



Mixing business with pleasure, pleasure with business - part 2 - by Dan Castner

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Dan Castner

This is part two of three. At home on weekends, I enjoy spending time outdoors, taking long walks, and sitting by a backyard fire pit. I also enjoy learning about and tasting red wine. During COVID, these activities either revolved around a bubble of neighbors we formed in our own village, or we forced them to take place with our friends and family over Zoom since quarantine wouldn't allow face-to-face.

So what did we learn?

Sabrina Pagani, Workplace Strategist at Savills, insists that new office designs are starting to take on more of the comforts of home, such as softer and multiple options for seating, coffee, snacks, quiet zones, and tech-free areas. The desire to be outdoors in nature is seen in biophilic design. Pagani notes that interior offices are incorporating garden paths connecting interior office departments, which act like unique neighborhoods. In many cases, walls and hard materials are being replaced with plants and organic materials to buffer spaces. Plant watering, watering systems, and third-party plant maintenance are becoming more customary procedures among office facilities managers.

Furniture is evolving as the workplace adapts to new behaviors. Identical desks and standard conference rooms are being replaced with a variety of furniture types to accommodate the diverse workforce. During the pandemic, some of us were more comfortable working from our bedrooms, while others in kitchens or living rooms. Office desks are beginning to reflect this variety. The idea of traditional conference rooms is giving way to multiple configurations, but typically with smaller in-person groups. A/V and acoustics are even more critical, with most meetings taking place with some portion being remote.

Marc Spector, owner of Spector Group, discussed the evolution of design in workplace in the Anti-Architect Podcast, episode 49. He dubbed the new employee environment "Lifespace", a hybrid of both the digital and the physical where people come together to connect, collaborate, and create. Spector noted that not only should productivity and engagement be considered in office design, but individual happiness has to be a component of any workplace strategy's success.

Beyond the design of the space, some workplaces are making an effort to change habits and promote the healthier lifestyles people have become accustomed to at home. Evelyn Lee, head of Workplace Innovation at Slack, notes that while their teams remain predominantly remote, they encourage their teams to "Talk and Walk" when they meet in person. With many remote, the need for large conference rooms is being replaced with the need for better defined rules of etiquette for those on camera for conference calls, limiting consecutive meetings, and insisting on break times and blocks set aside in the calendar for heads-down activity.

Part three appears in the May 14th NYREJ, to continue reading [click here](#)

Dan Castner is a principal + life science practice director with Mancini Duffy, Manhattan, NY.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540