

TOP FIVE DESIGN TRENDS OF 2021

by Catherine Francis
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The MYA Studio takes a look at the design trends we can expect to see throughout 2021. This year, design will take influence from 2020 and living with a global pandemic. The main themes will look at how design has responded to these influences and how creativity will help future-proof against viruses yet to come.

1. EASY/CLEANABLE INTERIORS

One of the main responses to the pandemic was to provide safe environments for the public, whether this be out shopping, in the workplace or eating in restaurants. A lot more importance was placed on the cleaning and sanitisation of all spaces, with companies taking responsibility to reduce the risk for the consumer. We will see design adapt to help simplify this process, with furniture choices based on how easy they are to clean; so, for example, seat backs and pads not touching, and both being removable for easy wiping.

Simple choices like this help to reduce the threat of furniture harboring harmful bacteria. Material choices will veer from the luxurious, to more practical options such as faux leather, woods and metals. These materials are easy to wipe and can be coated in an anti-bacterial lacquer, which kills harmful bacteria. These choices will see interiors take on a minimalist approach, with the finishing touches coming from the inclusion of new technology.

2. MULTI-FUNCTIONAL SPACES

Throughout the pandemic we have seen the importance of spaces being flexible enough to host a variety of functions. Living rooms have become offices, kitchens have become gyms and school canteens have become additional classrooms. The need for interiors to be easily adaptable is apparent now more than ever.

We will see school dining halls opting for free-standing furniture, with all fixed elements kept to the walls, allowing full flexibility of use and safe social distancing. This is already seen in schools with a small footprint. Restaurant and food places will no longer be 'eat-in only' environments and will begin to include a take-away option as their service models develop. As this element becomes more crucial, concept designs will start to consider exterior takeaway hatches and pick-up counters, allowing food to be ordered and consumed off site.



3. SUSTAINABILITY

Living with COVID-19 has seen a decrease in the use of reusable consumables, with customer safety taking top priority. Coffee houses have stopped using 'keep-cups' and there has been a higher use of takeaway packaging, all to reduce multi-handling of products.

We have almost seen a step backwards in single-use packaging, and this is supported further by the high volume of single-use masks and gloves that are thrown away daily.

Sustainability will soon become even higher on everyone's agenda, as we battle through living with COVID-19 and customers start to demand that companies take responsibility for doing their part. In the kitchen, the move will still be towards electric, energy-saving, 'clever' equipment, which combines processes for lower usage. Front-of-house, we will continue to see interiors place a higher emphasis on the use of natural materials, but what will be particularly interesting is how these natural materials integrate into a safe environment.

Raw wood and cotton are not considered the most 'clinical' materials, since there's a risk that harmful bacteria may remain in them even after cleaning. We will see a relationship emerge between clinical and sustainable environments, and there will be opportunities to seek substitutes for plastics and leathers, materials that are preferable for safe environments. As customers prioritise eating more plants in their diets, they will also consider the impact of the interior on the environment.



4. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND HEALTH

As new variants of COVID-19 and other viruses spread, people will become even more focused on eating well and staying fit and healthy. In future, AI looks set to help people track and tailor dishes to not only meet their dietary requirements, but their physical and mental health needs too. We have already started to see this in fitness apps, where information is gathered and goals set for either sustainable weight loss, weight maintenance or muscle growth.

AI goes further by interpreting the information and offering advice and changes. Restaurants can adapt this trend into their design and service, with a computer that decides what might best suit the customer to eat when assessing their physical and mental health. In the short term, interiors will start to feel more 'tech-led', with the dominance of touch screens and computers, and it will be the designer's job to make these appear as approachable and user-friendly as possible. In the long term, as customers start to customise their own meal choices, designers will need to start to think about individually customised interiors.

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5. DESIGN AND MENTAL HEALTH

One of the consequences of living with COVID-19 is the impact it has had on the nation's mental health. The country has seen a massive rise in depression as people lose their jobs and social interaction is greatly restricted. As the hospitality industry starts to open back up, design will look at how spaces can help improve the customer's mental health.

There will be a need for spaces that are inspired by nature, that bring calmness and allow for a small moment of escape. Texture will play a key part in enhancing all the senses and helping the user to feel grounded with the environment. We will see restaurant design include bigger dining spaces, which allow for larger groups to meet, share and come together, something that has seemed a novelty throughout the pandemic. Interiors will need to be clean and spacious, reflecting a calm mind, as ambience and experience become more important than ever.

AUTHOR BIO

Catherine Francis is Head of Studio at MYA Consulting Ltd. Catherine is responsible for the process of design and innovation, and works closely with her clients to capture the 'wow' factor. With exacting standards and an exceptional eye for detail, Catherine brings design leadership and innovation to any project team.

Catherine earned a degree in Interior Design from Kingston University, and then gained experience working in an architecture practice before joining MYA Consulting.



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