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Outdoor Meeting Spaces And Better Tech: Design Changes Post-Pandemic

July 15, 2020 Deirdra Funcheon, Bisnow South Florida

Steve Jobs was famous for conducting meetings while strolling around Palo Alto. Jeff Bezos would walk in Central Park to discuss his idea for an online store. Fresh air, pumping blood and strolling shoulder to shoulder can eliminate the stress that might otherwise come from staring down a person across a table in a boardroom.



Facebook's headquarters in Menlo Park, California.

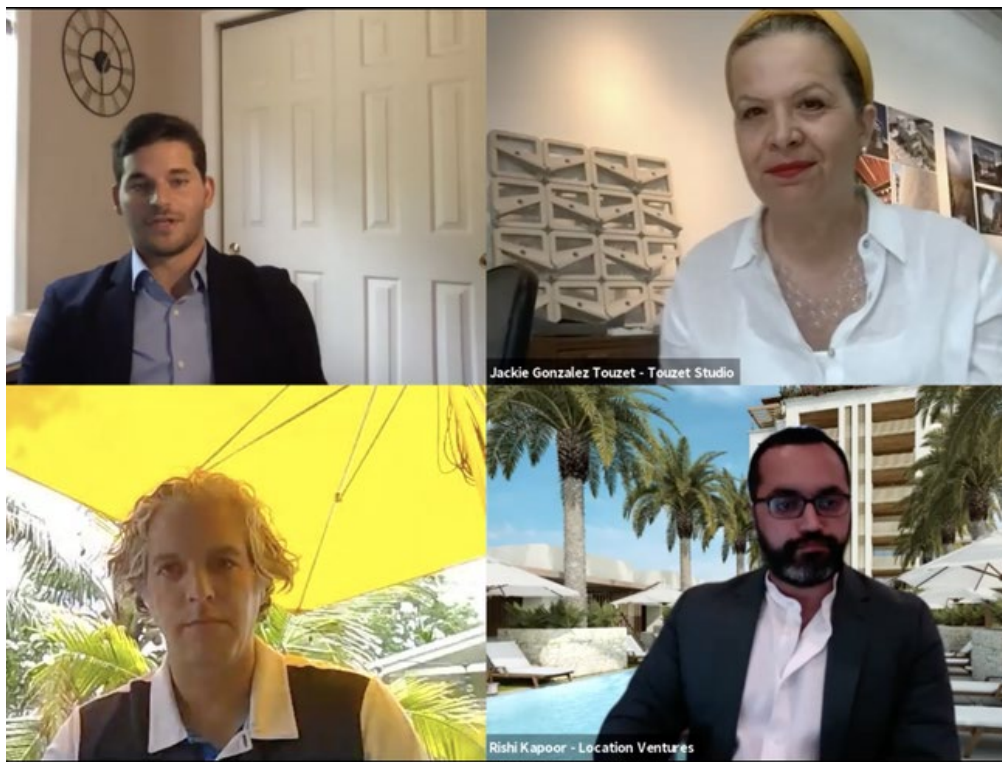
When architect Andrew Burnett, now a senior principal with Stantec in Miami, worked for Facebook, the tech company had already embraced the power of conducting business outside, he said on a Bisnow webinar about post-pandemic design trends last week.

“On their campus, they had a little roadway kind of mapped out, and pavers, and you'd walk from one end of the campus and touch the wall and walk back, and that was the meeting,” Burnett said.

"I'd rather take a walk and have a meeting than sit in a small meeting room with a couple people," he added. "I'd feel better about walking along Biscayne Bay and having our meeting there. Why couldn't we do that?"

He said that traditionally, in designing office buildings, landlords have tried to maximize floor-area ratio, the real estate measure for density, "but people are starting to realize the value of the open space."

On the webinar, Burnett was joined by Location Ventures CEO Rishi Kapoor and Touzet Studios founding principal Jackie Gonzalez Touzet to discuss how office designs could change following the coronavirus pandemic.



Clockwise from top left: Bisnow's Joe Bianco, Touzet Studio founder Jackie Gonzalez Touzet, Location Ventures founder and CEO Rishi Kapoor, and Stantec principal Andrew Burnett.

Burnett said companies may find it is worth the investment to spend more on mechanical systems to allow better air filtration in offices and open up areas like rooftop decks — all of which become amenities that draw tenants.

“All companies are going to be reassessing what they're doing in physical space, so there's a lot of potential,” Touzet said. “I think offices are watching this rise of sense of community, the sense of attracting talent to the office venture.”

Kapoor said the coworking spaces he owns already have access to outdoor amenities spaces, with many offices coming with their own terraces, as well as dedicated outdoor common areas and some outdoor conference rooms.

Kapoor said his projects have begun incorporating lighting that matches people's circadian rhythms, air purification systems and water purification.

“This is just a first step, where the technology has become what I would consider an accessible price point, where it's not just kind of Star Trek science fiction ... and can be incorporated in a feasible way into an indoor environment.”

Ninety percent of people spend 90% of their time indoors, he said, so buildings and people should prioritize their indoor air, light and water.

If there is a positive to the coronavirus, Kapoor suggested, it's that it has gotten real estate to think about health impacts and speed up changes that might otherwise have taken a long time to become popular.

"It's forcing the conversation that it's not only about the building's impact on the community, but also the building's impact on the people within it," he said. "I'm very excited about forcing the conversation that we need to protect and give a great environment for the people inside."

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