

MANSION

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Friday, October 23, 2020 | M1

Creating the Modern Work-From-Home Home

The pandemic may not last forever, but housing developers are betting some portion of the work-at-home revolution will remain: replacing movie theaters and social lounges with Zoom-call rooms, socially distant co-working spaces and even a TikTok studio

By KATY McLAUGHLIN

WHEN RIC BUCHER, a television and radio basketball commentator and writer who is a familiar face on Fox Sports, finished a roughly \$40,000 office remodel in his Half Moon Bay, Calif., home, he wondered if it was worth it. His workspace, completed about three years ago, was soundproofed, professionally wired, attractively lit, and rigged with professional-grade cameras and microphones. The idea was that if he ever needed to record a podcast or tape a television segment from home, he could.

“It was a very expensive proposition, and we asked, ‘are we doing the right thing?’” Mr. Bucher, 59, said of conversations with his wife, Corrine Bucher. Then the pandemic hit. Now Mr. Bucher is able to tape and record studio-quality segments for national Fox Sports shows and for his podcast. “There is no question that it has been a huge benefit to my career,” he said.



The podcast studios at BeDTLA, Los Angeles.

PHOTO: MARC SZABO STUDIOS/THE SOUFERIAN (RENDERING)

Mr. Bucher’s renovation, with its focus on making him look and sound good on camera, may have once seemed specific to his unique profession. But today, developers and home builders believe that the future, even after the virus is under control, will involve a lot more work from home, videoconferencing, and remote collaborating.

To accommodate this new landscape, they are crossing out blueprints that allocated space to movie theaters, game rooms, or lounges, and are using the square footage for co-working spaces, Zoom-call rooms, podcast recording areas and TikTok studios. They are wiring garden areas and pool decks with commercial-grade Wi-Fi and USB ports, and designing in-home offices with separate entrances, soundproofing and souped-up air filtration.

And while some city denizens are abandoning multiunit living for the moment, developers are betting that those who remain, and

Please turn to page M12

MANSION

Work From Home

Continued from page M1

those who return, will be attracted to a package of work-from-home amenities.

In downtown Los Angeles, Behzad Souferian's company bought a 606-unit rental building a year ago and rebranded it as the flagship of his new BeDTLA brand.

The building is 95% occupied, with rents ranging from about \$1,800 to \$3,500 a month, he said. But he is rebranding it to reflect what he believes are the needs of this generation of renters. By the end of the year, he will launch a TikTok Studio, a roughly 100-square-foot room with camera-ready lighting, tripod stand and mirrors. The small space will be ideal for one or two people to entertain themselves making TikToks—all the more important “now that bars and nightlife are closed,” Mr. Souferian said.

The building will also have two podcast studios. A space that was a social lounge will be converted into five to 10 work stations where people can be socially distanced from others, he said. There will be no additional charge to use the work-from-home amenities, he said.

“It's not that we have so many podcasters and influencers in our community now, but we want to create the facilities for these people” to attract them, Mr. Souferian said.

As the pandemic has developed, many building amenities have been closed—sometimes by state or municipal order, and sometimes by building managers themselves. Real-estate companies said that they will comply with regulations and follow the science to determine when common spaces can open or what kind of mitigation—such as limiting capacity—is wise.

Co-working space, a concept devised in a pre-Covid world, may sound ill-suited to today's environment. Developers said that while the virus is in full force, distancing, plastic dividers and other mitigation can be deployed to make it safe.

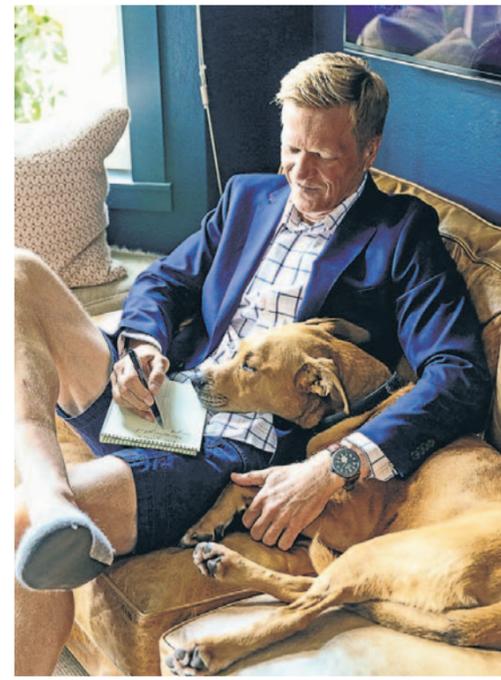
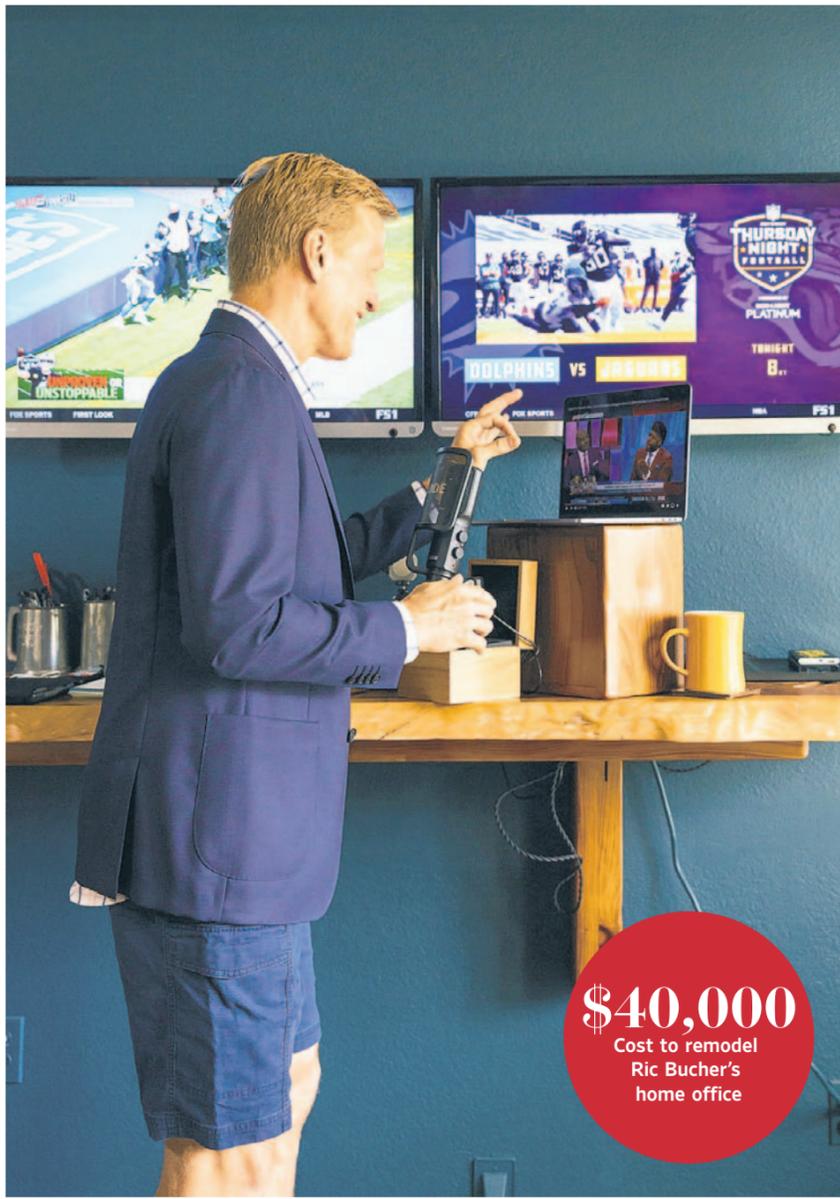
In August, Kassie Meiler, 25, moved into the Society Las Olas building in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., which opened in May. The founder of a social-media agency, she calculated that \$1,895 a month for a junior one-bedroom was a good deal because she would not have to spend up to \$350 renting an office in a co-working building.

In Las Olas, Ms. Meiler leaves her unit each day to use a conference room for hours of Zoom calls, she said. So far, nothing has been too crowded and she can always find space. She then ascends to the building's Sky Lawn, which is a 3,000-square-foot outdoor office with desks and electrical hookups on the 26th floor.

“If I'm in my unit, I will cook, do laundry and clean. I like the feeling of working with other people I can see as well,” Ms. Meiler said. Developer Ryan Shear, managing partner at Property Markets Group, said work space is a central offering of the Society Living brand, which currently has two more buildings under development in Miami and one in Orlando. One of the buildings in downtown Miami will have 30 offices and “social stairs”: large steps with electrical outlets and ports where workers can hang out with their laptops, Mr. Shear said.

“We're trying to accommodate all types of workers, from more sociable workers to the closed-door office worker,” he said. Before Covid, PMG based the brand on the idea of offering people like Ms. Meiler a way to save money on renting a separate office space, Mr. Shear said. When the crisis hit, building staff began wearing masks and regulating capacity in common areas. Since its launch in May, rents at Society Las Olas have been strong, Mr. Shear said.

In a neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles, Alex Valente, High Street Residential senior vice president, is currently working on construction of Llewellyn, a 318-unit rental building. It will have a co-working space tailored to the creative and professional community that Mr. Valente expects will rent in the building. There will be a 600-square foot, soundproof “jam room,” where residents can record podcasts or practice music. It will be located next to a 1,700-square-foot area dubbed the Co-Lab,



Ric Bucher, below, with wife, Corrine Bucher, son Mat and daughter Chance, and, above, with dog Beans. The remodel lets him do broadcast-quality video at home.



THE LOOK-, SOUND- AND FEEL-GOOD HOME OFFICE

Space10 Interiors in Half Moon Bay, Calif., designed the Buchers' home office. Here are co-owner Jennifer Glynn's best tips for creating an office for today's work-from-home life. Prices are approximate.



1. Install low-tech soundproofing. “Buy a wool rug with extra-thick padding to put under it. Install a solid-core door. Hang heavy drapes—even if you never pull them closed,” says Ms. Glynn. *Wall-to-wall carpet by Stark Carpet, plus installation: \$2,500* *Solid core double doors: \$750* *Window shades: \$2,500*



2. Use flattering lighting for video. “Ric has two lights on stands that sit in the corner ready when he needs them,” which he uses to eliminate shadows on his face during broadcasts, Ms. Glynn says. These, and dimmable ring lights that light the face from all angles, are available from companies specializing in this issue. *Lumecube's broadcast lighting kit: \$129*



3. Create a backdrop. The door to Mr. Bucher's office is painted the same dark blue color as the rest of the walls. This dark tone absorbs bright afternoon light, says Ms. Glynn, and offers a flattering backdrop on video. *Hague Blue by Farrow & Ball Paint in Estate Emulsion: \$110 per gallon*



4. Alert the family. Outside Mr. Bucher's office door is an “On Air” sign he can activate by remote control, signaling to the family the need for quiet. This could be handy for any family juggling Zooms and important calls needing quiet. *On Air Light: \$350*

5. Design for the long haul. Mr. Bucher moves around throughout the day between a stool at his built-in desk, a leather loveseat, and built-in bench under the windows. With people spending long hours in home offices, a variety of work spaces helps combat cabin fever, Ms. Glynn said. *Custom loveseat by Space10 Interiors: \$4,500* *Custom window box cushions: \$1,500* *Custom stool: \$1,500*



which will include acoustically isolated booths for group work and a conference room with a technologically enhanced white board.

The Co-Lab can open only when permitted by city ordinances. “We would likely open Co-Lab, assuming restrictions eased, at reduced

capacity, on a first-come, first-served basis, and by reservation only on conference rooms initially,” Mr. Valente said.

Michael Pestronk, chief executive of Post Brothers, a developer of rental buildings in Philadelphia, said that once the pandemic hit,