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HOMES

TikTok Studios, Zoom Rooms and Co-Working Spaces are the New Must-Have Home Amenities

As working from home becomes the norm, residential developers are trading movie rooms and lounges for souped-up work spaces



Ric Bucher works in his remodeled home office. It includes features that allow him to do broadcast-quality video from home. *ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By Katy McLaughlin

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When Ric Bucher, a television and radio basketball commentator and writer who is a familiar face on Fox Sports, finished a roughly \$40,000 office remodel in his Half Moon Bay, Calif., home, he wondered if it was worth it. His workspace, completed about three years ago, was soundproofed, professionally wired, attractively lit, and rigged with professional-grade cameras and microphones. The idea was that if he ever needed to record a podcast or tape a television segment from home, he could.

“It was a very expensive proposition, and we asked, ‘are we doing the right thing?’ ” Mr. Bucher, 59, said of conversations with his wife, Corrine Bucher. Then the pandemic hit. Now Mr. Bucher is able to tape and record studio-quality segments for national Fox Sports shows and for his podcast.

“There is no question that it has been a huge benefit to my career,” he said.

A Home Office Renovation Pays Off



Ric Bucher's office upgrade has allowed him to do broadcast-quality video feeds from home throughout the pandemic. *PHOTOS: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Mr. Bucher's renovation, with its focus on making him look and sound good on camera, may have once seemed specific to his unique profession. But today, developers and home builders believe that the future, even after the virus is under control, will involve a lot more work from home, videoconferencing, and remote collaborating.

To accommodate this new landscape, they are crossing out blueprints that allocated space to movie theaters, game rooms, or lounges, and are using the square footage for co-working spaces, Zoom-call rooms, podcast recording areas and TikTok studios. They are wiring garden areas and pool decks with commercial-grade Wi-Fi and USB ports, and designing in-home offices with separate entrances, soundproofing and souped-up air filtration.



Mr. Bucher and his wife, Corrine Bucher, son Mat and daughter Chance at their home. *PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

And while some city denizens are abandoning multiunit living for the moment, developers are betting that those who remain, and those who return, will be attracted to a package of work-from-home amenities.

In downtown Los Angeles, developer Behzad Souferian bought a 606-unit rental building a year ago and rebranded it as the flagship of his new BeDTLA brand.



Ric Bucher, a basketball commentator and writer, set up a professional, soundproofed space in his home to record podcasts and tape television segments remotely. VIDEO: CORRINE BUCHER

Mr. Souferian's building is 95% occupied, with rents ranging from about \$1,800 to \$3,500 a month, he said. But he is rebranding it to reflect what he believes are the needs of this generation of renters. By the end of the year, he will launch a TikTok Studio, a roughly 100-square-foot room with camera-ready lighting, tripod stand and mirrors. The small space will be ideal for one or two people to entertain themselves making TikToks—all the more important "now that bars and nightlife are closed," Mr. Souferian said.

The building will also have two podcast studios. A space that was a social lounge will be converted into five to 10 work stations where people can be socially distanced from others, he said. There will be no additional charge to use the work-from-home amenities, he said.

"It's not that we have so many podcasters and influencers in our community now, but we want to create the facilities for these people," to attract them, Mr. Souferian said.



The podcast studios at BeDTLA, Los Angeles. *PHOTO: MARC SZABO STUDIOS/THE SOUFERIAN (RENDERING)*

As the pandemic has developed, many building amenities have been closed—sometimes by state or municipal order, and sometimes by building managers themselves. Real-estate companies said that they will comply with regulations and follow the science to determine when common spaces can open or what kind of mitigation—such as limiting capacity—is wise.

Co-working space, a concept devised in a pre-Covid world, may sound ill-suited to today's environment. Developers said that while the virus is in full force, distancing, plastic dividers and other mitigation can be deployed to make it safe.

In August, Kassie Meiler, 25, moved into the Society Las Olas building in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., which opened in May. The founder of a social-media agency, she calculated that \$1,895 a month for a junior one-bedroom was a good deal because she would not have to spend up to \$350 renting an office in a co-working building.



Kassie Meiler in the co-working lounge of Society Las Olas in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. She moved to the building for its wide array of work spaces which she thought would save her money she otherwise would have spent on an office rental elsewhere in the city. PHOTO: ALEXIA FODERE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



A lounge at Las Olas. PHOTO: ALEXIA FODERE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In Las Olas, Ms. Meiler leaves her unit each day to use a conference room for hours of Zoom calls, she said. So far, nothing has been too crowded and she can always find space. She then ascends to the building's Sky Lawn, which is a 3,000-square-foot outdoor office with desks and electrical hook ups on the 26th floor.

“If I’m in my unit, I will cook, do laundry and clean. I like the feeling of working with other people I can see as well,” Ms. Meiler said.

Developer Ryan Shear, managing partner at Property Markets Group, said work space is a central offering of the Society Living brand, which currently has two more buildings under development in Miami and one in Orlando. One of the buildings in downtown Miami will have 30 offices and “social stairs”: large steps with electrical outlets and ports where workers can hang out with their laptops, Mr. Shear said.



Society Las Olas, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. PHOTO: ALEXIA FODERE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



A large co-working space at Las Olas. PHOTO: ALEXIA FODERE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“We’re trying to accommodate all types of workers, from more sociable workers to the closed-door office worker,” he said.

Before Covid, PMG based the brand on the idea of offering people like Ms. Meiler a way to save money on renting a separate office space, Mr. Shear said. When the crisis hit, building staff began wearing masks and regulating capacity in common areas. Since its launch in May, rents at Society Las Olas have been strong, Mr. Shear said.

In a neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles, Alex Valente, High Street Residential senior vice president, is currently working on construction of Llewellyn, a 318-unit rental building. It will have a co-working space tailored to the creative and professional community that Mr. Valente expects will rent in the building. There will be a 600-square foot, soundproof “jam room,” where residents can record podcasts or practice music. It will be located next to a 1,700-square-foot area dubbed the Co-Lab, which will include acoustically isolated booths for group work and a conference room with a technologically enhanced white board.

The Co-Lab can only open when permitted by city ordinances. “We would likely open Co-Lab, assuming restrictions eased, at reduced capacity, on a first-come, first-served basis, and by reservation only on conference rooms initially,” Mr. Valente said.



An optional home office at a KB Home at the Flatiron Meadows community in Erie, Colo. PHOTO: KB HOME

Michael Pestronk, chief executive of Post Brothers, a developer of rental buildings in Philadelphia, said that once the pandemic hit, he eliminated movie theaters, game rooms and social-lounging areas to create 3,000 square feet and 10,000 square feet of co-working space, respectively, in two buildings under construction. The first will be completed next month and the second in December of next year, he said.

There will be cubicles with high dividers—to create social distancing—where people can work on laptops, plus multiple rooms where residents can host Zoom calls and meetings. In a large downtown project in the design phase, there will be 15,000 square feet of workspace divided into three areas. On the ground floor, there will be conference rooms where residents can meet with outside visitors. On upper floors, there will be a co-working space, and another space with individual offices.

“It gives you space that is more customizable,” Mr. Pestronk said. If that project is approved, it would open in early 2024, he said.

Several developers have created programs that let off-plan buyers customize their floor plans to add home offices. In August, [KB Home](#), a Los Angeles-based builder of roughly 12,000 single-family homes a year, rolled out a program in which buyers can opt to turn a bedroom into a home office.

Starting at \$3,000, KB creates a built-in desk, shelves, cabinets, high-speed Wi-Fi, various USB ports and lighting over the desk. For additional fees, buyers can add a sliding-glass door to the outside, an en-suite bathroom and soundproofing, said Chief Executive Jeffrey Mezger .



A home office at Villa Valencia, Coral Gables, Fla. *PHOTO: LOCATION VENTURES (RENDERING)*

Rob and Mary Porges, both mortgage executives in their 60s, went into contract for a \$1.68 million, three-bedroom in Villa Valencia, a 39-unit condo building under construction in Coral Gables, Fla. The developer is building the couple an office off the master bedroom in a space that would otherwise have been a large closet, Ms. Porges said. The office will come with pocket doors, two built-in desks, custom millwork and wiring for internet.

For client meetings, the couple plans to use the building's boardroom, which will feature Bluetooth speakers, a high-definition video-conferencing camera, a high-definition large screen and audio equipment, said developer Rishi Kapoor, chief executive of Location Ventures.

Units at Villa Valencia cost between \$1.65 million and \$14.9 million, and each buyer has the opportunity to customize a home office, Mr. Kapoor said. The building also includes high-level water and air filtration, which for an additional cost can be upgraded to medical-grade quality, he said.

The luxury Manhattan market has long been predicated on the understanding that city executives would pay huge prices to live close to their offices. But even a new development there is banking on a work-from-home future.



A flex room being used as an office at Rose Hill, NYC. PHOTO: RECENT SPACES (RENDERING)

Rose Hill, a 45-story building on 29th Street between Park and Madison avenues where studios start at \$1.385 million and penthouses top out at \$19.5 million, offers some buyers in-unit “flex rooms” that can be designed as home offices, said Shaun Osher, chief executive at CORE, which is the building’s exclusive sales agent.

The space for these rooms came by lowering the bathroom count. “Luxury apartments have been over-bathroomed,” Mr. Osher said. The building will wire various common spaces—a library, dining/conference room, lounge, co-working area and garden, so residents can work on laptops.

Sales began in late 2019; Mr. Osher declined to say what percentage of the units were sold. “I think this pandemic has magnified things people wanted anyway,” said Mr. Osher.

The Look-, Sound- and Feel-Good Home Office

Space10 Interiors in Half Moon Bay, Calif., designed the Buchers’ home office. Here are co-owner Jennifer Glynn’s best tips for creating an office for today’s work-from-home life. Prices are approximate.



PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

1. Install low-tech soundproofing.

“Buy a wool rug with extra-thick padding to put under it. Install a solid-core door. Hang heavy drapes—even if you never pull them closed,” says Ms. Glynn.

Wall-to-wall carpet by Stark Carpet, plus installation: \$2500

Solid core double doors: \$750

Window shades: \$2500



PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

2. Use flattering lighting for video.

“Ric has two lights on stands that sit in the corner ready when he needs them,” which he uses to eliminate shadows on his face during broadcasts, Ms. Glynn says. These, and dimmable ring lights that light the face from all angles, are available from companies specializing in this issue.

Lumecube’s broadcast lighting kit: \$129



PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

3. Create a backdrop.

The door to Mr. Bucher's office is painted the same dark blue color as the rest of the walls. This dark tone absorbs bright afternoon light, says Ms. Glynn, and offers a flattering backdrop on video.

Hague Blue by Farrow & Ball Paint in Estate Emulsion: \$110 per gallon



PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

4. Alert the family.

Outside Mr. Bucher's office door is an "On Air" sign he can activate by remote control, signaling to the family the need for quiet. This could be handy for any family juggling Zooms and important calls needing quiet.

On Air Light: \$350



A variety of working and lounging options keeps cabin fever at bay. ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

5. Design for the long haul.

Mr. Bucher moves around throughout the day between a stool at his built-in desk, a leather loveseat, and built-in bench under the windows. With people spending long hours in home offices, a variety of work spaces helps combat cabin fever, Ms. Glynn said.

Custom loveseat by Space10 Interiors: \$4,500

Custom stool: \$1,500

Custom window box cushions: \$1,500

Unique Monthly Visitors: 61,870,000

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/work-from-home-amenities-11603385884>