What Day Is It?

W

hat day is it? Last Thursday, I thought it was
Wednesday...I don’t know how it has been
for you, but after long months of working
hard to stay ahead of the tsunami caused by COVID-19,
it finally hit me last week. The only question was why
it had taken so long.

This issue of the IDEC Exchange is focused on the
ways in which our lives as researchers, administrators,
teachers, professionals, and, yes, as human beings, have
been upended. In its Call for Content, the Exchange
posed provocative questions that energized the
opportunities and challenges that this unprecedented
event presented.

Even as I boarded the plane from New York to Tulsa
last March, I was already thinking ahead to how the
staff and faculty at New York School of Interior Design
would need to move fast to prepare for the challenges
of what was highly likely to happen in just a few weeks.
Within days, the whole country joined New York in
facing the COVID onslaught and turned to fully online
teaching and learning. For many of us, our educational
world was literally turned upside down in a matter of
days. How would we work with our students? How
could studios conduct presentations to guest jurors?
How would students remain engaged? Would their
education suffer if we could not all be in a physical
space together?

Those educators who were already teaching
asynchronous online courses proceeded as if nothing
had occurred, without even a hint of disruption. But in
the move from onsite to online, something interesting
began to happen...in stepping up, teachers began
to realize the great benefits that online learning
presents: increased collegiality and support among
students, more opportunities for collaboration, a
greater interest in being present in the class, as an
escape from the isolation of home. Somehow, working
in Zoom put every student into the front row, no one
could hide, and no one seemed to want to hide. The
physical classroom does not always lend itself to the
creation of a cohesive cohort, but Zoom did. There
was a sense of meeting a challenge together.

Instructors themselves saw that they needed to learn
how to use the new tools required to successfully
Teach their students – and learned them. Even more,
they eagerly and freely shared their knowledge with
their peers. The faculty who were experienced in
online teaching mentored the ones who had never
thought they’d be teaching this way. To everyone’s
credit, this grand “design-build” experiment largely
succeeded.

In essence, what many anticipated to be a disaster
of higher education, instead became an opportunity:
by being thrown into the ocean, many instructors
and students had a quick and deep immersion in a
constructivist learning environment. Forced to use
the assets and capabilities of a learning management
system beyond merely taking attendance and
recording grades, many educators found themselves
actively finding ways to engage students in building
their knowledge, practicing Socratic dialogue via the
guided discussions, and collaboratively engaging
and supporting one another in what was essentially
project-based learning. Now, most instructors would
not turn back, even if they could. Online and onsite
teaching and learning have merged to create a true
21st Century hybrid classroom: flexible, engaging, and
resilient.

Ellen Fisher
IDEC President 2020

Breaking the Silence

A

the time of this writing, we are just over three
weeks into the fall semester at Louisiana State
University after a long summer of speculation
and intense planning for resuming classes in August.
Our interior design program lives on the upper floor
of a modern building featuring an atrium that serves
to connect all floors, except ours. We are visually and
physically secluded and this lends itself to a strong
identity and sense of community among our students,
faculty and staff. The boundaries of this floor delineate
my daily, sometimes hourly, ritual of walking through
the halls, visiting classrooms and design studios,
bearing witness to the sound of bodies, minds and
voices in motion.

Prior to March 2020 we were a hive of activity,
with students everywhere, fully engaged in events,
coursework and design studio projects during the
day, evenings and weekends. Even in the early hours
of the morning I could find students huddled in
groups, sleeping on the bottom shelf of the studio
storage racks or headed home for a shower before
returning to class. We were noisy, vibrant and often
messy. Now we are teaching in uncharted territory
through an altered pedagogical lens, wondering if
this semester or the next will mark the return to
our traditional practices, a hybrid version, or something
we cannot as yet imagine.

During the summer months, we made radical physical
changes in our classrooms, studios and corridors to
support social distancing, hung plastic sheets between
desks that weren’t quite 6’ apart, demolished walls to
create a large open classroom to accommodate at
least 45 students at one sitting, and converted two
traditional classrooms to seminar and critique spaces;
all of this to ensure that we could continue to teach
the majority of our classes face to face as safely as
possible. We wanted our students to be present.
These stories of change are common at universities
and colleges across North America, and as design
educators we are trying to adjust, we are searching
for innovative strategies, and we are tired.

As I walk the halls now, I am overwhelmed by the
silence created by these new physical boundaries.
The chatter, noise, shuffling of feet, and other
palpable forms of human expression and interaction
in the context of learning is missing. We are teaching
in a muffled environment with masks, physical
distance and sometimes, fewer students, yet I know
that educators everywhere are asking themselves,
“How can we break this silence, ignite discourse, and
encourage human expression and interaction within
these boundaries?” “How can we help our students
sustain enthusiasm and remain focused?”

We have discovered that implementing unanticipated
social events, adapted forms of the core course, and non-
traditional design problems jump start visceral
engagement and counteract the silence, adding
welcome surprise. Utilizing the universal appeal
and language of music is one type of unanticipated
event resulting in simple episodes of temporal
celebration. Playlists arranged by students in each
year create anticipation, surprise and smiles behind
the masks among our students. The first featured
Satigold’s “Disparate Youth,” and the Wallows’ “Are
You Bored Yet?” Adapting peer reviews, even when
standing 6’ apart, help generate conversation when
they take place in a variety of locations, with greater
independence, and very small groups of students
meeting eye to eye. For our 1st and 2nd year students
these reviews have also been a means to develop
a sense of community and trust. We also looked
to non-traditional design problems as a means to
break the silence by challenging 2nd year students’
expectations and assumptions about course content
with short, high impact design assignments. These
assignments were designed to create a “buzz” among

Ellen Fisher
IDEC President 2020

Marsha Cuddeback
IDEC President-Elect
the students and advance creative engagement by exploring spatial design concepts through the lens of language and motion.

For our students, this muffled environment is an awkward and unfamiliar context for learning and socialization, compounded by concerns for health and safety. The design studio especially relies on active learning resulting in a sensory rich experience; audible, vibrant and messy. It is not quiet and the active and audible quality of this environment yields confidence that learning is in progress, whereas the silence asks us to question, “What’s happening?” Still, I remain optimistic during my daily ritual, and believe that our commitment to design education and our penchant for innovation will serve us well as we find ways to break the silence, come what may.

Marsha Cuddeback, IDEC President-Elect, 2020

References

We are experiencing thought-provoking times, challenging times, ever-changing times. Thinking back to only a few months ago, it is incredible to realize the transformation of our daily and professional lives.

Design is rapidly changing as well. In a relatively short time, we have learned important lessons and deftly responded to impending challenges. A few significant ones include the awareness that our hospitals were not ready to handle the pandemic, which is already changing healthcare design [1]. Additionally, the realization that companies may not need office space to be productive, and in fact may be more productive with remote workers [2], will certainly impact workplace design.

This issue of the Exchange documents new procedures, identifies issues, and explores future possibilities made evident by COVID-19. Some of these scenarios, revolutionary a few months ago, may already seem like common knowledge. But it is important to look back at our process and learn from it to move forward. As philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, “Life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forward” [3].

The essays in this issue reveal the many levels at which interior designers are responding to present challenges. Articles by Carter and colleagues, and Urquhart identify issues interior designers must understand, wrestle with, and resolve. Asojo and colleagues, Swearington, and Hicks share ways interior designers adapted physical environments at various scales to help with the reopening of our public spaces and to continue educating our students. Davidson shares a collection of personal stories that document the experiences of daily life at home with COVID.

We are grateful for the contributions of Sarah Urquhart, Dan Harper, and Gloria Stafford (associate editors) and IDEC’s professional staff. This issue would not have come together without their dedicated work.

We are designers. We are problem solvers. We have met recent challenges with empathy, intellect, and innovation.

Dana E. Vaux, PhD
Editor-in-Chief, IDEC Exchange, 2019-2021

References
2. Tom Simmons, “Rethink the Future – Building Together,” webinar, September 21, 2020, Graphisoft.com/us/bydesign. In a Graphisoft ROI survey of their users globally, the average productivity gain was 38%.

Image credit: Photo by Hello I’m Nik, https://unsplash.com/photos/MAGpHyRROAA
The summer has been busy for the journal. JID has numerous manuscripts currently under review or in revision, and some of these are international submissions. Since May 1, 2020, we have reviewed manuscripts from Bahrain, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, The Republic of Korea, and Turkey. We had our first accepted articles from Chile and South Korea. The continuation of submissions from around the world is evident, and JID clearly has a global presence. Continuing to attract authors and readers from around the globe is one of our goals as the journal moves forward.

We continue to see a variety of scholarship submitted. Historical analysis, experimental design, survey methodologies, and qualitative studies are appearing in the queue. This variety in research is critical to attract a diverse and new readership. Our two guest editors, Ronn Daniel, Kent State University and Dr. Lynn Chalmers, University of Manitoba are currently reviewing articles for the 2021 Special Issue entitled, Thinking the-Body-Inside. These manuscripts range from humanities-focused arguments, to social science methods, to visual essays. We are excited by the range of scholarship in this Special Issue to be published March 2021, and our sincere thanks to Ronn and Lynn for their dedication, hard work, and vision.

In this IDEC Exchange issue, how COVID-19 is influencing interior design education and practice is the focus. One aspect that is changing in the midst of these unprecedented times is technology. To address this timely topic, the 2023 Special Issue of JID will examine technology, co-edited by Dr. Newton D’Souza, Florida International University and Dr. Upali Nanda, HKS Architects, Inc. Look for the call of interest in November, 2020.

JID welcomes a new chair to the board, Bryan Orthel, Indiana University Bloomington and new board member, Alison Snyder, Pratt Institute. We have also actively recruited six new Ad-Hoc Reviewers. The review board is the lifeblood of the journal, and the critique of manuscripts provided has been outstanding. Our hope is to continue increasing the pool of reviewers in order to maintain the rigor expected of JID.

Joan Dickinson, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Interior Design
For almost 60 years, IDEC has brought together educators who are passionate about teaching, learning, and interior design. All of us who are educators were shaped by our mentors and teachers. As IDEC prepares to celebrate its 60th anniversary in 2022, the IDEC Foundation is sharing stories about the interior design educators who have influenced and inspired us.

At the annual meeting in Tulsa, I talked about the many small conversations Terry Rothgeb (University of Kentucky) had with me when I was new to teaching. His patience and guiding questions shaped so much of how I view the power of what we do as educators and interior designers.

In August and September, the Foundation featured stories about the power of mentorship on our LinkedIn group. Susan Ray-Degges shared how Ruth Brent Tolfte (University of Missouri) providing encouragement to her through her first IDEC conference presentation and “opening the door” for her to see her future with IDEC. Darrin Brooks wrote about Elizabeth Rogers (Utah State University) provided “crucial” mentorship through phone conversations and notes at many points in his life. Jennifer Webb recounted how Thorn Houser (University of Tennessee) was the first person to tell her about her potential and how he “modeled care and passion for his profession, his students, and his family.” Shauna Corry explained the importance ofJoAnn Asher Thompson (Washington State University) modeling “successful, dynamic, strong, and effective” leadership for women in architecture. Amy Campos explained her “deep appreciation for Hank Dunlop’s (California College of the Arts) optimism and ability to remind us all what a privilege it is to design.”

These stories retell conversations that have changed our lives. These stories are conversations that are shaping what matters now. These stories are the legacy of IDEC.

We encourage you to read these stories on the Foundation’s LinkedIn group. We ask you to share your own stories about the educators who inspired you. And, we encourage you to say thank you to the educators who influenced you.

The IDEC Foundation provides scholarships for graduate students to attend the annual conference, as well as support for the IDEC Special Projects grant, the keynote speaker at the annual conference, and the Journal of Interior Design. Calls for these awards and grants will be released through the IDEC website across the fall.

For more about the IDECF or to contribute, visit our website: www.idecfoundation.org.

Thank you for your conversations.

Bryan D. Orthel
B efore has a new meaning now. It is almost a measure of time marking the end of the epoch before our lives were upended by the pandemic. As design educators we face the question of how to move forward in this new ‘Mad Max’ [1] world. The issues we are dealing with, however, are not new. Rather, the pandemic has laid painfully bare the existing fissures in design and higher education. Yet there is hope. As many have suggested, disasters offer opportunity to reframe and rebuild systems in ways that feel untouchable during times of normalcy. For interior design education I suggest two areas that need specific attention as we move forward: Equity and Learning Theory.

Equity provides all learners with supports based on individual circumstances and needs [2]. It differs from equality which provides all students with the same opportunity and focuses on standardization. Equity issues in design are happening on two fronts. First, college students including those in design have real needs. Six in 10 students on four year campuses report experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness [3] and would be unable to come up with $500 to cover an emergency expense [4] much less buy a new laptop or spend the same on art supplies. Second, our design canon and standards do not take into account that many design programs rely on the inefficient mechanism of tacit knowledge transfer as a primary pedagogical mechanism which is problematic because understanding of methods and problems remains at the tacit level if it gets passed on at all [8]. Making design education more effective is not about just those that survive—we need to develop a clear understanding and model of how designers learn. Fortunately, the existing knowledge offered by the Learning Sciences offer a wealth of information about transfer of knowledge, meta-cognition, creativity, schema formation, and more. However, it is up to Interior Design educators and researchers to do the translation and study learning in the context of interior design.

Doing so will will mean making systematic changes to how we support our students, building programs that prioritize student wellbeing, taking leadership positions in our institutions to connect our programs to existing services and tracking affective as well as cognitive outcomes.

Once we manage the environment quality, we need to also ensure our teaching reliably imparts the intended knowledge and competencies. Currently, many design programs rely on the inefficient pedagogical mechanism which is problematic because understanding of methods and problems remains at the tacit level if it gets passed on at all [8]. Making design education more effective is not about just those that survive—we need to develop a clear understanding and model of how designers learn. Fortunately, the existing knowledge offered by the Learning Sciences offer a wealth of information about transfer of knowledge, meta-cognition, creativity, schema formation, and more. However, it is up to Interior Design educators and researchers to do the translation and study learning in the context of interior design.

Fortunately, partners in both the areas of Equity and Learning Theory are ready for us to join the fray. It is time for Interior Design to take responsibility for designing our learning environments, not just pedagogically at the instructor level but systematically, at the program level, at the regional level, and at the national level. We need to get to know our students as whole people and take responsibility for the accessibility and climate of the environment we invite them into.
This pandemic stripped away the safety net of our physical department walls and exposed us to issues that have always been there. It laid bare the everyday issues minority students deal with (such as inclusion, finances, and academic catch-up) and made the real world they face visible to dominantly white educators. With the desire to effect change in design education, the three of us are joining educators across the U.S. to begin conversations on “Decolonizing Interior Design” (Hadjyanni, 2020). Initial conversations have revealed that there is much to unpack, understand, and change in design education. We hope this group will morph into the emergent network within IDEC and additional interested educators will join us.

*If you are interested in this conversation, please email Laura Cole (colelb@missouri.edu)*

**References**


environments and adaptive products and materials that can be used in design responses. Notably, the project was conducted with participation of Ramsey County staff. This participatory process allowed us to integrate the adaptive solutions and strategies that the organization was planning. For instance, a review of the county’s service delivery dashboard and their 2018 community engagement report of residents’ use of county services and facilities informed our design decision making. Public health and infectious disease expert, Dr. Amy Kircher provided consultation on a range of issues, including operational safety, traffic patterns, and entrance and exit strategies aimed at minimizing person to person contact. The input enabled us to alter circulation routes in each building and to understand the role that the built environment plays in both facilitating and preventing infection.

### Interior Design Interventions

Public health considerations were key influencing factors for the interior design interventions our team proposed. We recommended consultation of Center for Disease Control (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) guidelines and standards. We categorized recommendations broadly into administrative policies; operations and activities; and maintenance and cleaning considerations. In terms of space planning, in line with CDC guidelines users are recommended to be spaced at least 6 feet from one another, using physical barriers between users are recommended to be spaced at least 6 feet. Artificial lighting and daylighting strategies during a pandemic were considered. Lighting design has two main implications for pandemic-era design solutions: (1) touchless door handles and faucets are recommended to mitigate the spread of diseases. Easy to clean seamless flooring, plexiglass dividers to provide safe spaces, sneeze-guard with easy-to-clean materials at the service desk, hand sanitizing stations, increasing outdoor and indoor ventilation, improved air filtration and signage to help wayfinding and shape behavior are other recommendations (American Institute of Architects, 2020; Dietz et al, 2020).

### Conclusions

Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate interior design interventions proposed for Maplewood and Roseville libraries. Overall, this experience offered our team of designers, equity professionals, faculty and students an opportunity to collaborate on solving a societal grand challenge. Our participatory process can serve as a model for other counties grappling with how to re-envision service delivery during a pandemic era.

### Acknowledgment

The authors would like to acknowledge the University of Minnesota Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) for funding support through the COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant Initiative. We also acknowledge our Ramsey County partners, Margaret Dreon and Jean Krueger. Special thanks to Dr. Amy Kircher, Co-Director, Strategic Partnerships and Research Collaborative and Senior Advisor, Food Protection and Defense Institute, University of Minnesota for public health feedback.

### References


### 2020 Grand Challenge

The authors would like to acknowledge the University of Minnesota for serving as a model for other counties grappling with how to re-envision service delivery during a pandemic era. Notably, the participatory process allowed us to provide safe spaces, sneeze-guard with easy-to-clean materials at the service desk, hand sanitizing stations, increasing outdoor and indoor ventilation, improved air filtration and signage to help wayfinding and shape behavior are other recommendations (American Institute of Architects, 2020; Dietz et al, 2020).
INTERIOR DESIGN STUDENTS CREATE SAFE LEARNING SPACES, EARN INTERNSHIP CREDITS DURING PANDEMIC

SALLY ANN SWEARINGEN, STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

As an educator, my ultimate goal is to prepare students to work in the interior design profession. This means helping them learn by doing through the real-world experiences of internships. However, when COVID-19 hit in March, most interior design summer internships were canceled, and my students needed a way to gain the critical hands-on experience they need to be competitive in the workforce.

As universities converted face-to-face classes to online learning over the summer, they began to plan for fall. I volunteered for our university’s reopening task force and enlisted five interior design students to help me develop COVID plans. Reopening safely would require adhering to physical distancing and face mask guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additionally, most of the buildings and labs lacked the technology faculty need to teach virtually.

In early June, we worked with our space utilization effectiveness (SUE) coordinator, on-campus project manager, information technology (IT) coordinator and facilities team to create a plan of action. This was a challenge. Since the only existing plans were old blueprint drawings, we needed digitized plans to complete our task. We also needed to survey and create plans showing existing furniture, electrical equipment and technology in each of the 389 rooms. Knowing that the university had made physical changes without documenting them on building drawings and inventory spreadsheets for faculty and staff to arrange the classrooms.

The interns also used Microsoft Teams to double-check each other’s work and exchange large quantities of data, including photos of furniture and technology. The three on-campus interns collected the data, drew floor and furniture plans and photographed the spaces, furniture and technology, while the two remote interns converted that data into AutoCAD drawings and inventory spreadsheets for faculty and staff to arrange the classrooms.

To determine how to design classrooms for COVID, we reviewed CDC requirements. The main principle was to design the rooms so that faculty would not have to re-create them. All these files were shared among interns and specific groups of staff via remote interns converted that data into AutoCAD drawings and inventory spreadsheets for faculty and staff to arrange the classrooms.

By Spring break, March 10-16th, 2020, the student teams had completed all interviews, case-study research, and programming. Notification came through at the end of Spring break that break was “extended” to prepare for changing teaching modality to online, due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Immediately, the challenges presented themselves, mainly the small portion of our student population who live in rural mountain areas and have little to no internet service. Local and regional organizations and businesses jumped into action to provide access to the internet for students to continue their studies.

COVID-19=KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON: MANAGING A SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE THROUGH COVID-19 CAMPUS SHUTDOWN

SHELBY HICKS, M.F.A., WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

In these unprecedented and unpredictable times, teaching a service-learning course has proven to be a challenge. This Junior level spring semester course integrates a team approach with a community project. The community project deliverables were to provide a variety of designs for a small home community. The community will house underserved members including but not limited to veterans, single mothers, and public service employees such as fire, police, and EMT.

Before getting started, we reviewed the SUE coordinator’s list of classrooms and labs that were being used, the times they were occupied at the current number of seats in each. Two of the intern generated a final template for standardization, while two other interns created a folder for each building on campus and for each room in each building. The fifth intern worked with the on-campus project manager to retrieve any existing digital plans so we wouldn’t have to re-create them. All these files were shared among interns and specific groups of staff via Microsoft Teams. This modality helped interns get fast feedback on how to solve the problem of posting the information in a format that faculty members could access easily and quickly apply to their COVID classroom seating arrangements.

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WiFi Hotspots were quickly created in local parking lots so students could log on from there. Which often meant students sitting in their cars for hours.

Keeping the students focused and connected was paramount to keeping the project moving forward. Students were required to attend weekly virtual meetings in blackboard collaboration ultra which proved successful in keeping them on task. In addition to the class meeting, each team had a separate virtual breakout room where they could discuss progress, solutions, and challenges with their teammates. This created a sense of identity, and put a face to the deliverables. The deliverables did not change although students who’s WiFi did not allow them to log on; participated by calling in on their cellphone.

The transitions did not change although the mode of delivery did. To connect the community member with the student teams, a USB and mailed to the community partner.

MPEG-4 which were loaded onto our YouTube site and linked to the University Interior Design website. This allows for community partners and potential students to view as a recruiting tool.

The end-product was amazing. We are in the process of reviewing designs and hopefully the outcomes we began discussing in January. The narratives describe how the pandemic lockdown has amplified the already strong and complex connection between mothers and their domestic space. The narratives convey how intimately these mothers identify with their homes as extensions of themselves and their caregiving. Common among the narratives is how the mothers seem to constantly be shifting around their houses to facilitate the needs of their children or partner; two of the mothers are also in the midst of moving to new homes. In general, the narratives are characterized by a mixture of restlessness and a determination to create spatial comfort in a particularly fraught time.

Each mother offers a detailed description of her home as a shelter and a source. The narratives are intimate and generous. What can designers learn from these personal accounts?

Amy

My husband and I are teachers at a “liceo” which is a university prep high school in Italy. My last day teaching at the school was February 22nd. Our house became a classroom - for my husband and I, teaching online, and for our two children (6 & 8 years old) who we began to homeschool. We had moved into our current house six months before the lockdown - our home and little garden became our haven. We used to live in an apartment, as many Italians do; Italy is a small, heavily populated country and very few own a spacious home let alone a house. Our little yard around the house allowed the kids to play and ride their scooters, helping my youngest the most during this time in all of our lives. It was hard having to transition away from class to online. You made the transition easier and did everything you could to ease our anxiety.” “This seemed to have tested the patience of many, but Shelby kept encouraging us to push forward.” The community partner shared “The students found creative ways to continuously present their work and produced the outcomes we began discussing in January. The end-product was amazing. We are in the process of reviewing designs and hopefully begin implementation by early fall. The quality of the work was not comprised by COVID.”

Vanessa

I can’t catch my breath. For the third night in a row I have a nightmare that I’m falling down my stairs while holding my baby. I’m 6 months pregnant and do not want to live in my dream house. The 1800’s beauty sits in a historic neighborhood with charm for days. The house was featured in a magazine for architecture and interior decorating is more than a hobby, it’s my passion. I need to exist in beautiful well thought out spaces. A seemingly effortless showcase of my art and my collections, nothing is accidental. But this nightmare is relentless, and this house is no place for a child. One week later, I walk outside and see a sold sign. We move. I’m in an airy bright apartment where we plan to live until we find a house. I decorate as though this apartment will be our forever home, purchasing 13 samples of grey paint. I feel safe tucked away on the 7th floor. Nesting is real and I’m in the throes of it as we watch the news, a virus abroad has found the US. The virus has found us. Vincent Valentine is three months old. We can’t get outside. There are 100 units in the building, and no one wears masks in the outdoor area which gave us so much - for many weeks people were only allowed to take walks within 200 meters of our properties while wearing masks and gloves. Our outside space allowed our children to be carefree. The kids attended school at our dining table - every Monday a plastic tablecloth went on with piles of our son’s notebooks, textbooks, photocopies printed off from his classroom’s platform; along with our daughter’s pens, pencils, markers, glue, construction paper and paints. I freed up a cupboard of the bookshelf for their necessities as the table couldn’t hold everything they needed. Every weekend I would put away all evidence of schooling so as a family we could ‘unplug’. My husband taught from his study and I took over the music room, hunched over a toddler IKEA desk that I transferred to the room.
a mask. Like in a horror movie, the way out is a hallway that gets longer and longer. The elevator is a hot box of germs. The lobby is lava. I see the virus on the walls, my food, my baby. I am having daily panic attacks. I am debilitatingly terrified. I am now medicated. I buy a house in the suburbs where I vowed to never return. We move. My new small house, cloaked with vinyl siding, sits on an eerily quiet street. A welcome mat leads the way to wall to wall carpeting and nicotine stained beige walls. The shade of beige pains me more than the nicotine. The giant yard doesn't excite me. I unpack 1 box, hand sanitizer and PPE, and leave the rest. I don't buy any paint samples. I purchase a 5-gallon bucket of white and ask the cashier which finish is most washable. I'm living among boxes. There is no nursery and plans for one have stalled. I see an empty space to another. The physical boundary of a wall which was used to define a space, i.e. a living room is useless. It is a free for all now, especially in smaller living spaces. Everything is everywhere. With the fear of food shortages during this panic, I now have bags filled with extra supplies and food. I had to fill the dog crate with all my extra food and supplies b/c I don't have any other place. My living room is also a gym. I planned to live one way but am forced to live like a hoarder. Thankfully, the bathroom is scared and has remained just the bathroom.

Max is on and off conference calls thorough out the day at different times and he usually uses the bedroom, aka office. A few days ago, I went into the shower and when I came out, I realized that I had to wait an hour naked wrapped in my towel until the call ended or go inside the bedroom and intrude on his zoom in a towel.

We move. My new small house, cloaked with vinyl siding, sits on an eerily quiet street. A welcome mat leads the way to wall to wall carpeting and nicotine stained beige walls. The shade of beige pains me more than the nicotine. The giant yard doesn't excite me. I unpack 1 box, hand sanitizer and PPE, and leave the rest. I don't buy any paint samples. I purchase a 5-gallon bucket of white and ask the cashier which finish is most washable. I'm living among boxes. There is no nursery and plans for one have stalled. I see an empty space to another. The physical boundary of a wall which was used to define a space, i.e. a living room is useless. It is a free for all now, especially in smaller living spaces. Everything is everywhere. With the fear of food shortages during this panic, I now have bags filled with extra supplies and food. I had to fill the dog crate with all my extra food and supplies b/c I don't have any other place. My living room is also a gym. I planned to live one way but am forced to live like a hoarder. Thankfully, the bathroom is scared and has remained just the bathroom.

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It is so hard not having alone time. Or even just the physical distance so you can mentally separate from the house. I am a huge planner and not knowing when this will end, or how this will affect our finances stresses me out. Will the money run out? Max and I can’t go anywhere alone b/c we need a sitter and I won’t do that now. At other times I wish I could just go out by myself, but it is not the same. It feels forced and like a chore. I have to purposely avoid

Jayne

My space is a cross between hurricane disaster and squatter living. What should we call that? Squatter-chic. Everything is everywhere. And finding my things is a challenge. Most of the time I end up playing tetris (stack things neatly into piles, leaving no unused space) or musical chairs, (moving things from one empty space to another). The physical boundary of a wall which was used to define a space, i.e. a living room is useless. It is a free for all now, especially in smaller living spaces. Everything is everywhere. With the fear of food shortages during this panic, I now have bags filled with extra supplies and food. I had to fill the dog crate with all my extra food and supplies b/c I don’t have any other place. My living room is also a gym. I planned to live one way but am forced to live like a hoarder. Thankfully, the bathroom is scared and has remained just the bathroom.

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people on the sidewalk and I not doing what I really want to do. I am also a huge explorer and love going places and experiencing things. I gather my energy and release stress at the same time by going out, so being stuck home is terrible. Buffalo weather isn’t the most cooperative either.

Tamara

We live in a small bungalow; it is always cozy and lived in. During our family lockdown, I learned to love it even more. I appreciate our safe space that has been both warm and cool when we needed it, as the months have dragged on and weather transitions. For the first month or so there was a twin mattress permanently in the middle of our living room. It was for forts, homework, trampolining, movie watching, and cat sleeping. The “COVID Mattress” didn’t need to move, no one was stopping by and it was in high demand during our full days in the living room. It eventually found its way back downstairs as we have transitioned to a bit of a bigger bubble and more normal life. Our house has room for a home office in the guest room, I am so grateful to have this luxury with the stress of working from home while parenting. In the early weekends we cleaned each closet out, decluttering jobs that I don’t usually have time to do. Now in summer months there has been more time for gardening and yard work than ever. We sit almost daily in the backyard and talk about how lucky we are to have our little hideaway outside and space for our children to run. During this long time in the home, Dave and I spent many conversations dreaming of what renovations we could do and creating lists of “to dos” around the house. Who knows when the renos will ever come, but it’s fun to imagine. I have always been grateful for the comfort and safety of my home, during COVID, my appreciation of our own sweet space has grown even more.

Rachel

Space in our household takes shape with the personalities and daily moods of its three occupants. There is a looseness to our spatial arrangements, almost as an act of defiance to the stifling pandemic. The result is scattered belongings and work stuff – ordered chaos. It feels right for this single mother who buck against any routine. I can decamp to the work station that fits the moment – my most formal work station that fits the moment – my most formal arrangement is in the sunroom, where I’ve set up a table with books for a footstool, a decorative gift box to elevate my screen, and a standard blazer slung on the chair for meetings. For those Zoom calls where scurrying children are to be avoided, I shift to my bedroom to crouch at my son’s too-small desk – a remnant workstation from the school year. Then there are days when the laptop travels on my person,
We learned quickly that papers don’t survive long in these environs - they disappear under newspapers, mail, bills and books. Paper stacks are also easy victims when I need to clean away anxiety. During the school year, my son, age 9, made a workstation in his bunkbed, complete with extension cords and a snack zone (he takes after his mother). Meanwhile, my daughter worked religiously at her desk in her room, door closed - perhaps to block out the chaos of her loosey-goosey mother and brother. With summer the house is either quiet (with kids outside playing), or a zoo. Four kids from the neighborhood ran giggling through the house last week and, mid play, waved on their way out to my colleague on Zoom. At that moment, I smiled at the free spirit gracing our home. We’re going to be ok.

Lian

We’re lucky that our city apartment has two patios that are sunny in the mornings and shady and relaxed in the afternoons. We used these spaces before the pandemic but now we live out there and have lunch outside daily. Our three-year-old son enjoys watering the plants and harvesting tomatoes. It’s where we send him to play with sand, water, paint and clay; where he smashes up spices and mixes them with bits of leaves and twigs for his own “cooking”. Even where we do quiet activities like reading or playing with Legos, or just laying on our backs to watch the clouds go by. With our usual playgrounds, local attractions, and even our preschool closed right now, there aren’t as many things we can do with our son. Our walks are never completely relaxed as we’re constantly on alert to see if others are wearing masks and keeping their distance, and if our son is crossing streets safely. Our own little outdoor spaces are where our son can play without us worrying, where we can be messy and a bit freer. We’ve covered the wooden decking with outdoor carpets to make the spaces cozier and move in and out in our bare feet. I used to try to insist that we use outdoor slippers on the patio, to keep our feet and the house clean, but had to let that go a week or two into the pandemic (and instead, just run our robot vacuum indoors and out. It still feels good to have some control.)

Among the things that we can see in these narratives, is that spatial comfort is not tied to preconceived notions about how domestic space should ideally look. Whether it’s a “COVID mattress” in the middle of a living room, a dog crate being used as a pantry, or a remote workstation in a bunkbed, the spaces that the mothers describe are constantly in-flux. Spatial scenarios in the narratives are idiosyncratic and highly personalized; they are much more improvised and changeable than the spaces designers often craft or represent. Perhaps most importantly, these private spaces are not immune from the anxieties that are so palpable outside of the domestic sphere. Though the mothers all describe either comfort or equilibrium that they have with their spaces, the positive feelings are tinged with tension. Different degrees of frustration are expressed in the narratives, with spaces described as messy, chaotic, a hurricane disaster, and with more than one mom using a child’s desk for remote work. The tensions articulated in the narratives should remind us that lived-in space is complex. The varied responses to spaces that just six narratives express also show us that we can’t predict how people respond to space. In order to learn about the spatial needs and desires that people, like mothers, have, we need to ask.

Photograph taken by Lian of her home.

We're going to be ok.

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