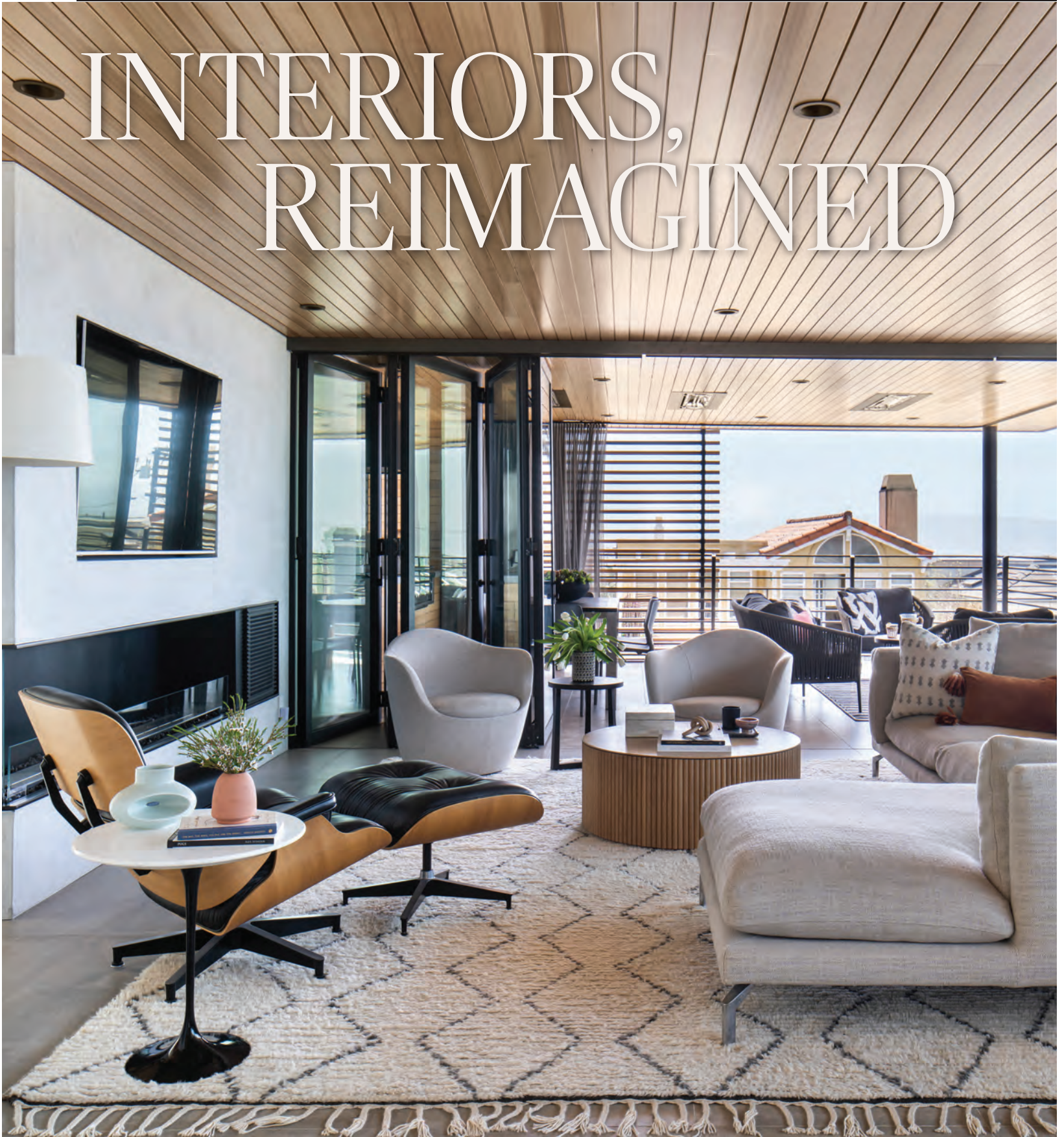


design

INTERIORS, REIMAGINED





Maximizing airflow is top of mind in post-pandemic design.

Masks are thankfully a fading memory, but COVID-19 and the pandemic lockdown may have created permanent changes in our homes.

BY PAUL HODGINS

Freedom has always defined American life — the freedom to work, play, socialize and relax wherever we desire.

For two long years, the pandemic constricted those freedoms. And even though we're (hopefully) looking at that terrible time through the rear-view mirror, COVID-19 has altered our world permanently in many ways.

Perhaps the most visible manifestation of the new post-pandemic landscape is our relationship to our homes. The virus forced us to reconfigure and re-evaluate the places where we live and share space with family, close friends and pets. Some of those changes, it turns out, are going to stay with us.

“During (the pandemic) we discovered that we can perform our work from a lot of different places,” says Luis Murillo, founder of LMD Architecture Studio in Los Angeles, a firm that specializes in coastal residential design throughout California. “You don’t have to go to an office to do good work. And to that extent, I think people learned that this could be a continuous thing.”

LUIS MURILLO OF LMD ARCHITECTURE STUDIO IMAGES

The pandemic created the desire to effortlessly step outside.



Parents quickly realized that many aspects of home life had to be radically rethought, says Christine Vroom, founder of Christine Vroom Interiors in Los Angeles. “People went, ‘Oh my gosh, my kids have to do schoolwork. I have to work. My spouse or partner has to work. I’ve got the dogs to deal with.’ There’s so many different aspects to everyone being home.”

Vroom says that for many parents, “It became a question of ‘How do we divide the space? We need to find pockets for people to have their own private space and to also be able to function within them.’”

THE HOME OFFICE

The first order of business in many households during the pandemic was creating a functional home office — not just a cramped corner big enough for a laptop, but something that worked just as well as an equivalent office workspace.

“Home offices definitely became more important and more prominent,” says Christopher Brandon, president of Brandon Architects in Costa Mesa, a firm with many residential projects in coastal Orange County. “Soundproofing and the need for an aesthetic backdrop for Zoom meetings became necessities for many clients.”

In her own projects, Vroom sees ample evidence that people who were forced to work out of their houses are



Home offices became a necessity.

COURTESY OF LMD ARCHITECTS

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Private spaces
became sought-after.



Multi-purposed spaces and blending the indoors with the outdoors are two pandemic-influenced design trends.

now spending money to make those pandemic home offices permanent — and, in some cases, lavish. The desire to dramatically remake the workspace “came right off the bat, just immediately,” Vroom says. Now it’s simply part of a standard new home design request.

“I feel like every single new build we’re doing has at least one or two substantial home offices. The home office, if you even had one, used to be just a little side room that maybe you stuck a small desk in. Now it’s a major and attractive and (well-appointed) space — maybe multiple spaces. Since it’s being utilized more, there’s just more detail that goes into them now.”

Also: Carefully staged bookcases that tell a personal story are favorite Zoom backdrops.

GOODBYE, OPEN FLOOR PLAN?

The open floor plan, long a feature of Southern California homes, could become a casualty of post-

pandemic design preferences, designers say.

Murillo’s clients now “want to maintain a certain amount of privacy between them,” he says. “When you’re on a Zoom call, you don’t want to necessarily be dealing with kids and dogs in the background, or someone having another meeting in the same room. Kids like to be doing their own thing most of the time, so you want them to have their own separate space. Overall, privacy is now more important.”

Brandon has noticed an increased desire among his clients for more purpose-built rooms that are set apart from the rest of the home. “More spaces to gather as a family is a top requirement. There (also) has been a rise in game rooms and playrooms that lend themselves to family centered activities or homeschooling spaces.”

HARMONIOUS EXISTENCE

So, we want our own private, enclosed spaces now

DAVID TSAY PHOTOGRAPHY

more than ever. On the other hand, the pandemic created an understandable desire to let the fresh air in and effortlessly step outside.

More efficient HVAC took a back seat to a desire for more permeable boundaries between indoors and outdoors, our sources agree. And the yard is considered a more integral year-round extension of the home — an entirely achievable goal in many parts of Southern California.

“Clients have expressed the desire for more outdoor space,” Brandon says. “(There’s a) draw toward bigger yards. Outdoor living is, now more than ever, very important (in) our designs.”

Murillo agrees. “In California, (indoor/outdoor living) has been a thing for a while. But I think that now it’s even more dominant. When we were forced to stay confined to our houses, having that access to the rear yard or the front yard became even more valuable. I think that connection is very important from your office as well as from other rooms.”

Condo and apartment dwellers felt the need for nature, too. In many high-density neighborhoods, once-neglected patios and balconies became re-imagined during the pandemic, providing a vital slice of the outdoors for those who couldn’t leave home. The sudden profusion of barbecue grills on decks and balconies prompted communities such as Laguna Woods to adopt new regulations.

The pandemic has even changed some of the practical and aesthetic small points of home design, Vroom has observed. “People want a lot of plugs everywhere. I’ve noticed more requests for multiple plugs on the kitchen island, more floor plugs. It’s a big question now: ‘Are there gonna be enough plugs?’ I think it means people like to be more mobile within their home.”

Sound insulation has also become a more frequent request, Murillo has noticed. “People are paying more attention to insulation between the spaces, because a family with multiple people doing multiple things, your dogs included, can make quite a noise.”

Murillo has noticed a change in attitude toward HVAC. “(Clients) are now more into radiant heating as opposed to delivering air through a traditional system. I think that is related to health, too. When you push air, you’re pushing dust and everything else into a room.”

Filters block only so much, Murillo adds, and need to be scrupulously maintained in sophisticated HVAC systems.

HOME FOR HEALTH

The new emphasis on health in the home extends to exercise, Brandon has noticed. “Home gyms or wellness rooms have been on the rise — not necessarily spaces that are stocked with equipment, but rather space for yoga, sauna, ice baths and free weights.”

Murillo thinks the changes he’s been seeing over the last year or so are beneficial, not just for us and our families, but for society as a whole.

“Before the pandemic, everyone thought it was a lot



Having access to a backyard became even more valuable.

DAVID TSAY PHOTOGRAPHY



Seeing their homes serving so many functions, people are taking a more holistic approach to design.

SARAH TRAMP PHOTOGRAPHY



Privacy, but with access to the outdoors, became the gold standard.

DAVID TSAY PHOTOGRAPHY

better to get together for work in person — you get a lot more done. Well, we learned that we can be effective and we can produce really good results while working from home. Who likes to commute?”

Home offices allow people to multitask and keep the work-life balance finely tuned, he adds. “We’ve become more flexible and adaptable, I think, in many aspects. Perhaps we’re even a little more patient.”

Vroom senses that her clients are thinking more holistically about what they need from their homes now that they serve so many more functions.

“I even had a client that (wanted) a quiet room. It was a triple-drywall, totally soundproofed spot. He said that he wanted it so that he could have total silence, just like one of those quiet rooms they have at a spa.” She laughs. “I’m not sure how often he’s going to use it, but it’s nice.”

It will be fascinating to see how some seemingly contradictory post-pandemic home design trends will play themselves out — greater privacy vs. closer connections to family, purpose-built and insulated spaces vs. melding the indoors with the outdoors. The only certainty is that Southern California is one of the only places in America where affluence, attitude and climate combine to allow these elements to work toward a harmonious coexistence.



There’s a new emphasis on health spaces.