

Neighborhoods Redefined

HOW LOCKDOWN REDESIGNED THE
IDEA OF BEING ALONE TOGETHER



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“I’m really asking,
what exactly does the
property management
agency exist for?
Are they a service
agency or a regulatory
authority? Who can
give me an official and
accurate reply about
COVID-19 protocols?”

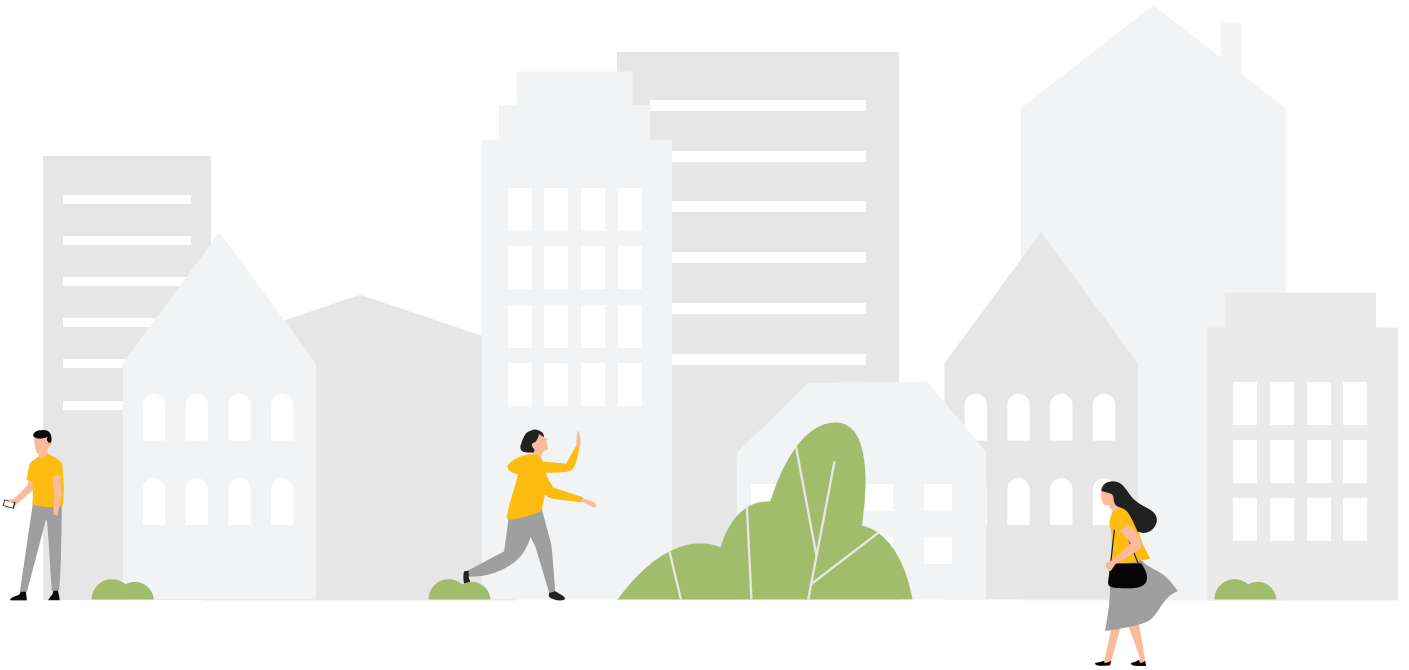
—Chinese pop singer Li Ronghao, from a post on Weibo,
which received 1.16 million likes, 72,000 comments,
and 49,000 reposts in May.

INTRODUCTION

When the pandemic hit, our cities and communities changed, almost overnight. During COVID-19, much of daily life slowed down or came to a standstill. Experiences we once took for granted—going to the office or school, eating in restaurants, visiting with family and friends in public places—suddenly became risks to our collective health.

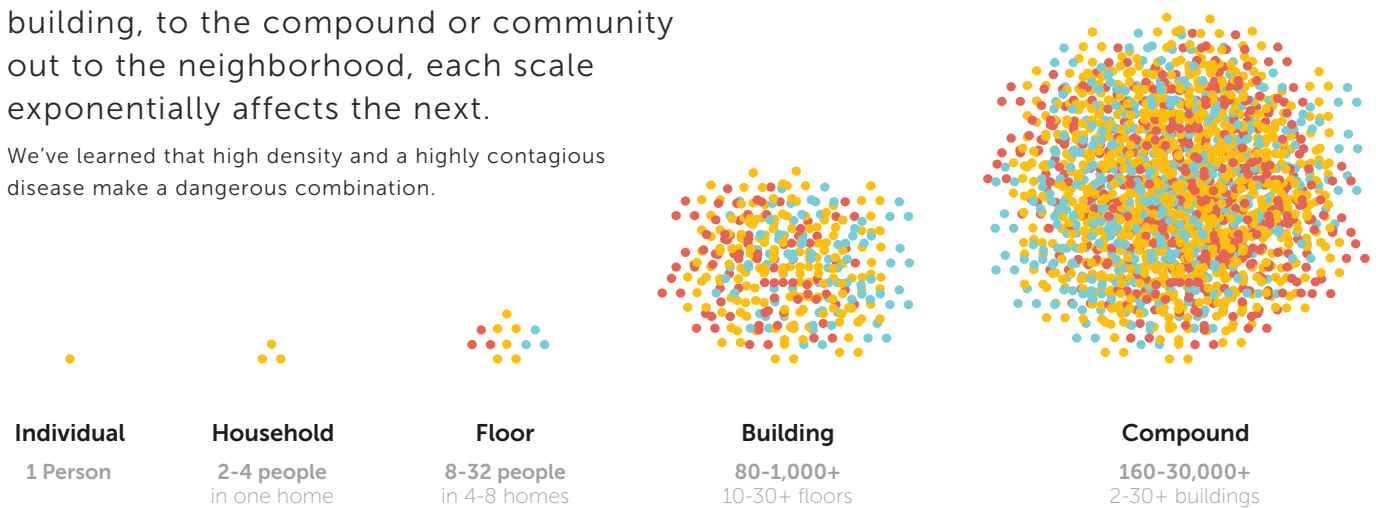
Our daily journeys into residential neighborhoods, buildings, and homes have been altered, augmented, and transformed. In this new reality, the way we design experiences must shift to meet our new expectations around hygiene, safety, security, and comfort.

There's much to learn here, particularly for those who design and manage communities. We looked to dense residential buildings and communities in Asia to frame and understand opportunities for new approaches to property management and development in the future.



From individual residents to households aggregating to each floor, to each building, to the compound or community out to the neighborhood, each scale exponentially affects the next.

We've learned that high density and a highly contagious disease make a dangerous combination.



A Perspective from Asia

We spoke with a cross section of residents living in high-density buildings and communities in Singapore, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. They ranged from individuals living in a new city, to families living with young children or elderly parents.

We interviewed property managers, who are close to the operations and facilities management side of the business, to understand their pain points and challenges during this health crisis.

We ideated with our global network of subject matter experts (APAC, US, and EU) in spatial design, IoT, and smart city technologies, who were also living through the lockdown, to come up with concepts that would resonate with residents within and beyond Asia.

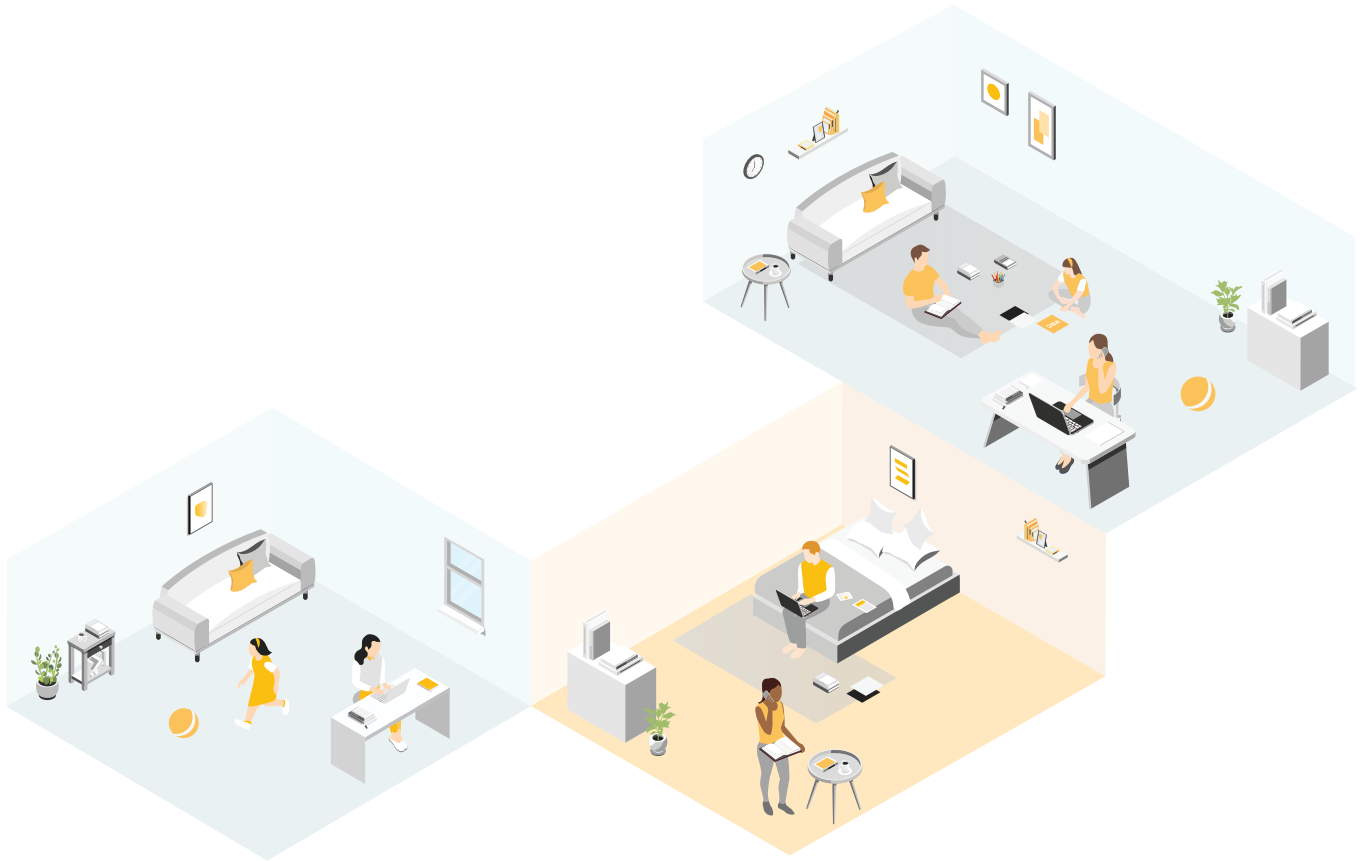
Here's what we learned.



HOME IS THE NEW CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

The ways we live, work, learn, and play are intertwined. In our next normal, interactions with others—in our households and communities—require clear boundaries. Boundaries have become increasingly important because they create separation between work, social, leisure, and personal time. When many people in a household are always at home, boundaries become the key to a happy life.

Now is the time to design intuitive and effective boundaries in our homes.



“As everyone starts to work from home, I have to make sure my husband isn’t going to use the ‘meeting’ space at the same time as I do. Sometimes, the room I intend to use for calls gets hogged by my son because he doesn’t want to leave, and I have to find alternative spots in order to work.”

—Xuecheng, parent in Shanghai

“I used to have more defined boundaries of work in the office, private life, and leisure but now I get distracted by watching YouTube videos while working from home.”

—Yoshi, parent in Tokyo

“There’s a table in the bedroom which I never used before, but now I’m just using it for Zoom or when I need some privacy.”

—Priya, parent in Hong Kong

KEEPING DENSITY DESIRABLE IN THE FACE OF RISK

Before the pandemic, many people chose to live in dense residential communities because of the convenience of living in an urban center—the proximity to work and school, and the quality of shared resources and amenities.

Today, residents are chiefly concerned about the invisible health and safety risks of every shared touchpoint and interaction they encounter getting from the street into their homes.

They look to property management for protection. Visibility, transparent communication, and the ability to respond swiftly are increasingly important for people to feel secure in their buildings and compounds.

At the same time, there's a tension between the need for heightened security and the desire for the anonymity and privacy of living in a large community.

It's time to redefine the roles for property managers.



“Our compound has no registration management for night visitors, and the attitude is too relaxed, so I am worried about the whole safety management of our community.”

—Xuecheng, parent in Shanghai

“There was no way for us to know if there is an actual COVID-19 case until we were informed by the government about our residents being infected. We didn't know in advance. When it happened, we had to switch out our entire ground staff to put them on home quarantine.”

—Alvin, property manager in Hong Kong

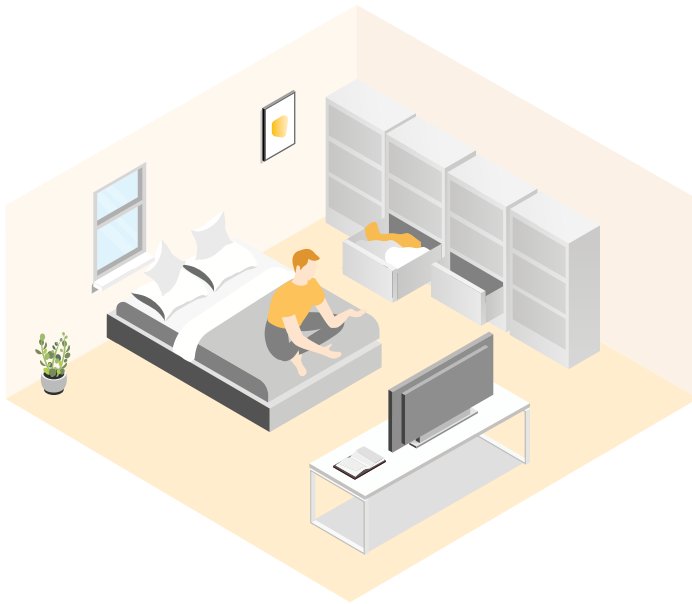
“While I appreciate the use of smart technology by our property managers to keep residents safe, I am also worried when they use technology that [is] too advanced, e.g. facial recognition, as I'm not sure if the data collected will be stored safely.”

—Meiting, senior in Shanghai

FEELING NORMAL WITH THE NEXT NORMAL

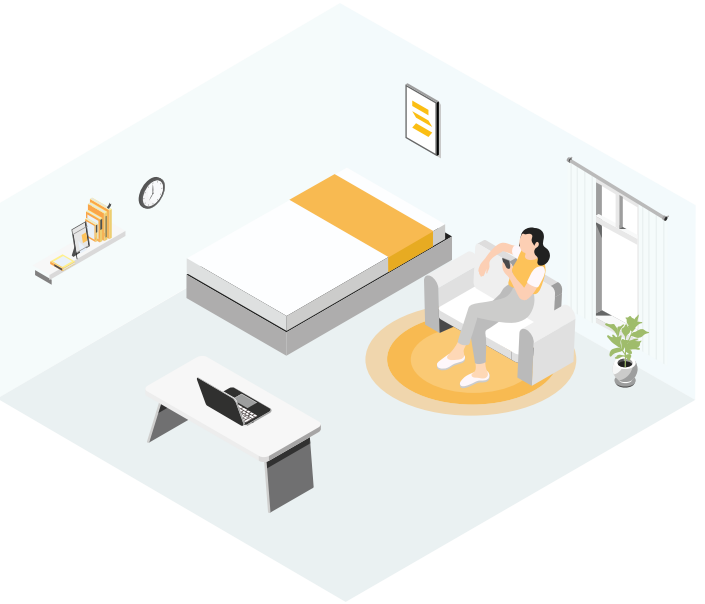
Keeping residents healthy and sane requires a whole new host of high-touch services—with touchless delivery.

As people isolate into the smaller worlds of their homes, obsessiveness has become a standard coping mechanism. They're clocking excessive hours of online shopping, cleaning, binge watching, gaming, or other activities to curb their anxiety.



With more people spending time at home, residents need better ways to interface with the world beyond. Finding, curating, and vetting the network of services becomes a valuable benefit to them.

Convenience is not good enough anymore. Residents today expect elevated amenities and services to feel cared for.



“...I’ve also ordered a lot of books, toys, crafts from online companies and [they] just appear on my doorstep...”

—Sharon, parent in Singapore

“During the quarantine period, residents can contact the property staff through the intercom, and the property staff can understand [in a timely manner] the needs of the residents and take action to help them.”

—Xia, realtor in Shanghai

“Community service is very important when it is difficult to go out. It would be better to have a shop, selling food, or healthcare services in the community.”

—Lin, single in Shanghai

THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE REAL THING

Today's screen-time levels have risen to new highs. Everything that can be digital and/or virtual is happening or is being tried. Digital channels easily address our functional needs of communication, entertainment, and consumption.

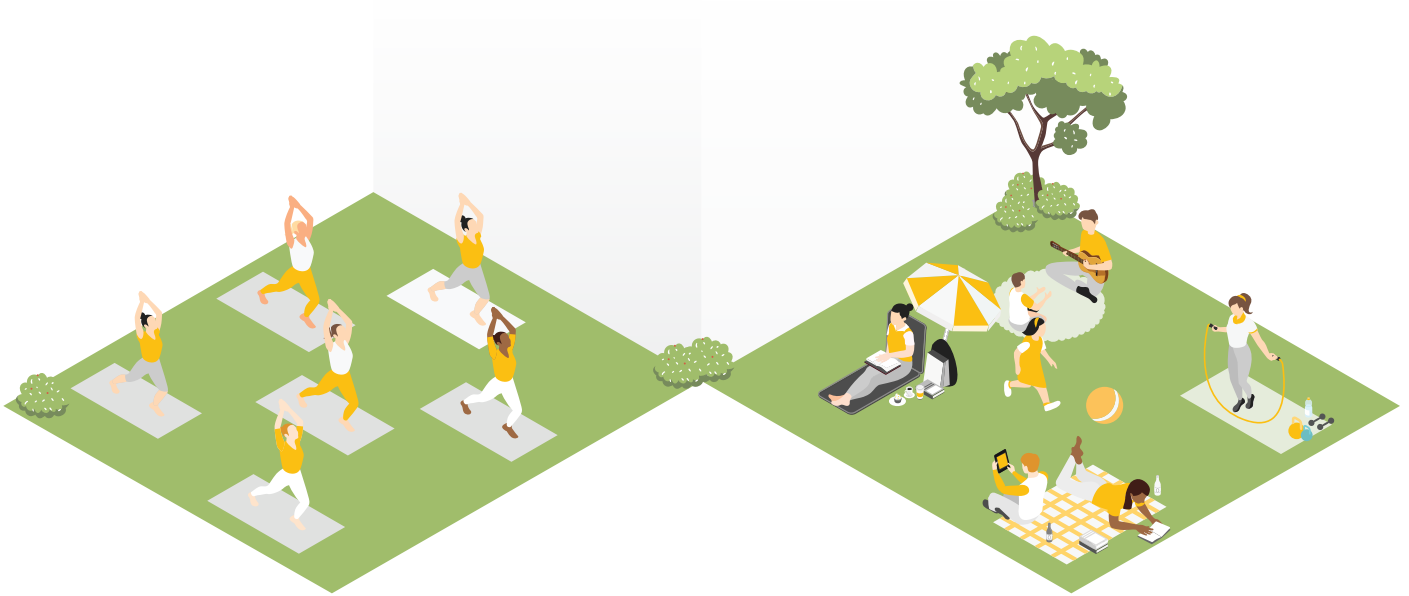
However, some things are irreplaceable.

At the end of the day we're still human, with an innate need for physical, sensory connections with each other and with the natural world.

These connections became scarce during COVID-19, and they remain scarce.

For residents of high-density urban properties, safe and uncrowded access to open spaces and outdoor leisure areas has become, and will likely remain, a key consideration when evaluating where to live.

Providing safe shared access to indoor and outdoor spaces will become a key requirement for residential planning.



"I don't feel like I'm a part of society during COVID-19. I miss the interactions that I had when I shared an apartment with others in the past."

—Devin, single in Tokyo

"I try to spend more time on the balcony, in order to get fresh air without having to encounter crowds at parks."

—Emma, parent in Singapore

"I hope there are more windows in the building to ventilate as well as green plants in the public space of the buildings. When I can't go out, I want to be able to experience the natural air outside."

—Lin, single in Shanghai

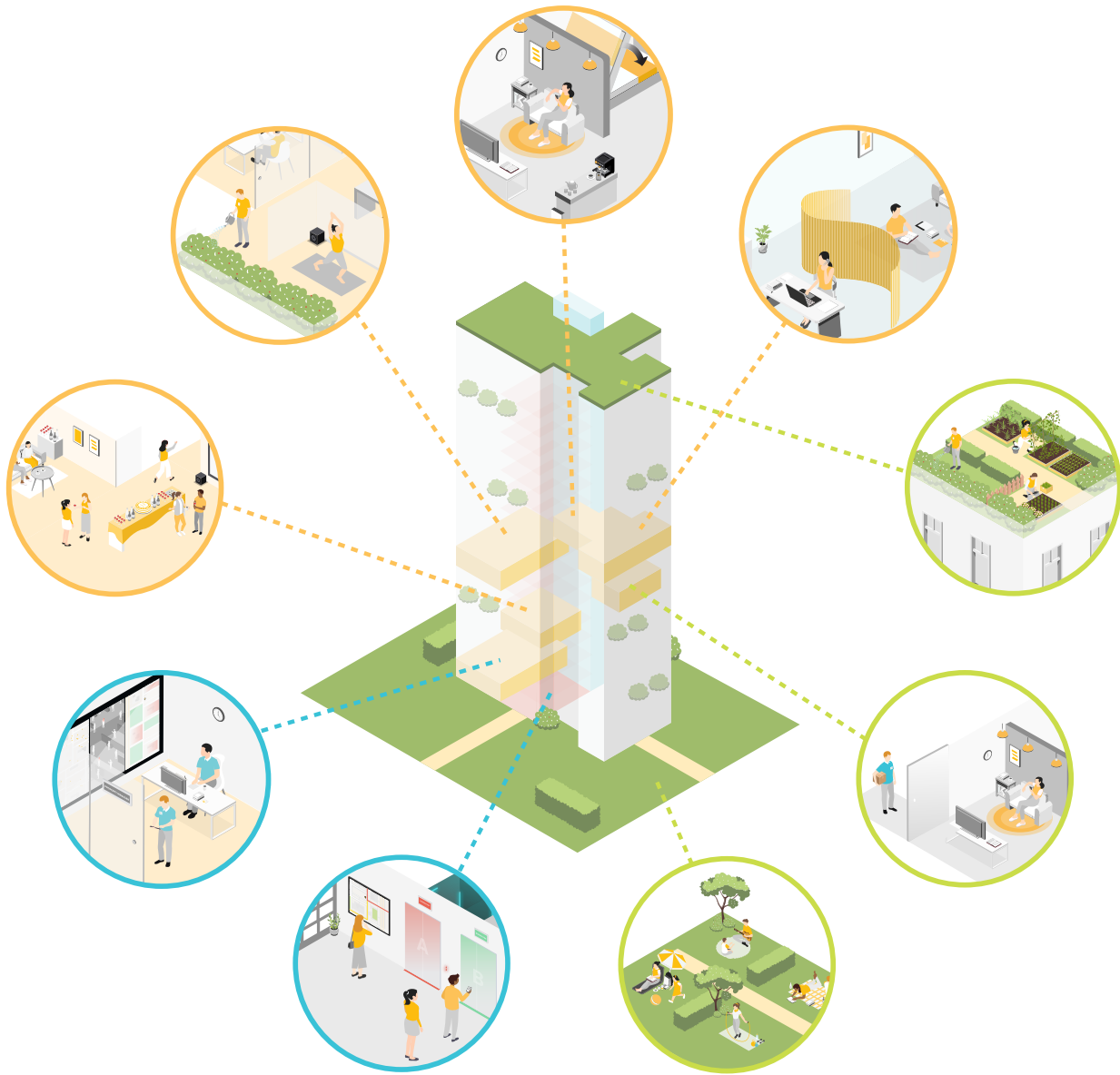
Time to Make a Change

Today, many people are reconsidering the price of urban living. When the lifestyle benefits associated with the city are no longer viable, it's easy to want out in the short term.

At the same time, once people leave lockdown, the next normal of urban living must feel safe. Residents must be able to trust their property management to create the right conditions and processes for healthy, safe, and comfortable social distancing measures.

We see three opportunity areas that will enable property managers and developers to move forward successfully.

Opportunity Areas



01

How might we redesign residential spaces with the necessary flexibility to transform and cater to different work, learning, social, and leisure needs?

02

How might we enable better health and safety measures—such as tracking and communication of health, safety, and hygiene matters—to protect residents without invading their privacy?

03

How might we support new habits of comfort while encouraging attention to physical and mental health?



How might we redesign residential spaces with the necessary flexibility to transform and cater to different work, learning, social, and leisure needs?

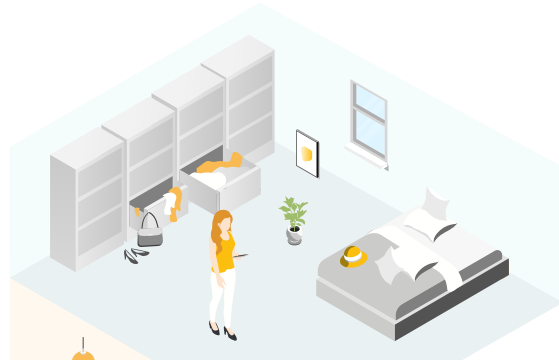
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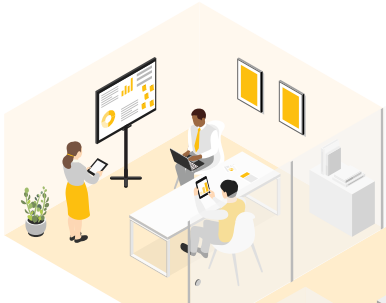
“Turn Up” for Work and “Turn Down” for life

With many people getting used to working from home, the trend will likely continue after lockdown ends. For them, creating barriers around work and other parts of life may require different designs around rituals and sensorial shifts. These will be enabled by new spatial considerations that are powered by technology.

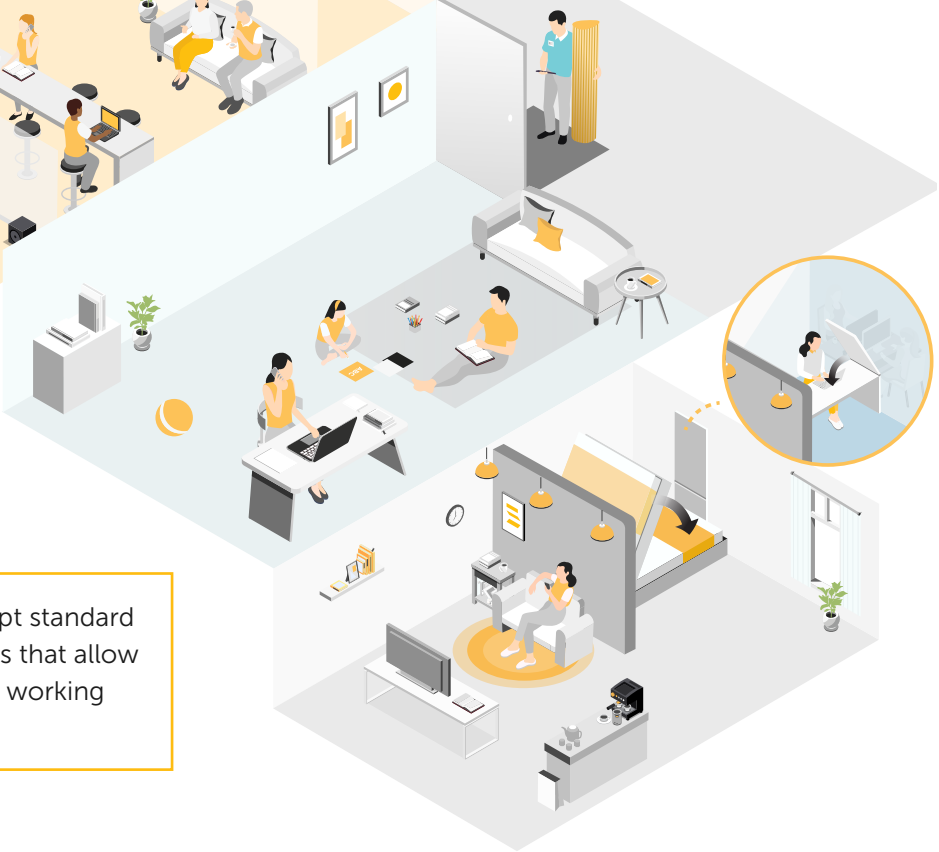
Extra rooms managed by the property on each floor or block can be rented to host visiting guests or business associates.



Optional free-standing partitions can be rented and delivered to residents' doors.



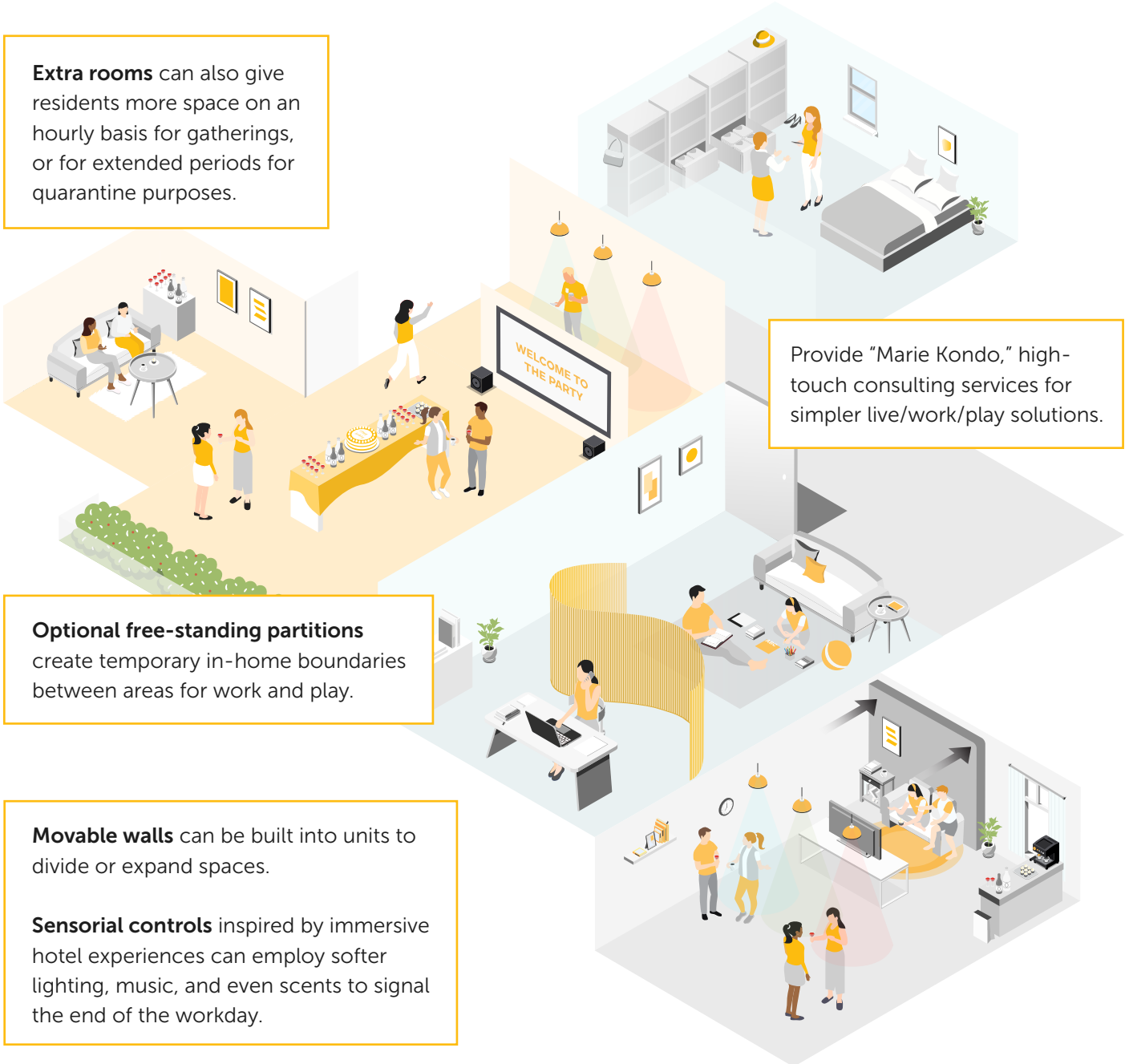
Pre-packaged solutions can adapt standard units with furniture configurations that allow for different needs and modes of working and living.




Stretch, Optimize, and Grow Spaces

As some residents settle into long-term remote work, they'll need spatial changes to their apartments. This might involve redesigning current spaces or finding ways to flexibly use them.

At the same time, new developments will need to consider iterating standard apartment layouts to enable residents' new needs.





How might we enable better health and safety measures—such as tracking and communication of health, safety, and hygiene matters—to protect residents without invading their privacy?

“While I appreciate the use of smart technology by our property managers to keep residents safe, I am also worried when they use technology that [is] too advanced, e.g. facial recognition, as I’m not sure if the data collected will be stored safely.”

—Meiting, senior in Shanghai

How might we support new habits of comfort while encouraging attention to physical and mental health?

"...I've also ordered a lot of books, toys, crafts from online companies and [they] just appear on my doorstep..."

—Sharon, parent in Singapore

Regulated Rituals and Distributed Amenities

Many residential buildings and complexes currently centralize their amenities at the ground level or in the basement levels—in lobbies, plazas, greenspaces, or exercise facilities. With the continuation of social distancing, having scaled-back amenities in multiple areas and levels, distributed throughout buildings and communities, may allow for smaller groups of neighbors to share facilities in safety and comfort.



Residential Concierge

Coming out of lockdown, residents are much more careful about the health and safety measures regarding service providers. In addition, many will be less inclined to venture out of the building or complex for “nice to have” experiences.

Bringing in vetted services to residents will be highly appreciated and provide that extra differentiating touch.

Depending on the resident mix, property managers could curate a mix of longer-term services with shorter-term pop-ups, reflecting seasons and holidays throughout the year.

Partner with service providers to create a convenient platform to connect with residents:

- Telemedicine, pharmacy, and counseling
- Farmers and other specialty markets
- Local food and grocery delivery service
- Transportation services
- Pet services
- Beauty and wellness services



Develop a portal for providing trusted rental of:

- Exercise equipment
- Kids’ toys, games, crafts, books
- Office furniture and equipment
- Cooking gear and equipment

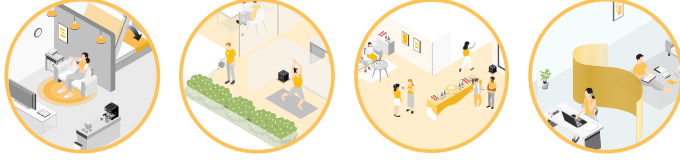
Such a portal might be offered in partnership with local external providers.

High-Density Living Enabled by Design & Technology

How might we help property managers and developers design and implement these or similar ideas to improve the lived experience for existing and potential residents?

Making It Real

Space & Experience Design creates boundaries for better living



Now

- Free-standing partitions for rent
- Pre-packaged configurable furniture solutions
- Sensorial mood controls in units and shared spaces

Future

- Design and build units with movable partitions
- Extra rentable rooms
- Distributed amenities and facilities

Technology gathers and reports data



Now

- IoT sensors monitor and report density, traffic, disinfection status, etc.
- Cellular enabled sensors promote social distancing

Future

- Data-driven property management and facilities maintenance and servicing
- Anonymized contact tracing data

Digital Platforms connect residents and community



Now

- "Concierge" platform for residents to:
- Check status of IoT sensor-gathered data
- Rent furniture, toys, and equipment
- Book facilities and activities
- Place orders with merchants (e.g. restaurants, grocers)
- Schedule services (e.g. doctor, trainer, "Marie Kondo," shop visits)

Future

- Data-driven insights and dashboards to monitor and assess usage, demand, fit, and satisfaction of services
- Loyalty initiatives to incentivize tenants to use services in the ecosystem

Conclusion

This is neither the first, nor will it be the last, pandemic to affect people living in dense urban conditions. The hard lessons we learn from COVID-19 will have lasting effects on communal living. Using a human-centered approach to spatial, service, and technological innovation will help us design for our current uncertain moment and prepare for the next normal once the crisis is over.

Now is the time to envision future typologies that will enable more natural ways to live, work, and play for residents. Taking novel ideas, designs, and services forward will create opportunities for more human-to-human and human-to-nature connections. Setting up and leveraging available or emerging technologies for new methods and processes will provide better protection and communication of risks. Designing new typologies and extensions of the home to meet new needs will become important innovations. All of which, we believe, will make city living even better on the other side of the pandemic.

EPAM Continuum integrates business, experience, and technology consulting focused on accelerating breakthrough ideas into meaningful impact.

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