

The new urban sanctuary

No longer just a roof over your head, your future home is one that combines wellness, work and community living. **BY TAY SUAN CHIANG**

LIVING in a pandemic era has changed the way people look at their homes. Once a haven to return to after work to relax, it now does double duty as office and home. And as activities outside of home are now limited, the focus of entertainment has also switched to one's own turf. As more owners reconfigure their apartments or houses for a 24/7 lifestyle, it hasn't taken property developers long to follow suit.

Where once their priority would have been to pack as many units as they could into a project with some token landscaping and amenities thrown in, they are now adding more details in response to what they feel homeowners are looking for.

"Well-being" is now a buzzword for developers who are also incorporating more nature into their designs, with amenities that help build neighbourliness, and multi-functional interiors.

"Dual usage or flexible design in a home and more open public spaces are the norm in projects currently, and the pandemic has sped up their adoption," says Mark Yip, chief executive, Huttons Asia. "Well-being is at the forefront now and projects are emphasising this more."

Lee Choon Li, Frasers Property's executive vice-president and head of development and projects adds that with the pandemic, buildings have to be designed with a greater focus on hygiene, wellness, biophilic design, connectivity, accessibility and adaptability.

"These features may have been relevant for a long time, but the pandemic has accelerated and accentuated greater interest and demand for them," he says.

For Arthur Aw, executive director of Kimen Group, building a home with a functional layout is no longer enough. "The Covid-19 experience has given rise to an increased desire by urban dwellers to seek a healthier lifestyle," he says.

Kimen Group, together with Roxy-Pacific Holdings, is launching Jervois Mansion, a freehold 130-unit development at Jervois Road. Mr Aw says, "We focused on maximising the healthy living experiences that residents can enjoy, rather than maximising the total number of units we could build."

With over two decades of experience in both private and public sectors, including senior management roles at CapitalLand and JTC Corporation, Mr Aw believes that "architecture is about 'heartware', and people want to live closer to nature". He says the pandemic has reinforced his beliefs and now, more than ever, neighbours are an extension of family. "With people spending more time at home, that kampong spirit you have with your neighbours is so important," he says.

Jervois Mansion apartments are housed in five-storey buildings with plenty of greenery not only on the ground level, but also outside each apartment. Wherever they walk residents will always find pockets of nature to appreciate. The



Jervois Mansion apartments are housed in five-storey buildings with plenty of greenery. The rooftop will have lush greenery, and facilities such as a playground and dining pavilions. A section of the roof top will house a community urban garden, where the harvest will be shared with residents. PHOTO: JERVOIS MANSION



Parc Greenwich is one of the rare ECs with two clubhouses offering a whopping 52 wellness and lifestyle facilities. PHOTO: PARC GREENWICH

rooftop will also have lush landscaping, and facilities such as a playground and dining pavilions.

Mr Aw points out that 40 per cent of the greenery planted will be medicinal, usable or edible plants, which will be distributed to residents for their use. The condominium's landscaping firm will also conduct urban farming workshops. Mr Aw hopes that residents will want to join and "build a community spirit from there".

Homeowners who purchase a unit at Frasers Property's Parc Greenwich will be glad to know that their wellbeing has been considered too.

Located at Seletar Hills, it is one of the rare executive condominiums (ECs) with two clubhouses offering a whopping 52 wellness and lifestyle facilities including themed gardens, a community farm garden, and a function room which comes with a kitchen and dining area where residents can host culinary classes.

Another development that is banking on nature and communal facilities to attract buyers is GuocoLand's Midtown Modern. Located in Bugis, it prides itself on being the only central business district (CBD) condo with full facilities that include a tennis court and a 50m-long pool, set in one hectare of gardens and landscape areas.

Dora Chng, general manager, residential at GuocoLand says: "When we designed Midtown Modern, we wanted to attract families, especially families with children and other owner-occupiers such as retirees and build a community."

She adds that the project designers turned out to be prescient in their plans for an urban sanctuary with thematic gardens and landscaping, planned way before the onset of the pandemic.

Architects, too, have weighed in on what urban dwellers want now. Jason Pomeroy, founder of Pomeroy Studio, says spending more time at home increases the number of people in close proximity over 24 hours. "This necessitates greater consid-



Located in Bugis, the Midtown Modern prides itself on being the only CBD condo with full facilities that include a tennis court and a 50m-long pool. PHOTO: MIDTOWN MODERN

eration for the need for natural light, ventilation and a connection to the outside. The socio-physiological wellbeing of urban dwellers cannot be under-estimated," he says.

Serie Architects co-founder Christopher Lee, who is designing Jervois Mansion, says the pandemic has hastened some of the themes his firm has been developing over the years in residential design, one of which is "the proximity and access to mid-door spaces and nature". He explains: "This means a living space can be connected to nature via a generous and well defined half-indoor and half-outdoor space."

He adds, "Another (thing) to think about is the kind of amenities that can be injected into communal spaces that can complement working from home, and the enjoyment of nature."

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Above: Parc Greenwich's four- and five-bedroom units have kitchens that open out to the balcony, offering extended spaces for alfresco dining and other purposes.

Left: Irwell Hill Residences has a purpose-designed workspace exclusively for residents.

Far left: At Jervois Mansion, a section of the roof top will house a community urban garden, where the harvest will be shared with residents.

PHOTOS: JERVOIS MANSION, IRWELL HILL RESIDENCES, PARC GREENWICH



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While closer proximity to nature and more communal amenities are good to have, Singaporean homeowners are still a practical lot. They want homes with spaces that are good for multiple uses.

Ong Teck Hui, senior director for research and consultancy at JLL Singapore, says, “As a hybrid work model where working from home part of the time could be a long-term phenomenon, many residents or homebuyers want to incorporate proper work spaces in their homes rather than just working from the dining table or some ad hoc corner that is not conducive for work.”

Developers are clued in on this. Chew Peet Mun, managing director, investment and development at CapitaLand, says even before the pandemic, the firm has aimed to enhance home designs with a more conducive environment for remote working in light of the growing prevalence of agile working.

“As part of this effort, we are designing our new homes with spaces that have the flexibility to be converted into home offices,” he says.

The flexi-living concept of CapitaLand’s One Pearl Bank includes cosy areas such as an alcove in a one-bedroom unit which can easily be converted into a study or work area.



Studio, one- and two-bedroom units also come with a multi-functional swivel table fitted into the kitchen system, giving residents the option of converting their breakfast counter into a workspace during office hours.

GuocoLand’s other Bugis project, Midtown Bay, has units with balconies large enough to fit an eight-seater dining table and which can be enclosed, thereby freeing up space in the living area to be used as a home office, or vice versa. Some apartments come with high ceilings that allow for a loft platform to be built, so that space can be used as a work area.

Developers are also throwing in hot-desking options in the communal areas of their projects.

At Irwell Hill Residences by City Develop-



ments Limited, there is a purpose-designed workspace exclusively for residents. The bespoke workstations are equipped with Wi-Fi and charging points in a setting that offers a spectacular view of the sky framed by greenery – a sure way to make anyone in a Zoom meeting envious.

Midtown Modern will have a hotel-like lobby lounge where residents can receive guests, have meetings and hot-desk. Ms Chng says this is not a new feature for GuocoLand; its Wallich Residence also has a lobby lounge that offers concierge services.

“Before the pandemic, Wallich Residence’s lobby was already popular with residents, and we have noticed more residents using the space to work and meet business associates recently,” she says.

“We have received much positive feedback from residents of Wallich Residence, and we think such a lobby will be welcomed at Midtown Modern too.”

While location and price are still of utmost importance when house hunting, developers are confident that the pandemic will make buyers consider more than those factors.

Far left: At Parc Greenwich, residents can book function rooms to host culinary classes and gatherings.

Left: The flexi-living concept of One Pearl Bank includes cosy areas such as an alcove in a 1-bedroom unit which can easily be converted into a study or work area. PHOTOS: IRWELL HILL RESIDENCES, ONE PEARL BANK

Ms Chng says, “In the past, it was always about location. In today’s environment, we see that buyers also consider aspects such as community, with a focus on flexible spaces, wellness and sustainability.

JLL’s Mr Ong says that as budget is always a key consideration for homebuyers, some might be able to stretch theirs a little more to have that extra space in their location or project of choice. Others who are more budget-constrained may have to consider a less expensive location where they can afford a bigger unit.

“To entice buyers, we may expect workspaces to be featured in showflats to show interior design ideas on how workspaces can be efficiently incorporated in new homes,” he says. “The incorporation of proper work spaces in homes is a likely trend in the post-pandemic world.”

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