



The nitty-gritting of renovating your house to make it Covid-compliant

With stay-at-home, the house has become an office, school, fitness zone, entertainment--all rolled into one. New needs that have arisen have created demand for upgrades and renovations

Namrata Kohli | New Delhi September 18, 2020 Last Updated at 13:30 IST



Getting the outside inside your home helps boost health. Getting ample sunlight not only improves your mood but also concentration. Source: Provence Estate, Gurugram by Dikshu C Kukreja

Covid has changed the design and aesthetics of the living space in more ways than one. While WFH and online classes have more or less become the new normal, there is an emerging trend in the way homes are being done up in order to accommodate WFH, study-from-home, and even fitness and entertainment.

Says Niranjana Hiranandani, Founder-Chairman, Hiranandani Group and National President, Naredco, "Anything that makes our lives and homes more efficient is worth investing into. Covid has brought a paradigm shift in the way we live with work from home (WFH). I know CEOs of companies who are happier with WFH. Those at mid management and junior level are not required to come to office every day. We have heard stories of companies saying that five years from now, they will only have 25 per cent of staff working from offices and the rest will work from home."

As a result, says Hiranandani, homes have suddenly become claustrophobic, not because they are small but because you have everyone working and studying out of the same place, at the same time. As a result, small earlier cubby spaces that looked like store rooms are being emptied out so that children can study. Balconies

have become essential. Terraces have been reclaimed from their neglected state. Furniture is undergoing a change. The difference between an ordinary society and an extraordinary one is getting highlighted now than ever before.

"In short people want to upgrade their homes, and work towards a better quality of life," Hiranandani adds.

Covid-compliant homes

Architects and designers say post-Covid homes will be characterised by the inclusion of home offices, spacious living areas, open-floor plans, and optimised entrances for safety and security.

Sonali Rastogi, Founder, Morphogenesis says, "In the post-pandemic era, the home office or study will be a permanent feature in all residential spaces." She suggests incorporating certain practices while redoing homes such as re-modelling them to have a washroom or a powder room at the entrance for people to use as soon as they step in; segregated entry areas to facilitate contactless deliveries; use of reconfigurable furniture to permit efficient space allocation.

The home is now a multifunctional space and there is a need for multi-use furniture. Dining tables are turning into office desks during the day. Beds are getting rolled up onto the wall and becoming part of the wall furniture instead of occupying the floor space. Almost every nook and corner of the house is being re-examined. However, it is the kitchens, bathrooms and study that are witnessing maximum upgrades, says Manish Rao, Head of Renovation Housejoy. "People are not going for luxury materials and finishes but for affordable and mid-range products that are higher on functionality than pure aesthetics. The apprehension about getting work done and allowing labour indoors, is now being replaced by a more pragmatic approach to get on with life and get homes Covid ready."

Many people want open, well-ventilated spaces. It's a good idea to invest in larger windows, lighter paints and getting the outside in. Says Dikshu C Kukreja, Managing Principal, C P Kukreja Architects, "The outbreak of a pandemic not only shook the global order but also reminded us that the basic tenets of residential design are the presence of natural light and ventilation. Designing our spaces to incorporate these elements has become absolutely vital. Large windows, doors, balconies and terraces help in cross ventilation and diluting any contaminated air, apart from allowing natural light to flush the interior spaces."

Home



These click-n-lock tiles by Welspun Flooring come with anti-microbial features and are grout-free, preventing the accumulation of germs. Source: Welspun

technology

Home technology can be optimised to make your abode safe and efficient. You could opt for contactless and touchless taps, lights, doors and blinds to localise the ‘touching’ of shared items indoors. Says Rastogi: “With the advent of technological innovations and the Internet of Things (IoT), one can effortlessly create minimal-touch post-Covid environments. The innovation in smart home tech will help minimise or localise the touching of shared control items such as electrical switches, TV remote control, blinds, automated door locks, etc. Additionally, community services such as elevators and common area lighting will be either voice- and sensor-activated or managed via smart phones; entrances will have sanitisation pods or chambers and doors with a foot-operated latch.”

Already, there are a few fully-automated smart homes in the market such as one by Embassy group. Says Reeza Sebastian, President, Residential Business, Embassy Group: “Embassy Edge smart homes in North Bengaluru are India’s first Alexa-enabled homes that let you operate your home with just your voice. We expect that the post-Covid era will see more of DigiHomes. The real estate market will tap this space. According to industry estimates, the Indian smart home market is currently valued at about \$893 million and is expected to grow by leaps and bounds in the next five years.”

Material matters

One should pay attention to material used while renovating homes. Kukreja says materials with non-porous surfaces, such as stainless steel, plastic and composites allow the Covid virus to live longer. Special care should be taken to routinely clean and disinfect walls and panels. Surprisingly, porous materials like wood, cardboard, fibres, cotton, and leather seem to be less supportive of the Covid-19 virus, which lasts only 24 hours on these surfaces.

Quite a few anti-microbial brands in the market claim to reduce surface transmission of bacteria and viruses. Welspun has come with a tile that has a special coating of silver ion and titanium oxide, which inhibits the growth and eradicates pathogens, including the human coronavirus, to the extent of 99.68 per cent. The

coating eliminates the virus when it comes in contact with the surface. Says Mahesh Shah, CEO-Domestic Business, Welspun Flooring Limited: “Consumers must give due importance to the role floors play as they are high interaction surfaces. Opting for tiles that come with antiviral and anti-fungal properties is one way to look at redoing your homes under this new normal. Our range of flooring not only has anti-viral, but also anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and anti-microbial properties. The click-n-lock tiles come with anti-microbial features and are grout-free preventing the accumulation of germs.”

Use of hands-free products can be incorporated under home renovation. Godrej Locks has launched arm-operated door handles (arm-operated door openers that work on any latch-less wood, or metal door) and foot-operated door opener, to open doors without touching them with hands. There are digital locks with contactless features such as Godrej’s Advantis Crystal. Since, there are no handles in this lock, one can easily use the RFID card to push open the door with one’s arm/body push. The cost of this lock for glass doors is Rs 25,000 while the one for wooden doors is Rs 12,500. A lot of their products are made in brass. Says Shyam Motwani, EVP and Business Head, Godrej Locks, “I would encourage people to look at brass solutions right from the main door, which is the first access to your house, and brass locks and handles to pull the doors anywhere in the house. Brass, as an alloy of copper and zinc, is the most effective retardant for active viruses to stay even a smaller duration of time.”

Upgrade to a new home

In certain cases, people are exploring or even buying new homes and shifting to bigger ones, and better gated communities. Anuj Puri, Chairman, ANAROCK Property Consultants says there is good demand for plotted developments across key cities like Bengaluru and Gurgaon. In the case of Bengaluru, Puri says that enquiries for larger homes have increased by 40 per cent with property seekers predominantly scouting for 3BHKs with an average 1,800 sq ft built-up area, as against the previously-preferred 2 BHKs. The current buyers are largely working couples with children, most of whom are pursuing WFH and e-learning options. These buyers will largely settle for peripheral locations to secure bigger, more affordable homes and a better lifestyle.

Grade-A developers are most sought after. Says Tanuj Shori CEO, Square Yards, a real estate brokerage firm with a national footprint. “During the past five months, top-20 developers have had a 70 per cent market share. People are going in only for Grade A developers and that has been the biggest behavioural change during the pandemic. One reason is that a lot of these transactions were digital, where a certain degree of trust must exist,” says Shori, adding that NRI interest has also improved in the past five months, with the volume rising from 25 per cent to almost 40 per cent.

Developers have been planning projects that can accommodate the changing needs of people. Says Embassy’s Sebastian: “Buyers, owing to the new normal of WFH now, will prefer homes that offer space to set up exclusive work stations and learning areas. To cater to this, apartment designs are now being transformed by turning hallways into stairs and stacked floors and opening up floor plans. With smart, thoughtful design solutions, space can be utilised optimally to cater to the demand for accommodating a multi-gen family. This will not only provide more dense construction and residences per acre, but will also keep the cost of construction down. Pantry and storage space, neutral colour schemes, choosing eco-friendly materials for construction like non-toxic paint, Energy Star appliances and LEED-compliant light fixtures in and around the home, a disinfecting area to curb any potential contamination, and most importantly, integrated smart technology-enabled appliances will increasingly gain preference. Outdoor space or a front porch will also get added to the list of preferences, now that socializing with neighbours will need social distancing.”

Architects and designers believe that the post-Covid home will juxtapose older traditions and ethos with modern materials and technology. Everyone is now looking at his or her current and prospective residences with a brand-new perspective, having survived many days stuck indoors. The home is now a fertile ground where every family member is coming up with interesting ideas. This has been the ‘wish I had...’ moment for many.

Table: What it would cost you to make your home Covid-compliant

Section of house	Type of renovation/upgrade	Cost (Rs)

Walls	Whitewash/Luxury paint for a 3BHK 1,400 sq ft home	25,000-45,000
Kitchen	Kitchen renovations involve changing existing cabinets with water-resistant wood in newer designs and concepts, bigger baskets and double sink, greater storage, tall units. Glossy laminates cost Rs 70-100 per sq ft while sinks cost Rs 5,000-12,000. Kitchen renovation will approx. cost Rs 1,000 per sq feet	1,00,000-1,25,000 for a 100 sq ft kitchen
Bathroom	A 50-sq ft bathroom with glass partition (@Rs 120/sq ft) will cost Rs 10,000-12,000 while wall and floor tiles (basic ones start from Rs 35/sq ft) another Rs 10,000	22,000
Study	Converting a full room other than master bedroom to an office with two study tables, two chairs, bulletin board, library, with paint etc	25,000-60,000
Flooring	Tiles in a section of the house such as living room or dining area or bedroom	Vitrified tiles Rs 90-110 per sq ft
Home Automation	Smart home solutions that control fans, ACs, geyser, light, TV sets, security systems	11,000-45,000
Windows	Larger glass windows and sliding door: Rs 250-500 per sq feet, depending upon whether UPVC or wooden	10,000-14,000 per room
Locks and handles	From basic steel locks to brass ones and contactless solutions. Eg Godrej Universal Brass Key at Rs 299, Godrej Arm pull handle and Godrej Foot Pull Rs 499; Digital locks Godrej's Advantis Crystal for glass doors is Rs 25,000 while for wooden doors is Rs 12,500	250-25,000

Source: Market Research