The top 3 priorities buyers place alongside location

The past year has brought unparalleled attention to luxury properties in suburban and vacation markets. As companies have made the transition to remote work, buyers are weighing the option to move out of compact urban centers—but location isn't the only thing on the luxury buyer's wish list. As lifestyles change, so do the criteria for the perfect home.

Tara Fox

Of course, the importance of location hasn't gone away. According to Tara Fox, Real Estate Salesperson with Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty, location will always be the number-one priority for buyers, and the growing demand for homes in her market of Long Island has quickly changed the game for her luxury clients.

"Those who have traditionally waited on the sidelines have had to step up to the plate and make a quick decision—otherwise there's another homebuyer ready to make an offer," she says. "Buyers now feel a sense of urgency, with limited inventory, record-low mortgage interest rates, and the unknowns of the present situation."

Caroline Guthrie

Yet for all the analysis and speculation around buyers leaving urban markets, Caroline Guthrie, Senior Global Real Estate Advisor at Sotheby's International Realty's East Side Manhattan Brokerage, notes that luxury living in metropolitan centers isn't going anywhere—and for many buyers, an apartment in the middle of town is still as covetable as it's always been.

"Interestingly, affluent owners who have chosen to relocate to their homes in resort areas such as the Hamptons and Palm Beach or nearby towns like Greenwich, Connecticut, are holding onto their large apartments in the city with the intention to return at some point," she says.

So if location is only one criterion that homebuyers are considering at this time, what are the others? Here are three additional features that they're looking for, according to Guthrie and Fox.

1. Space inside and out

Daniel Gale Sotheby’s International Realty

This first priority won’t come as a surprise to agents keeping track of the trends. Having room to work, relax, and remain physically distant has rocketed to the top of clients’ must-have list. “Some of the priorities I’ve heard have included large outdoor spaces with room for fire pits, outdoor movie screens, outdoor kitchen, and in-ground pools,” notes Fox. “Home offices, Zoom rooms, home gyms, and spaces for at-home schooling are also common requests.”

In urban markets, the availability of luxury amenities has been compromised by lockdowns and new health and safety measures —yet Guthrie observes that these features will return to relevance and grow even more appealing as remote work becomes the norm. “Today’s new developments offer lavish amenities which have been instrumental in drawing people to them, such as gyms, screening rooms, playrooms, and even pet spas,” she says.

2. Modern and move-in ready

When businesses went into lockdown, so too did all renovation projects—and homeowners aren't looking to resume them anytime soon. "New constructions and fully renovated homes have been in high demand," says Fox. "Buyers realize that time is the most valuable commodity; they appreciate a home that is move-in ready, and are willing to pay a premium for a turnkey residence."

Along with no repair or restoration required, buyers also don't want to have to replace any appliances or technology. Fox has seen huge demand for fully smart homes wired with the latest digital and automated systems, along with well-appointed kitchens.

3. Culture close at hand

Sotheby's International Realty – East Side Manhattan Brokerage

As Guthrie mentioned, there are still many homeowners who have opted to stay in her Manhattan market—and the reason is simply because they love it. “There was certainly a flight to secondary homes outside of the city when we were in lockdown, but now people are returning, and not just for school. There seems to be a new appreciation of New York City and its many cultural institutions—a palpable feeling of loyalty to the city.”

As a result, while many homebuyers left the city to seek more room, others are now reversing this trend as they spend some of their time in town and some of it away. “A few clients have made the decision to downsize their footprint in the city and purchase a pied-à-terre instead of a larger full-time home,” says Guthrie. “This has increased interest in special apartments in prime locations, with park and city skyline views.”

Caring for clients comes first

Both buyers and sellers have major decisions to make as the world continues to change. “Be even more communicative, and have empathy as clients find themselves in this predicament,” says Fox. “Patience, understanding and hand-holding are more necessary in times like this.” She suggests helping educate homebuyers to have their finances and pre-approvals in order, as sellers will be more likely to engage in negotiations knowing the buyers are prepared.

“I think the most important thing an agent can do is not only listen to their buyers but understand them,” advises Guthrie. “We need to be both creative in offering solutions and also endlessly patient and encouraging. Ultimately there is the right property out there for everyone and our role is to make the transaction as painless as possible.”

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