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Full-Service Luxury and Expansive Outdoor Space Lead Amenity Trends for 2022

Luxury buyers and renters will spare no expense for convenience and comfort, and developers have responded accordingly

By **Virginia Smith**

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The real estate frenzy kickstarted by the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't just driven up home prices, it's driven up luxury buyers' expectations, as well.

"As far as developers we work with who are planning new communities, we're saying to them, what used to be an upgrade is now expected," said Michael Saunders, owner and founder of Michael Saunders & Co., a brokerage in Sarasota, Florida. "We're advising them to raise the bar in terms of finishes."

What does a raised bar look like for new developments headed into the new year? In many cases, white glove-level service, along with amenities that allow a building to fulfill nearly all functions of a resident's day-to-day life, from work to fine dining to boutique fitness classes to expansive outdoor space.

"We have people who have moved looking for buildings that really emphasize service," said Jeremy Brutus, co-founder of New York-based amenity management and concierge tech firm URBN Playground. "They're looking for open space, outdoor space, and what's happening is hotels, business and residential all merging together."

And many amenity trends that gained steam during the depths of the pandemic will continue to be front and center moving forward.

"The trend toward more community amenities as well as more work-from-home amenities, was starting pre-Covid and obviously got magnified," said Andrew Barrocas, CEO of MNS Realty.

Below, what else to expect in the world of luxury amenities headed into the new year:

Full-Service Luxury, Event Programming and Hotel-Branded Services

The the pandemic drove many luxury buyers out of supertall towers and into single-family homes, many are now back in urban new developments, and they expect all the attendant perks—and then some.

“It seems like people are really looking for things to be as full service as possible,” said Ryan Serhant, founder of the New York-based brokerage Serhant. “They’ve spent the past 18 months doing everything for themselves, and they’ve come back and want to get back to whatever the new normal is, and have things taken care of. They want the services and they pay for them.”

In practice, this can look like classic concierge services, butlers, in-house restaurants from celebrity chefs, branded boutique fitness classes and curated events. It also dovetails with the ongoing trend of luxury lifestyle and hotel companies opening branded high-end residences of their own.

The Standard recently announced the launch of the Standard Residences in Miami, which will be the hotel group’s first residential project and is slated to feature 34,000 square feet of amenity space. In New York, the Mandarin Oriental Residences, Fifth Avenue, has announced that perks will include personal chefs, butlers, personal shoppers, and sommeliers and bartenders, as well as a restaurant by Daniel Boulud.

At The Residences at the St. Regis Longboat Key Resort, also in Florida, “Buyers want the St. Regis service, that’s really important to them,” Ms. Saunders said. “The butler is of course glamorous—and the private chefs, just being part of a five-star resort where they can retreat to individual homes but be steps away from restaurants and an incredible spa.”

Rather than providing event rooms that largely sit empty, buildings are now taking on responsibility for creative in-house event programming.

“Having programming for your amenities is really important,” Mr. Barrocas said. “That’s something that we’re really emphasizing as we look at things from a retention standpoint, and giving people a reason why they should stay in our building versus going to another building.”

At Brooklyn Point, a new development in Downtown Brooklyn, “We’ve partnered with a group called Meet Resident, and they have relationships with chefs at Michelin-starred restaurants,” said Ari Goldstein, senior vice president, development at Extell. “They bring them in to do tastings and wine pairings with residents, and residents get early access ticketing and discounts. That piece of activating and managing [amenity spaces] we feel is really important.” (Meet Resident is also partnering and hosting fine dining events with Quay Tower, a new Brooklyn development being marketed by Mr. Serhant.)

This newfound focus on community events reflects a broader shift in how luxury buyers and renters want to interact within their buildings.

Pre-pandemic “it was so much about being private,” said Tina Necrason, executive vice president, residential for California-based firm Montage International. “Now the social aspect has definitely started to become more attractive for our families and our owners.

Doubling Down on Health and Wellness

Health concerns catapulted to the top of buyers' minds in 2020 and 2021, and while basics like cleanliness and air filtration remain an ongoing concern, buildings are also now tackling a more holistic approach to wellness.

"The theme du jour is all about wellness and health," said Leonard Steinberg of brokerage Compass. "33 Park Row [a condo building in New York City's Financial District] has a terrace for outdoor workouts. In the past, you never would have cared about that, the gym would have been in the basement, and everyone would have been fine."

New buildings are allocating huge amounts of space to expansive fitness and spa facilities in an effort to enhance a sense of overall well-being for residents.

At Arte, a 16-residence condo building in Miami's Surfside neighborhood, the rooftop includes a full-sized tennis court in partnership with celebrity coach James Bollettieri, who will offer lessons for residents.

In some buildings, an approach to health can also extend into residents' kitchens.

"We have partnerships with Hudson Valley farmers and they deliver farm boxes to the building once a week," Mr. Brutus said. "We've seen an uptick in people using it, and we like to think that the future of amenities is about connecting people to each other and their local communities and cities where they live."

At Pendry Residences Natirar in Gladstone, New Jersey, a 12-acre working farm supplies residents with fresh produce, Ms. Necrason said. "Residents have a plot of land to farm on in any way they wish—we can do it for them, or teach them."

And at a baseline, health features including high-tech air and water filtration and DELOS systems continue to become increasingly de rigueur.

"I hear it again and again that people are looking for air-conditioning systems that filter out particles," Mr. Steinberg said. "Even if they're not worried about Covid, people are now looking at filtration for quality air, cleaner water. The audience for that is pretty astounding."

Outdoor Space Continues to Expand

"All-season outdoor space is something that's here to stay," said Kirsten Jordan, an agent with Douglas Elliman in New York City. "People didn't ask me [before the pandemic] to see the roof deck, and now they want to see the deck, see the amenities, see what that looks like and how it feels."

Ample outdoor space has become so important that in some cases developers are sacrificing square footage that might normally have become a penthouse for the sake of sprawling communal roof decks, as was the case at New York boutique development Gramercy North.

1000M, a 74-story new project in Chicago, is also reserving its rooftop for shared amenity space, said Francis Greenburger, chairman and CEO of Time Equities. “We’re expanding our outdoor space offerings wherever we can, and with a combination of active spaces—pools, fire pits, activities—and other areas with [features like] meditation gardens for a quiet, more contemplative space.”

Mr. Greenburger added, “I would say the first priority is outdoor space. Not that people didn’t value it before, but it took on new meaning through the pandemic.”

Working From Home for the Long Haul

The remote work trend doesn’t appear to be fading any time soon, and in addition to home offices in their actual apartments, luxury buyers are keen to expand their options within communal amenity spaces.

“I think that’s part of life now and we’re all just changing how we do things and taking that into consideration,” said Andrew Harris, an agent with Sotheby’s International Realty in New York City. “What you are seeing in amenities is conference rooms and private meeting rooms, so that people that live in buildings can maybe go downstairs and have a meeting rather than going to the office.”

Waldorf Astoria Residences Miami will have executive office space and conference rooms so people can work from the building conveniently, said Ryan Shear, managing partner at PMG, developer of the Waldorf Astoria Residences Miami. “We’re doing that at all of our luxury product. In some of our rentals we’ll do 50 offices, and in newer condos, almost 100 offices. You could spend your day eating, working, working out and going home, and you don’t have to leave, which is a shift you’re seeing in some of these very luxurious buildings.”

Children’s playrooms have become an important piece of the work-from-home equation as well, providing parents with options on days when their kids might be home from school.

“For those that have stayed in New York City, they’re mapping out how they’re going to live here long term,” Ms. Jordan said. “For parents working from home, being able to have these other spaces for their kids is really helpful right now. They’ve decided they want to make sure they have a playroom to send them to, and a lot of community building happens in these spaces.”

In existing buildings, expect under-utilized movie theaters and event rooms to be transformed into all manner of offices and playrooms, as well.

“People built these party rooms and bars and buildings a few years ago, and those parties never really materialized,” Mr. Brutus said. “I think those bars are now used as workspaces for people.”

Green Technology Enters a New Era

With an increased focus on overall building health as well as a deepening urgency around climate change, green technology in buildings is evolving well beyond half-hearted claims about LEED certification that might have sufficed (or gone overlooked) in previous years.

Electric car charging stations are an essential part of any parking area, even for residents who don't necessarily own electric cars themselves.

"[Buyers] all want charging stations because they're thinking ahead to resale, or to a change in their own personal vehicle ownership," Ms. Saunders said.

Buildings are also going beyond buying green energy from the local utility company to installing their own solar and geothermal systems, Mr. Steinberg said.

"The awareness of the environment, and of the health attributes of [green] systems in buildings, is enormous," he said. "Even in the wealthiest parts of London in the most luxurious developments, mentions of sustainability and eco-consciousness are very much at the forefront."

More broadly, increased demand for top-of-the-line sustainable design fits into a larger picture of luxury consumers who have money to spend, and after being stuck at home for the better part of the past two years, expect no detail in a development to go overlooked.

"Buildings with large amenity packages have benefitted as people are spending more time at home and also re-evaluating things," Mr. Barrocas said. "People have a different sense of the value of their time now, so having these amenities in the building has really helped better their lifestyle. That's the biggest benefit for amenities that came out of Covid, is the perception of lost time."

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