

UNIVERSAL APARTMENT DESIGN

Eric R. Harrmann, AIA, Chief Design Officer | AG Architecture

Apartment design plays a key role in rental decision-making.

The BizTimes BizInsights' article, *Revival of the urban neighborhood*, highlighted how communities and developers are continuing to invest in creating unique living environments to appeal to a modern lifestyle. While an amped-up amenity offering can make all the difference as renters decide where to live, carefully considered apartment design options are still critical for enticing multiple generations of renters.

"Oftentimes an apartment unit design is a result of what space is left over, rather than the apartment design driving the overall layout and vision of the development. We take great pride in designing our apartments from the inside out," said Tony DeRosa, Vice President at Fiduciary Real Estate Development, Inc. "A great unit design will make an apartment more than just a place to live, but rather a place to call home. The right design is what will separate the good from the bad in a soft market."

Apartment design provides the building blocks for the design process of multifamily and mixed-use developments. The design of each living unit and the configuration of those units influence the form a structure will take and the marketability of the development. With a highly desirable amenity offering in place, here are the key considerations for providing highly marketable apartments.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The level of finishes and amenity offering in a development excite potential renters and create a level of energy in the selling process. It is important to maintain this momentum by creating a distinct first impression when entering an apartment. Whether with a well-positioned foyer to offer a sense of arrival, a welcoming open floor plan or ample views to the outdoors, impact needs to be achieved immediately. In addition to a selling moment, this sense of arrival will comfort residents every day and impress friends and family who come to visit. The entry sequence is a key consideration that provides distinct first and lasting impressions.

THE HEART OF A HOME

The heart of a home is always the kitchen, and when looking for an apartment, residents want

this space to serve as a hub of activity. This is more than a place for meal prep; it is the spot for a cup of coffee in the morning and an area to entertain. Developments have seen success with a medium-sized kitchen—one that is highly efficient with ample storage and enough room for friends and family. This is a marketable solution that meets a range of demographic needs, from young professionals to those downsizing from a larger home.

A SUITABLE SUITE

There was a time when master suite translated to maximum space. In addition to a walk-in closet and master bath, a spacious bedroom may have exceeded 225 square feet. Today, bedrooms are first and foremost a place to sleep. It is about efficiency and relaxation rather than luxury. When looking for extra space, potential residents want the additional square footage maximized in other areas of the apartment that offer flexibility for multiple functions. A suitable suite still includes a walk-in closet and master bath, but for the majority of renters, the perfect bedroom is approximately 170 square feet to properly accommodate a king-size bed and two side tables.



INNOVATIVE STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Almost all apartments offer some sort of resident storage, but the developments that are integrating ample storage into the footprint of the unit have found it to be a desirable, marketable amenity. These apartments offer space for laundry and utility equipment as well as more usable, efficient and easily accessible storage. This may require

innovative solutions to suit a variety of floor plans, but providing residents the ability to declutter living space is rewarded with longevity in leasing.

“Apartment dwellers prefer the flexibility of renting versus owning, but want the amenities that homes and condominiums offer,” said Robert Joseph of Joseph Property Development. “To address this need, we offer ‘gear rooms’ inside our apartments. This allows tenants to store all of their items for fishing, hunting, biking, golf, camping, etc., and also provides a dedicated area in their home for hobbies, crafting, or other storage that may not be found in a typical apartment. This is a great selling point and one we are designing into all of our current and future projects.”

OPTIONS THAT ATTRACT

As the building block of design, apartments come in a variety of shapes and sizes to satisfy a wide variety of renters. Determining the right unit mix for a development relies on a deep understanding of the location as well as the needs of the target demographic. Offering a variety of size and price points attracts a diverse mix of renters. If located downtown, there is an opportunity to attract young professionals who want to live close to work as well as those downsizing from suburban homes who want to be in the heart of activities and entertainment districts. Understanding the desired renter and the surrounding community will inform the mix of sizes, from studios to three bedrooms and the marketability of penthouse suites.

The location of a multifamily development always matters and sets a project up for success. The amenity mix then amps up the energy and creates a sense of community, differentiating it in the marketplace. However, apartment design still matters. How a unit addresses the key considerations of the modern renter will impact the final buying decision. After all, it is the distinct space a resident will call home.

To learn more about how boomer expectations are influencing what's next in unit design, visit <https://agarch.com/insights/> to download a recent report.