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REAL ESTATE

How the Master Bedroom Took Over the House

With square footage that rivals the average American home, master suites in luxury properties come with private pools, kitchenettes, gyms and spa amenities.

By
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With boutique-store-style closets, media rooms with retractable projection screens, offices, gyms and even kitchenettes and laundry rooms, the latest high-end homes come with master suites larger than average-sized houses. Rendering: ArX Solutions

The latest high-end homes come with master suites that are so vast and lavishly appointed, you never have to leave the bedroom.

With boutique-style closets, media rooms, offices, gyms and even kitchenettes and laundry rooms, many masters are larger than average-size houses.

The penthouse master suite of the new L'Atelier Residences in Miami Beach, Fla., is over 3,000 square feet, with another 1,000 square feet outside on two terraces—including one with a hot tub overlooking downtown Miami.

“It’s like a separate apartment,” says Meir Srebernik of SMG Management, the co-developer of L'Atelier. The penthouse, priced at \$33 million, totals 8,000 square feet of indoor living space, 37.5% of which is in the master. Echo Brickell, another Miami-area development, will have a 10,000 square foot penthouse with a master suite that has a “midnight bar,” gym and an infinity-edge pool.

At Turnberry Ocean Club in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., the 11,000-square-foot, three-level penthouses will have master suites that take up almost an entire floor and feature a large balcony overlooking the ocean. The space includes his-and-hers offices, a gym, a massage suite, a sitting room and a separate living room with a “midnight bar” that has a sink and microwave. The units haven’t yet hit the market, but the developer says the asking price will be around \$35 million when they do, later this year.

Carina Radonich, the co-owner of Finish My Condo, a Miami-based general-contracting company, says she recently completed a penthouse at the Regalia tower in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., where the master takes up 50% of the home’s total 5,700-square-foot floor plan. Built as a vacation home for a client whom she declined to name, the condo’s master includes a sitting area, an office, his-and-hers closets, his-and-hers bathrooms and, of course, a bedroom. A large projection-screen TV is hidden in the ceiling in an entertainment area.

Today, the median newly built American home measures about 2,300 square feet, with a typical master bedroom taking up 12% of the overall square footage, according to the National Association of Home Builders. It wasn’t always this way. Before the 18th century, a home’s sleeping quarters tended to be communal spaces in multi-purpose rooms like great halls, according to “Sleeping Around: A History of American Beds and Bedrooms,” by Elizabeth

Collins Cromley. Late 19th- and early 20th-century homes had bedrooms with far more privacy, though they were typically small, often to conserve heat. For the wealthy, a master bedroom could include a series of sitting or dressing rooms, a precursor of the multi-room suites gaining popularity today.

By the mid-20th century, larger suburban-style homes gave rise to master bedrooms with private bathrooms and larger closets. Architects say the space started to become more luxurious in high-end homes in the 1980s and '90s, with [grander closet spaces](#) and spa-like bathrooms.

In recent years, homeowners and developers say elaborate master suites have become more apartment-like in the midst of another trend: multigenerational housing. Many homes now include living spaces designed to house aging parents as well as adult children who may be moving back home. The sweeping suites provide a getaway for the homeowners. Joan Marcus-Colvin, senior vice president of sales, marketing and design for the New Home Co., a master-planned community developer and home builder, says the company has recently started offering more floor plans that make the master suite feel more like a private retreat, partly as a response to the multigenerational shift.

Newer floor plans offer options like laundry rooms, small gyms or Pilates areas and “super closets” within the master. The company’s newest community, in Newport Coast, Calif., will have homes with very large private decks off the master bedroom. When the homes are finished, prices will start in the mid-\$3 million range.

In Park City, Utah, orthopedic surgeon Dennis Phelps hired architect Lori Schneider, of Boulder, Colo.-based Studio Blue Design, to create a 6,000-square-foot spec home with a 1,200-square-foot master. Because the home would most likely be a second residence for the potential buyer, and frequently draw relatives and friends as houseguests, Dr. Phelps and Ms. Schneider discussed making it a private suite that could be somewhat self-contained from the rest of the home. The entire space can be heated and cooled separately. A flexible room within the suite can be outfitted as an office, gym or TV room. The home sold in March for \$3.3 million to a couple from California.

Jeff Franklin, best known as the creator of the TV show “Full House,” recently put his 8,000-square-foot Los Angeles home on the market for \$38 million. The home, perched above the Sunset Strip, was built speculatively to sell and completed earlier this year. (Mr. Franklin lived on the lot for more than 20 years before tearing down the original house.) Mr. Franklin decided to dedicate the third story to a roughly 2,500-square-foot master. “It has the best views in the home,” says Mr. Franklin, who lives in a different home he built nearby and is [working on a reboot of “Full House.”](#) The glass-walled space has two fireplaces, an espresso bar and a private terrace with a fire pit. An indoor/outdoor shower overlooks downtown L.A.

His listing agent, Brendan Fitzpatrick of the Agency, says master bedrooms often rank in the top two or three things buyers consider when purchasing a home, after the kitchen. “It’s the first place you end up in your home in the morning and the last place you end up in the evening,” he says.

Richard Landry, a Los Angeles-based architect who has designed luxury custom homes for celebrity clients like [Tom Brady](#) and Gisele Bündchen, as well as Mr. Franklin’s spec home, says he has designed master suites as large as 5,000 square feet. Amenities have included everything from small kitchens to beauty salons and pedicure stations. Some clients have requested private pools just off the master, separate from the home’s main pool.

Though it’s still considered the most private area of a home, some homeowners have started to think of the master as a space that could also work for small-scale entertaining, particularly as closets have evolved from utilitarian storage spaces to showpieces modeled after designer stores, with fireplaces, seating areas and separate dressing rooms. “It’s a place to enjoy looking at the things you have,” he says.



This sitting area is part of a master suite in a home in Winnetka, Ill., designed by architect Richard Landry.
PHOTO: ERHARD PFEIFFER

In Miami Beach, Friedrich Koesters, a corporate lawyer, and Michael Jarboe, a former model, say that since they spend most of their time in the kitchen and in the bedroom, it made sense to invest most heavily in those areas. “Everybody spends a lot of time in the bedroom, even apart from sleeping,” says Mr. Koesters. A 930-square-foot master-suite addition to their 1937 Art Deco-style home cost roughly \$500,000.

The design started with a free-standing tile and porcelain shower structure that takes center stage in the open-plan bathroom. “We wanted to showcase everything almost like a piece of art.” They recently put the 3,900-square-foot home on the market for \$4.35 million because they’ve decided to relocate to Europe.

Claudia Barnett, a real-estate agent Premier Sotheby’s International Realty in Sarasota, Fla., recently remodeled a circa-1926 historic home, spending an estimated \$80,000 on the master renovation. The space now has a large his-and-hers bathrooms, mirrored closets and a bedroom. Ms. Barnett says friends and relatives visit frequently. “We run our house like a B & B and have guests upstairs and our own space downstairs,” she says.

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The master suite's sitting area at the Winnetka home, called Le Grand Rêve. The home is currently on the market for \$13.9 million. ERHARD PFEIFFER



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The bedroom in the master suite at a Winnetka, Ill., home designed by architect Richard Landry. [ERHARD PFENNER](#)





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The glass-walled master has two fireplaces, an espresso bar and a private terrace with a fire pit. "It has the best views in the home," says Mr. Franklin. *ERHARD PFEIFFER*





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