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Eye on the future

Designers, architects on the trends shaping how we'll live in 2022 and beyond

DANNY SINOPOLI

Whichever party assumes power after Election Day on Sept. 20, the country's next

federal leaders will face a daunting challenge: Canada needs more housing — and fast.

According to an eye-opening report released by Scotiabank in May, a “chronic inefficiency” afflicts our home supply, which offers the lowest number of units per 1,000 residents in the G7: just 424, compared to 540 in France, which sits at the top of the list.

“The fact that we are so far below our G7 peers provides some indication of the under-build relative to needs,” wrote Scotiabank’s chief economist, Jean-Francois Per-

rault. In the GTA, it might seem as if those needs are being addressed almost solely by condo builders, but creative solutions to the shortfall are in fact being explored by all types of stakeholders across every form of housing.

In June, for instance, Toronto’s Planning and Housing Committee voted to supplement 2019’s lane-way housing bylaws by finalizing regulations for the design and installation of garden suites — detached structures in the rear yards of residences that don’t abut public lanes — by the end of the year. GTA architects, meanwhile, are rethinking everything from the traditional size of single-family homes to condo heights and amenities to meet changing demands, many of them driven by the ongoing pandemic.

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66 more storeys of living space coming to Mississauga.

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It’s a great time of the year to give our homes the once-over.

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“WE ARE SEEING AN INCREASED DESIRE FOR CONNECTION TO NATURE OR MORE ACCESS TO NATURAL SPACES WITHIN AND AROUND THE HOME THAN EVER BEFORE. — HEATHER DUBBELDAM



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DUBBELDAM ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

Skygarden House by Toronto-based Dubbeldam Architecture + Design features multiple access points to the outside, including an exposed terrace off the third floor. Right: The appeal of having direct, personal access to fresh air and greenery within the city is growing amid the pandemic, Toronto architect Heather Dubbeldam says.

Seeking smaller, greener homes

TRENDS

Continued from HPI

“We are seeing an increased desire for connection to nature or more access to natural spaces within and around the home than ever before,” says Toronto architect Heather Dubbeldam, citing just one of the factors shaping residential design right now.

Based on a canvassing of leading architects, designers and developers, here are five key trends to look out for as 2022 beckons.

SMALL WILL BE BIG

Among the realizations that many people have come to over the past 18 months, say Meg Graham and Andre D’Elia, principals at the Toronto architecture practice superkül, is “that they don’t need as many square feet or as much stuff to live well.”

This desire for “quality over quantity,” as they put it, has indeed been percolating over the past few years, spurred by rising energy costs, greater eco-awareness and an effort to maximize land use in dense urban settings. But the pandemic has crystallized the less-is-more ethos for many, reflected in the fact that online inquiries into “tiny homes for sale” increased by 55 per cent across Canada last year, according to the trend-monitoring software firm Semrush.

This year, design firms such as superkül are seeing an uptick in real demand. “Smaller but better-quality homes are now preferred,” say Graham and D’Elia, whose calling cards in the format include Gradient House, a deceptively airy, 1,225-square-foot home fea-

turing skylights, oversized dormer windows and 11.5-ft. cathedral ceilings on a tight L-shape plot in Toronto’s Kensington Market.

They have also designed a similarly sized, two-storey prototype that can be adapted by homeowners and developers to just about any compact site.

“In effect,” the architects say, “the next big thing is a whole bunch of little things.”

NATURE CONTINUES TO CALL

As widely reported as the exodus of urbanites to rural settings has been over the past year, architect Dubbeldam doesn’t see it lasting. “The trend will subside as the economic advantages of cities return to focus,” she says. “Density delivers higher returns on corporate and infrastructure investment.”

Because of this, the appeal of having direct personal access to fresh air and greenery within the city will only grow. In single-family homes, Dubbeldam says, this will mean ample glazing to maximize natural light, larger backyards rather than big interior footprints and multiple access points from indoors to outside through terraces, balconies and roof decks. With multi-unit buildings, the architect adds, larger individual balconies and expanded outdoor common areas are increasingly de rigueur.

“Our designs have always maximized this direct connection to the outdoors,” she says. “It will become even more of a priority now.”

ALTERNATE MODELS WILL GAIN STEAM

In 2021, 46 per cent of GTA buyers intend to buy a detached home, up four

per cent from this year, the luxury real estate company Engel & Völkers says in its latest annual market report, citing StatCan figures. “However,” the company also warns, “supply is short and set to become more constricted.”

One takeaway from this projection is that the current pace of homebuilding in the GTA isn’t about to meet demand, making alternative forms of housing all the more imperative.

On that front, construction of the laneway housing that Toronto has been experimenting with of late should grow in popularity and urgency. Those protocols for garden suites should also ideally be fast-tracked.

“We really hope that the many arguments for middle density, greater inclusion and alternate housing models shift City Council’s resistance to change on our main streets,” say Graham and D’Elia. “There are signs that this shift is happening, but it’s too early to call at this point.”

LOW-RISE COMPETES WITH HIGH

Bird’s-eye views will never get old, and very tall buildings aren’t going anywhere. One need only look at the expanding skylines of Toronto, Mississauga and Vaughan to see that.

But with an end to the pandemic still up in the air, waiting for and riding in elevators with a skyscraper full of strangers won’t be any more appealing to condo dwellers than it’s proving with wary office workers, at least in the short term.

“People want to live in great neighbourhoods, not 30 storeys above them,” says

Paul Johnston of the real estate sales company Unique Urban Homes, whose portfolio includes Biblio Lofts, a seven-storey development slated to go up next to the historic Riverdale Library on Queen Street East in Toronto.

Although his pitch may be overexuberant, Johnston has a point. Besides being pandemic-friendly, low- and mid-rise condos are the kind of missing-middle structures ideal for occupying empty infill sites and increasing density across the region.

“Missing-middle buildings are not skyline buildings but intrinsic contributors to their neighbourhoods,” says Lisa Spensieri of BDP Quadrangle.

SAFER AND SAVVIER COMMUNAL SPACES

One condo proposal in Vaughan promises a massive open-air yoga area, although it’s unclear how well used that might be in the winter. Other building designs are replacing once-static lobbies with hotel-like gathering spaces that serve as exclusive all-purpose bubbles for residents.

“We are designing lobbies with group seating, fireplaces, co-working spots and hospitality counters where residents can grab a muffin, coffee or some other beverage — much like in a hotel,” say Graham and D’Elia.

Similarly, “bicycle parking and storage areas are no longer being relegated to the deepest, darkest corners of the building or in the basement.” And pet ownership, which increased significantly during the pandemic, is also being addressed more directly, with dog-washing and specifically designed outdoor relief areas becoming much more common.

“For traditional purpose-built rental buildings and condominiums, amenity spaces are being carefully reconsidered,” say the superkül principals. “The goal is to make them functional, dynamic and welcoming to all.”

Use paint to create a feeling of space

Go easy on bright or dark colours

MELISSA HANK

As a rock band, Crowded House claimed the ‘80s with its dare-you-not-to-sing-along ballad Don’t Dream It’s Over. As a design aesthetic, though, a crowded house is much less desirable.

Decluttering can make your place seem bigger, as can smart storage, strategic lighting and well-chosen furniture. But there are a few painting tricks that can earn you some virtual square footage too.

“Paint is one of the easiest (and) greatest value additions to any home,” home stager Laurie Uspchuk, who owns the Ontario-based company Love This House, wrote for Canadian Home Trends. “It makes the greatest impact with the least cost and time invested. Paint has the power to enhance or detract.”

To that end, here are some questions that’ll help you decide if the paint in your home is visually expanding it or not.

■ Is the colour too bold? Hues like red, purple, green or orange can make a big statement, but if your goal is an airier atmosphere they may be the wrong choice. “Strong or bright colours will make your space feel smaller and the walls feel closer and more closed in,” Connecticut-based stager Leia Ward told Apartment Therapy.

■ Is the wall colour different from the ceiling colour? A stark contrast between the two can instantly shrink a space. Ward recommends going with white for both. “By painting the walls and ceiling the same colour, you create a seamless experience for the eye,” she said. Her top choice is Chantilly Lace, a neutral bright white from Benjamin Moore.

■ What about the paint finish? If it’s matte or flat, you might not be getting the most space-enhancing effect out of your paint, even if it’s white. “Deploy a higher gloss on surfaces that will catch the light and scatter it throughout the room,” Benjamin Moore’s colour specialist Nivara Xaykao told MarthaStewart.com. Eggshell and satin have lower sheens, while semigloss and high-gloss amp it up.

■ Am I forgetting the trim? Contrasting moulding around windows, doors and floors can also distract. “Painting trim in a colour other than white, or leaving it wood-toned, will make your space feel smaller,” Ward said. “If it’s painted a deep colour, it grabs the eye and focuses on the small dimension of that space.”

■ Are the walls only painted partially? It’s trendy to paint a wall one colour halfway or three-quarters of the way up the wall, while choosing another colour for the remainder. But it’s not doing you any favours space-wise. “Your eye tends to never go beyond what was painted, making the room seem smaller,” New Jersey-based stager Nicholas Pielaat told Apartment Therapy.

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