

Homes / Condos

## Rooftop gardens, outside doors, bigger patios: Richard White looks at post-COVID condo design

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Rooftop gardens are becoming more in demand. PHOTO BY FILE /Postmedia

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Many are wondering how not only their lives will change because of COVID-19, but how cities will change post-COVID. While some are predicting the decline of the downtown and the rise of the suburbs or even the renaissance of people choosing to live in rural areas, others are not so sure. Internationally renowned London, UK-based architect Norman Foster, (architect of Calgary's The Bow) believes the pandemic will not fundamentally change cities, but will accelerate things that were already happening — urban farming, gardening and the use of technology in our everyday lives.

I have done lots of reading and thinking (heaven knows COVID's given me time) about what changes we might see in condo design and urban living in Calgary.

I am betting rooftop gardens will become even more popular, with more space devoted for tenants to grow vegetables and less for games, decorative plants and communal seating. The rooftop will be more like a community garden. In a winter city like Calgary, rooftop greenhouses make sense as we get lots of sun.

We could also see bigger balconies, with space to grow vegetable and/or allow more physical distancing when we have visitors. Again, because Calgary is a winter city, we could see more balconies that are enclosed sunrooms with windows that open up to let in fresh air. We have developed a greater appreciation for the importance of fresh air and sunlight as a result of COVID.

Speaking of air, look for improved ventilation and air filter systems in new condos as buyers will want cleaner air. Also, look for more windows throughout the condo that open to allow for fresh air to circulate through the condo. Perhaps we will even see condos with a small enclosed area at the front door with decontamination scanning technology for everyone who enters. At a minimum, look for hallways lined with small shelves or insets with hand sanitizer.

Common areas will become smaller as residents become more concerned about sharing space with others. Unfortunately, during outbreaks, common areas are shut first and opened last.

However, on the flipside look for more co-work spaces to be added to the commercial area of condo developments. The next best thing to an office in your home is to have one downstairs when you need one. They are also a great way to meet neighbours. Co-work spaces could become the new “common area.”

With more people online shopping for everything including groceries and meals, look for main floor storage areas where deliveries can be securely stored away, rather than scattered in the lobby for anybody to grab. There will even be secured cold rooms where perishable food and meals can be delivered during the day and picked up when residents get home later in the day.

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Look for more touchless technology where you won't have to touch doors or elevator buttons to get into your building or your home.

Speaking of elevators, look for an increase in demand for condos less than 10 floors where one can take the stairs more often. In fact, stairwells could become the new gym as tenants realize they are the original Stairmaster. Imagine stairwells well-lit with windows, so they are bright, attractive options to access your home. What a great use of an under-utilized space.

Ground floor condos with an entrance to the sidewalk will increase in popularity as you have your own private entrance.

Purchasers will be looking for larger condos that give them a bit more room — maybe an extra bedroom (flex room) for an office, craft area, media room, quiet library/reading room or workout room. Perhaps even a larger kitchen as people return to home baking and cooking, rather than going out to eat. I have become the “muffin man” at my house.

The open concept will continue to be popular as the living room is now your yoga workout studio, so you need space to spread out one or more yoga mats as you do yoga online. Dining room tables and chairs are a poor substitute for a desk and proper chair. Look for more furniture having multiple uses and be designed for function more than fashion.

## **Last Word**

Sola is a new 172-home, nine-storey development on 14th Street N.W. near Kensington Road, by Ocgrow Group of Companies. Its Canada Amazon partnership will give residents a smart home hub offering safety and security, along with Amazon's Alexa/Echo cloud-based connection for voice control to do everything from play music, listen to news and weather and answer the door for parcel deliveries. This could be just the beginning of how technology and COVID-19 will change how we live in the future.

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