

BEDFORD & NEW CANAAN

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FIVE EMERGING *Home Trends* THAT ARE HERE TO STAY

A CONVERSATION WITH CHUCK HILTON FROM CHARLES HILTON ARCHITECTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Robert Benson

Projects from the
Charles Hilton Portfolio



It goes without saying that the pandemic has had unparalleled impacts on nearly every facet of our lives. Even with 2022 fast approaching, we're still feeling the effects of the worldwide shutdown so tangibly. In the height of the uncertainty, isolation, and confusion of the global health crisis, many of us relied on our homes more so than we could have ever predicted. As remote living became our new normal, we began using our homes in ways we never anticipated: the kitchen table became a fully equipped office setup, the mudroom became a disinfecting station, the guest bedroom became a home gym, the playroom became a remote day school, and so on.

While the disruption of 2020 is slowly fading away and the familiarity of daily life is coming into view, the concept of 'pandemic-proofing' in architecture is becoming increasingly fashionable. How can we change the way we build now to anticipate the future? We sat down (albeit virtually) with an industry expert, Chuck Hilton - the renowned architect and co-founder of Charles Hilton Architects - to discuss the emerging trends in residential home design. Charles Hilton Architects specializes in the finest quality custom residential architecture, sustainable design and waterfront projects. Over 30+ years, Charles Hilton Architects has earned a reputation for producing traditionally inspired residences, landscape features, and architectural interiors, and they are well versed in a wide variety of 'healthy home' techniques to create environments as good for one's health and well-being as they are attractive.

Equipped, CONNECTED, & ENABLED

Perhaps the most obvious trend identified here is the need for suitable working and learning setups in the home. “Even after the pandemic is over and businesses revert to more normal operations, I expect that working and learning from home will continue to be significantly more prevalent than it was previously,” said Hilton. Designing a home with a workstation poised for a full- or part-time remote position requires careful attention at all scales, from room orientation to capture views and light, down to the specifics of choosing comfortable and practical furniture. More important than all of that, however, is having the proper infrastructure in place to support a seamless home office. “Increasingly, our office is integrating mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems down to the fraction of an inch to ensure all the conduit, cabling, and technology are properly accounted for and to reduce surprises and compromises in construction. Building workspaces that are soundproof and acoustically isolated from the noise of the house is critical, particularly if multiple family members are working from home simultaneously.” Hilton explained.



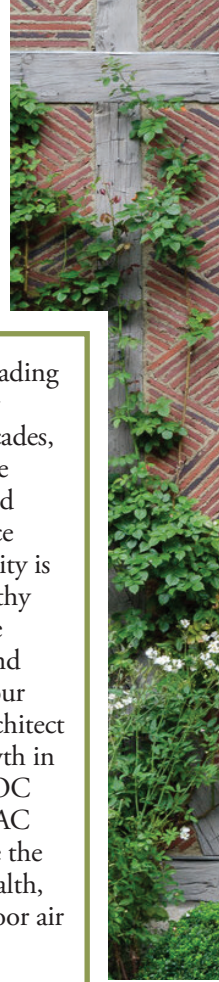
One of the most stringent demands that quarantining put on our homes is the need for flexibility in our built environment. Having the luxury of space gives us the opportunity to adapt our surroundings and allows us to have room to grow. Where excess space is not an option, building in versatility to your home design is key both to use the space you have efficiently, and to pivot as your needs change over time. As an effect, Hilton has noticed “...the previously very popular open plans are still popular but are giving way to more defined plans with rooms that can be closed off for privacy.” Using pocket doors as a tool allows spaces to be designed to feel open and connected while maintaining the ability to have privacy and quiet when necessary. Considering adaptability while designing or renovating your home not only allows you to plan for the unexpected, but also affords the ability to consider how your needs in your home will change over time. The concept of ‘aging-in-place’, or planning our homes to be comfortable for all stages of life, is becoming a norm.

Spacious, FLEXIBLE, & ADAPTABLE



Hilton continued, “Another layer to the flexibility of a home is creating transitional indoor/outdoor spaces: greenhouses, pergolas, trellises, gazebos, loggias, or even a sliding glass wall. Finding a way to bridge the interior and exterior can allow us to bring fresh air into the home and encourages us to extend our enjoyment of the outdoors into the inclement months.” This charming limonaia (image to the left) designed by Charles Hilton Architects to be nestled into the treeline says it all.

Healthy, DAYLIT, & CLEAN



While wellness and health have been leading topics at the forefront of contemporary building science for the past several decades, the pandemic cemented the importance of well-considered details, materials, and construction practices in making a space healthy for inhabitants. Indoor air quality is one of the major components of a healthy home. Especially given how much time is spent indoors, properly ventilating and eliminating pollutants from the air in our homes is essential. Working with an architect to prevent opportunities for mold growth in exterior wall assemblies, specify low-VOC finishes, choose high-performance HVAC systems, install HEPA filters, and make the right choices to prioritize long-term health, can all have a major impact on the indoor air quality of your home.



Equally important to the air we breathe is the water we drink. According to Hilton, some people do not realize that “...many areas have well water that contains mineral deposits that are unpleasant to drink and stain indoor and outdoor surfaces over time. Even municipal water sources contain unwanted contaminants. We are typically filtering drinking water of all types and sometimes using whole house filtration on certain well water.”

Designing homes to embrace our natural circadian rhythms is another factor of a healthy home. Orienting buildings to capture natural light, positioning windows in rooms to diffuse daylight, and even using calibrated LED bulbs to simulate the hue of daytime/nighttime cycles on dark days can make a noticeable difference in alertness and mood throughout the day.





Durable, RELIABLE, & LOW-MAINTENANCE

As the cost of construction materials surge and supply chains are stretched to their limits, homes that are built to last with lower maintenance are looking especially appealing. Choosing cladding, roofing, door, and window products upfront that are durable and reliable can save money in the long run. Not to mention, more resilient materials mean less dependency on replacements, repairs, and maintenance - which reduces stress down the line. On top of this, "With sea levels rising and the frequency of severe storms seemingly increasing," Chuck Hilton said his practice is "...fortifying many of our homes to protect against natural disasters. With generators, off-grid power sources, resilient exterior envelopes, and strategic landscape design, homes can be far less vulnerable to storms than in the past."

Sustainable, RENEWABLE, & RECYCLABLE

Considering that the building and construction industry is a major contributor to waste and pollution across the country, many homeowners are becoming increasingly conscious of the burden we all share to make responsible decisions. Hilton said many of their "...new projects are super energy efficient with LED lighting, high-efficiency appliances, tankless water heaters, high-performance glazing systems, and smart-house controls. Some have geothermal HVAC or electric heat pumps at the home."

Choosing materials that have lower embodied energy and reduced carbon footprints can greatly reduce the impact a home has on the environment. Some new homes go even a step beyond evaluating materials on their sustainability at installation and look all the way to the 'end-of-life' potential, or the ability for a material to be recycled or reused after the eventual demolition of the home.

