “hexicles” to distinguish them from the claustrophobic cubicles of the past. The six-sided spaces are larger with components such as sliding privacy windows which adjust to the occupant’s needs.

Thielke adds that smaller “on the fly” huddle spaces may become more popular; in this way, a few associates can discuss shared work in private rather than at large meeting tables.

Does this end the collaborative open-space model of the

early part of the century, built for millennials who want fewer work walls, who grew up with the free-flowing global connectedness of the internet and expect that in their office environment?

Not entirely, but the post-COVID-19 office space will consider this model with others. “Some of the spaces in the new office environments will evolve into something entirely different, based on developments in health, wellness and technology, as we trade out one kind of space for others,” says Thielke, noting that DLR Group has developed three “Resilient Office” concepts for post-COVID-19 spaces.

Many want to return to the office to collaborate and socialize and to remain connected to the company culture.

“Maybe they won’t go to the office every day but they will want to go for these benefits,” he says. “Collaboration and socialization are the biggest elements that people talk about missing.”

In addition, the post-COVID-19 office will incorporate technology and life-affirming “green” elements such as plant walls and other biophilia.



Home office space. Photo courtesy Candelaria Design Associates

Enhanced audio- and video-conferencing equipment will provide better virtual meetings with employees working at home or in other company locations, Thielke says. Other healthful components will include automatically sanitized workstations; zero-touch bathroom faucets; voice-activated directories, building entries and elevators; and air-purification HEPA-filter and similar systems.

“Siri hasn’t taken over the workplace yet,” he says with a smile, “but we do expect technology to have an increasing impact in our office spaces.”

THE NEW HOME ‘FLEXES’

With many of us working at home during COVID-19, we are looking closely at our living spaces. Are they functioning optimally for our lifestyles today and in the future? Will they provide the flexibility we will need during this crisis and when another occurs?

“People are not spending money on traveling, so they are upgrading their homes or building ones that include the amenities they need,” says Brad Leavitt, president of A Finer Touch Construction, a Scottsdale-based luxury home builder and remodeler.

Depending on the owner’s

pocketbook, these spaces include home gyms, yoga and meditation spaces, wine rooms, man-caves and she-sheds and, perhaps, the revived media room for the big-screen experience. Many will also seek casitas, guest houses, or additional bedrooms for older parents who have moved in because of COVID-19. “Homes have become, and will continue to be, more multi-generational than ever before,” says Sumney.

“We are seeing a number of changes in the design and details of the homes we have both in design and under construction,” explains Mark B. Candelaria, AIA, founder and principal of Candelaria Design Associates, the multi-award-

winning luxury home architectural firm in Scottsdale.

The Mud Room, for instance, is becoming what he calls the “Package Receiving and Sanitizing Room,” comprising space for employees from companies such as Fed-Ex and Amazon, the dry cleaner, and the pizza and grocery delivery people for drop-off and pick-up.

“We are designing spaces where delivery people can enter an intermediate space that is secured by electronic code that only allows them into this space. This allows the home owners’ deliveries to be out of the elements and in a space

Home gym design. Photo courtesy Candelaria Design Associates



where they cannot be stolen by outsiders, while not allowing the vendors access to the main part of the house,” he says.

Leavitt has also seen builders offer large, retractable delivery slots at the foyer where a package can be safely dropped.

Beyond this preliminary Mud Room, and secured from it, the traditional Mud Room has equipment to de-sanitize phones, keys and other items, to leave shoes, and a wash sink with soap and hand sanitizers for homeowners to wash up from where they’ve been.

The home office is in transformation, too. The traditional iteration—perhaps a corner of a kitchen by the oven or a makeshift garage bay—will no longer do.

“The new home office will need to be a place where you can work eight hours a day with top high-speed technology and full WiFi connectivity,” says Leavitt.

Sumney adds that consumers will want multiple home offices—one for each family member who is working from home permanently, plus dens and children’s computer areas for online learning. He notes, too, that desired homes will include soundproofing, thick walls and solid-wood doors, especially in homes with large families that are now often filled to capacity.

“The new home office will have much more technology for work and to connect with others virtually from home at the same efficiency they do at the office,” Candelaria explains, citing multi-screens; cameras providing different angles; and cool, stylish backdrops.

A back work room may be added, with a copier/scanner and supplies, which connects with the children’s home school space and offers a sound trap between them.

This classroom at home has a large central work table for projects and collaborations with friends and tutors, with perimeter dedicated workstations for each child.

“This space will also have cameras and large screens which can convert to gaming and fun activities when virtual school is over,” says Candelaria.

Large and small home gyms are becoming prevalent—and not just in luxury homes. Some are asking, post COVID-19, should we return to the public gym? With connected machines, music and technology, these home versions can be adjacent to the master suite or in a location shared by the family; for higher-tier homes they are detached structures so that the space can be used as part of a pool cabana experience.

In the same spirit, outdoor decks, patios and outdoor access will maximize open areas and provide more home space for entertaining.

“The outdoor kitchen, with every grilling and cooking gadget, is really going off the charts, all with close proximity to



Sensate touchless kitchen faucet. Photo courtesy Kohler Co.

anything from a small herb garden to full-blown vegetable gardens,” says Candelaria, a superb home chef himself.

As with the work office, technology in the post-COVID-19 home will be vital, including UV blue lights to disinfect water and air filtration systems and even lighting that adjusts to circadian cycles.

Touchless technology will also be more and more popular, following use in commercial settings for many years: sports arenas, public bathrooms in malls or stores and restaurants.

Installing a touchless kitchen faucet, for example, reduces the potential of spreading contaminants; many offer a voice-activated option. Also available are touchless soap dispensers, hand dryers, touchless faucets and toilets, explains Erin Lilly, design studio manager for Wisconsin-based Kohler Co.

The company is about to debut a line of touchless flush toilets designed similarly to traditional commodes but with a built-in flush-handle sensor, she explains.

“There are no new behaviors or routines to learn.”

HOME, SAFE HOME

The new flex home combines technology, comfort, health, and enhanced refuge.

“People want their home to feel safe and secluded from the world. They want to create a sanctuary, with the luxury of solitude, allowing for work, family and private time,” explains Tanya Shively, ASID, LEED AP, principal of Scottsdale’s Sesshu Design Associates, which has completed eco-sensitive, healthful interiors for 20 years.

“People want cleanliness and no clutter, healthy living, comfort and good design and construction,” says Leavitt. “They want to experience the vibrancy and energy of home. They want a space that will inspire them from day to day, a place with Zen.” 🌿