

How developers can bring wellbeing concepts to the housing market Comment 29.05.20

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With public places and workspaces embracing the wellness trend, housing developers need to play catch up, says Grant Lipton, co-founder of Great Marlborough Estates.

As COVID-19 tightens its grip over daily life, encouraging positive mental and physical health during this period of confinement and isolation has become increasingly critical.

Both the government and the business community have taken steps to ensure that life under lockdown does not negatively impact the wellbeing of those who are furloughed or working from home.

However, even before Coronavirus, the corporate world was beginning to take the wellbeing of employees seriously. Wellness, the trendier term for wellbeing, has gone from being a hashtag on Instagram, to informing HR strategies and the design and fit-out of workspaces. That's why facilities that were once the preserve of gyms and spas, such

as running tracks, climbing walls and yoga rooms, can now be found in new office developments as companies realise happier, healthier employees are more productive and more likely to stay.

Yet until recently, wellbeing had barely been a consideration in the residential market. A number of build-to-rent landlords and student accommodation providers are now leading the way by putting wellbeing at the heart of their operational strategies, yet in the for-sale market, wellbeing is virtually absent from the conversation.

However, with lockdown bringing the importance of our wellbeing at home into sharp relief, developers need to step up and create places to live that promote personal wellbeing. Fundamentally, this means embracing high quality design centred around the four pillars of light, materiality, colour and green space.

According to research from the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), natural light is key to improving our wellbeing because it encourages normal sleep-wake patterns. Where possible, homes should be built to be south facing, using large windows that open up the space and draw light into the room, and with gardens - or if in an apartment block, balconies - that face the sun. Warm artificial lighting should be used as a complement, not replacement, to natural daylight to create homes that are cosy, comfortable and calm around the clock.



The materials that are used in and around the home are also vitally important. Clean lines, soft angles and gentle curves foster a benevolent spatiality, while materials such as timber, cotton, marble and slate create a more natural atmosphere. At our Clay Street

development, we used textured brick highlighted with rich timber, for depth of character and a welcoming feel.

The visual aesthetics of a home are often highly subjective – we don't all necessarily want to live in places that align to Feng Shui ideals - but a sense of comfort should be the main aim. Homes should be designed to encourage personalisation, but there is a big difference between harsh minimalism and sleek urbanity.

According to Karen Haller's *Little Book of Colour*, soft tonal palettes also contribute to productivity, happiness and physical and mental health. Signature colour themes and ample wall space for hanging artwork and decorations bring life and warmth into a home.

However, no design feature is as important as green space. Biophilia has become a hugely prevalent trend in recent years, and with good reason. Fresh air and green vegetation are clinically proven to reduce stress, improve memory retention, reduce respiratory problems, and boost creativity. At Regent's Crescent, we've designed vertical green landscaping and made extensive use of glass to bring light and sense of connection to nature. And for our West Village development in Notting Hill we used shrubs, flower borders, hedges and creeping plants to soften the exterior.

These aspects of design are essential to the health and wellbeing of our purchasers. For real estate developers and investors this is a huge opportunity to provide a high-quality product and build resilience in the market post-Covid-19.