

The Rise of the Plus Space in Apartment Living

By Tom Brink, Vice President



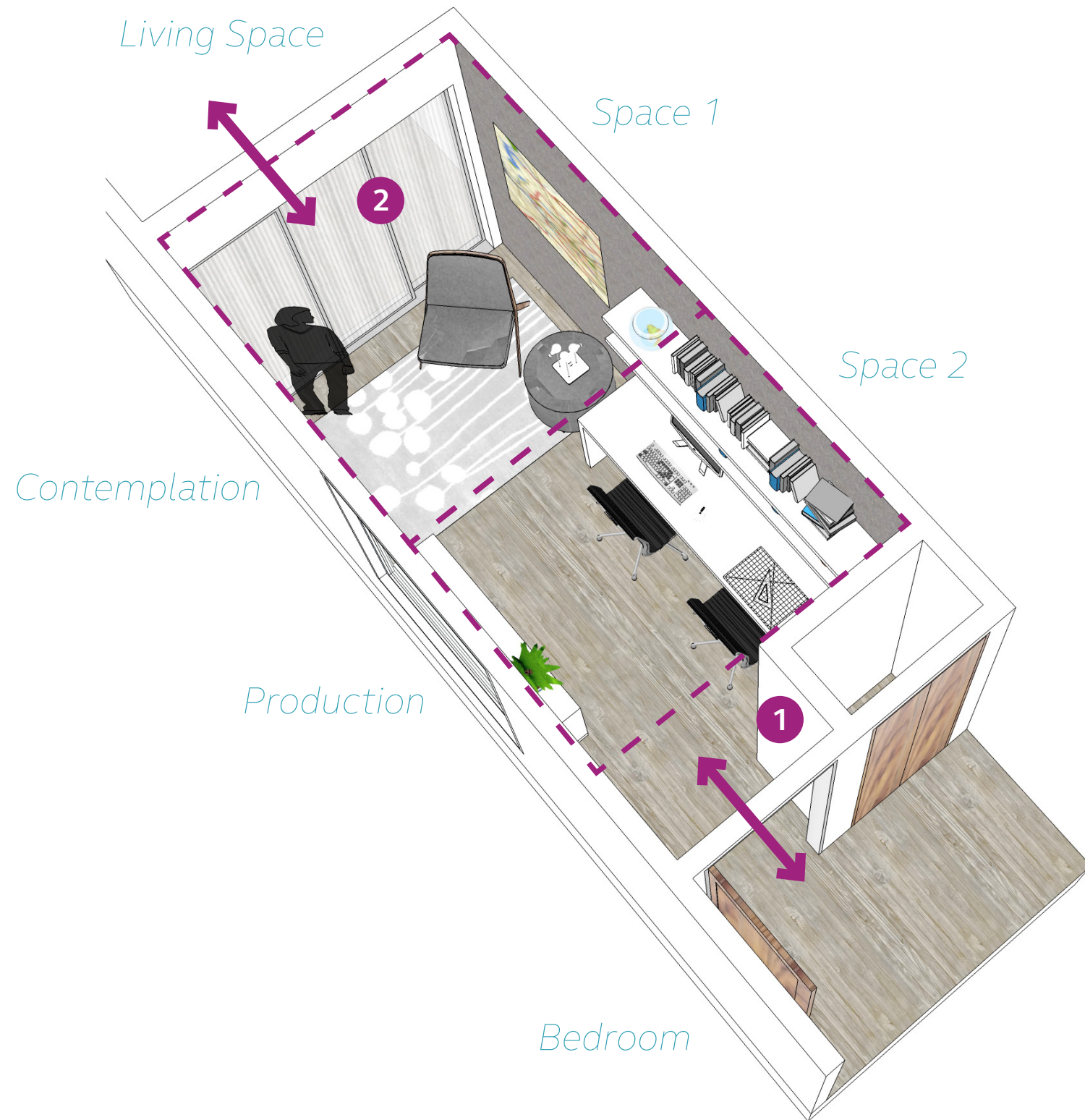


The View
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The kids are tugging at your sleeve, the dog is barking and your smart phone is ringing. Just another day at the office -- in the era of working from home. CRTKL's Residential team has been thinking a lot about the effect of the coronavirus on multi-family design, and one of the key implications has more to do with the nature of work than it does the nature of apartment living. Whatever the longer term effects of COVID-19 are, many see multiple advantages of the Work From Home model-- including reduced employee commute and client travel time; lowered peak demand for transit; lower parking demands; reduced pollution and noise; as well as other environmental and health benefits.



As the trend for apartment design grows smaller and smaller due to a more urban-oriented lifestyle, for most people, finding space to accommodate working from home has become a greater challenge. One of the key concerns is having a dedicated space separate from the rest of the home. Not everyone can simply move to a spare bedroom or renovated basement. Open-floor plans with homeschooled kids, or a shared home with roommates or a multi-generational family present significant Work From Home challenges.



Flexible Design for Increased Productivity

What we've learned in these last weeks is that freedom of space creates new productivity. Whenever space is at a premium, our ideal is to design flexible spaces; even our two most time-intensive daily activities-- sleep and work only use around eight hours each-- a third of the day, meaning it's critical to design flexibility into our homes.

We like to envision a place called the Plus Space off the main living area, with doors that allow for two smaller spaces, or one large space, as desired. This can serve as your WFH space, media room or guest bedroom. translucent glass doors and other translucent materials can create the appearance of an expansive space, while ensuring acoustical privacy. Sliding or pocket doors are best, as they have the least impact on furniture layouts. And in our senior living units, for easy hands-free movement, we consider looking to how retail handles the automatic sliding glass door such as in a 7-Eleven.

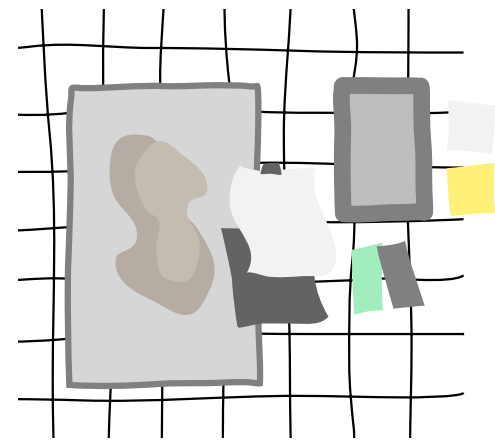
1 Bedroom closet pushes the bedroom door away from the main space

2 Sliding translucent doors act as a backdrop to the room for those exiting the bedroom.

Environment Matters

Whether you're sitting at a desk or in a comfortable chair, when you're working from home, you make the most of what you have. Speaking of chairs: an ergonomically designed one is a must. A large countertop still comes in handy for laying out documents, organizing images or spreading out to tackle a big project. And of course, a large wall-mounted flat screen for Zoom and Microsoft Teams meetings allows greater flexibility of movement in that space not being tethered, as it were, to a tiny laptop screen.

Studies have shown that natural light and outside views contribute to workplace efficiency, so having your work from home place near a window, a balcony or small terrace can improve your work activity compared to being in a confined space. Working outside on a nice day, sliding open a glass door to extend your work environment, stepping out to check the weather or simply getting a breath of fresh air and saying hello to your neighbors can all be healthful benefits of WFH.



Giant Wall for Pinning Ideas, Inspirations, Goals and Accomplishments, all to be seen in one spot



Giant Table or Spot for Gathering and Production



Spot for Contemplation



Storage for anything that is to be Hidden Away



Natural Light



Flatscreen TV for Conference Calls



Technology, Technology, Technology

In addition to the physical elements, having the right technological set up in your WFH space is key. This largely depends on what you do. Some people like a desktop, others prefer laptops for portability- with a docking station to multiple monitors. No longer is a bookcase filled with reference books necessary (unless that's your video background) and since storage is in the cloud, no one needs filing cabinets and lots of dated paper taking up valuable space.

A strong, consistent connection to Wi-Fi is a must- including a remote printer. As VR and other technologies advance, the potential to further modify your workspace into an environment you can control and enjoy as you work becomes more and more realistic, and the possibilities become endless. Work From Mars, anyone?



Moving Toward the Future

As the impacts of the coronavirus are documented over the next five to ten years, the effects of Work From Home may have had the biggest effect on the home becoming the preferred workplace of the 21st-century. No longer pandemic-driven, our homes and our workplaces will likely merge— forever changing the nature of our neighborhoods, our cities and our lives.



Tom Brink

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Tom has spent his award-winning career designing some of the most innovative retail and residentially-driven mixed-use projects in the world. His extensive experience with retail design and the spectrum of multi-family project types, from townhouses to high-rises and renovations, give Tom a thorough understanding of issues and trends across both industries. His familiarity with urban design and the public process is at the heart of his potent ability to conceive highly-effective project solutions that not only deliver complex design programs, but further enhance his clients' commercial strategies.

CallisonRTKL, a global architecture, planning and design practice, began over seven decades ago and has evolved into a cultural agency to advance positive outcomes in our local and global communities. Through a human-centric design approach our team addresses the imperatives of resiliency, wellbeing and technology and their influence in the built environment.

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Cover Image: Eleven33 Oak Park, Oak Park, Illinois