

Outside *the* Box

New trends in condo design include podcast studios, meal-delivery rooms and pickleball courts

BY SHERI RADFORD

“There was a phase in Vancouver where it was just build, build, build, build. But now there’s a little bit more care and attention taken,” Alyssa Virani says. The VP of marketing and strategy for Virani Real Estate Advisors, she’s worked extensively on the Monogram project, which brings the feeling of a resort—complete with poolside lounging and rooftop yoga—to an elegant condominium tower planned for Vancouver’s West End.

Virani’s team spent much time looking at amenity spaces in older buildings, noting how empty they usually are: “They’re not designed in a way that can be used by multiple people at the same time without feeling like you’re overcrowding each other.” In contrast, the shared spaces in Monogram are flexible and easy to separate thanks to design elements such as privacy screens in the digital lounge and private work pods and meeting rooms in the collaborative workspace.

“Coworking amenities have emerged as one of the most sought-after features in condominium living,” says Kelly Cray, creative principal at U31, an interior architecture and design studio in Toronto. Ever since the increase in working from home during the pandemic, coupled with the rise of the social media influencer, condo dwellers have been clamouring for high-tech rooms for podcasting, producing videos and hosting Zoom meetings. “Designed with flexibility in mind, these spaces often draw inspiration from eclectic boutique hotels or trendy cafés, aiming to make the workday more enjoyable.”

Parcel rooms have expanded and changed since the pandemic, Cray says, mainly due to delivered meals. “Food delivery continues to be popular, and as such, developers have implemented the addition of warm and cold storage for food and medication deliveries.”

Also: a renewed focus on wellness. “A few years ago, gyms were the only wellness component in a condominium,”



MONOGRAM RENDERING



LEFT: MONOGRAM ABOVE: A U31 PROJECT



TOP: MONOGRAM RENDERING BOTTOM: A U31 PROJECT

Cray points out. “Now, they are essentially like spas. We see salt baths, saunas, whirlpools, steam rooms, indoor pools, private yoga rooms, meditation rooms, fitness spaces equipped with screens for digital classes, half-courts, and—the latest craze—pickleball courts.”

That emphasis on wellness includes a desire for large, welcoming outdoor spaces, for both the building’s communal areas and the individual condos’ balconies and rooftop decks. In the wake of the pandemic, Lisa Lock has observed “people never wanting to be trapped in a condo box again.” Lock is the CEO of Stober Group in Kelowna, which is working on its first condominium project, Movala. Similar to Monogram, Movala brings a resort feel to condo living, with its bocce ball lawn, hot tub, cabanas and pool overlooking Okanagan Lake.

Each living unit is generously sized and has a large deck, and the layouts vary widely. “From a development standpoint, not super-efficient,” Lock says with a laugh. “But from an end-user standpoint, very desirable for people selling their large homes, wanting that transition space where it doesn’t feel like they’re in a box.” Lock notes that LEED-certified Movala is designed to accommodate EV chargers in every parking stall.

This emphasis on sustainability has become common in new condo developments, which incorporate everything from green roofs to rainwater-harvesting systems to low-flow plumbing fixtures. Virani, too, notes that Monogram’s parking stalls and bicycle lockers are all EV-enabled, and the southwest side of the building has an exterior solar shade system to help with cooling. “As the sun moves throughout the day, these shades will lower,” Virani says. “It allows for additional comfort of the person living inside.”

Aleem Kassam, principal interior designer for Kalu Interiors in Vancouver, spends much of his time focused on making living spaces both comfy and attractive. He mentions space-saving elements such as flip-up dining tables connected to kitchen islands and, in smaller and open-concept spaces, integrated appliances, which keep fridges and dishwashers neatly tucked away behind panels. New tech continues to take over the kitchen, from LCD fridges to invisible induction cooktops, which allow you to cook directly on a countertop.

Technology has invaded bathrooms, too, with options like heated floors now commonplace. “I just saw a developer add in two-way mirror TVs in the bathroom vanities,” Kassam says. But by far the biggest trend in bathrooms: indulgent spa-like elements. “People want their bathroom to be an escape, something that’s relaxing, tranquil.”

One thing that has long annoyed Kassam is all the wasted space in the design of a typical condo closet—“It’s been one of my pet peeves for two decades”—so he’s delighted to see a movement toward custom built-ins that look attractive and use space more efficiently. And when it comes to colours, in every room of the newest condos he’s noticing an “upward trend towards lighter, neutral and natural tones.”

A condo trend that never fades—especially in pricey markets such as Vancouver and Toronto—is the desire to fit more into less space. “We really try to maximize every square foot of homeowner space,” says Jane Hwang, design manager for Beedie Living, which is currently focused on the master-planned community of Fraser Mills in Coquitlam. “Space-planning of all of our units is reviewed to create efficiency,” she says, noting even Beedie’s smallest suites are laid out to allow the dining/living area to accommodate a desk setup.

But, no matter how large or small the condo, it seems one idea remains true. Says Hwang: “I think people have always wanted additional space.” ▽

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A U31 PROJECT



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FROM TOP: MONOGRAM, A U31 PROJECT, A U31 PROJECT

HOME ACCESSORIES WITH PERSONALITY



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