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GIVING VOICE TO THOSE WHO CREATE WORKPLACE DESIGN & FURNISHINGS

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JP Lounge | Jonathan Prestwich

## Top Predictions for COVID-19 – 2021 Edition // A Gathering of Hollander Design Group and Friends

compiled by officeinsight

What does the future hold? The COVID-19 global pandemic has created an atmosphere where we can barely predict what might be around the corner next week. But the reality is that 2021 is right around the corner, and we'll be able to finally draw to a close the lovely chapter that was 2020 [cringe].

2021 presents just as many challenges and unknowns, but we *are* also wielding a *bit* more knowledge.

A few weeks ago, our friends **Jeffrey Hollander** and **Viveca Bissonnette** of **Hollander Design Group** hosted a gathering of design minds with the goal of putting many heads together to project what might be coming our way in the 2021 edition of the COVID pandemic.

The gathering took place via Zoom (of course), and everyone came to the meeting very well prepared with cocktails of all flavors at hand.

Our panel of participants were dialing in from all across the country, and come from a wide swath of design backgrounds:

>**Brian Graham**, Founder & Creative Director, Graham Design

>**Jennifer McGregor**, Director of Strategic Partnerships at MG AEC Technology Partners

>**Chris Stulpin**, Chief Creative Officer

>**Felice Silverman**, Principal at Silverman Trykowski Associates

>**David Silverman**, Principal at Silverman Trykowski Associates, Inc.

>**Rosalyn Cama**, founder of CAMA, Inc., a health design studio spearheading the evidence-based design movement

>**Ken Wilson**, Design Principal at the Washington, D.C. office of Perkins+Will

>**John Rouse**, Partner at Perception Studio, Ltd.

>**Martin Flaherty**, President at Pencilbox, Inc. a communications, strategy and sustainability practice

>**Viveca Bissonnette**, Founder/Principal of Hollander Design Group

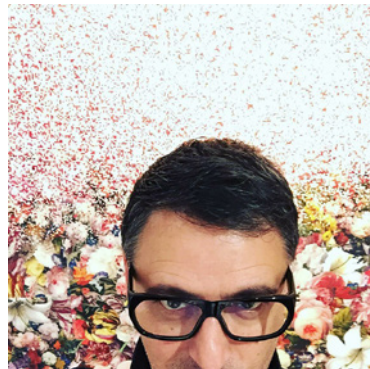
>**Jeffrey Hollander**, Founder/President of Hollander Design Group

>**Bob Beck**, officeinsight Publisher

>**Mallory Budy**, officeinsight Editor-in-Chief



Brian Graham, Founder & Creative Director, Graham Design



Chris Stulpin, Chief Creative Officer



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John Rouse, Partner at Perception Studio, Ltd.



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The discussion was lively, and fruitful – with plentiful predictions for what 2021 will hold. But before we dive in, a few words from our publisher, Bob Beck...

“Cultural memory is long, especially after a deep trauma. And I think before we’re finished with COVID-19 – or perhaps I should say before it’s finished with *us* – this whole thing we are going through will be a cultural trauma of similar magnitude to “the Depression.” When making that comparison, I think about how deeply the Depression affected my parents’ and grandparents’ generations in how they thought about abundance and waste and the value of having a job.”

“So, there is little doubt that the world will be changed for a long time when we emerge from the pandemic, and of course the world of work in our modern society is about offices and they exist for the very purpose of put-

ting people in close proximity. So how will they change?”

“I have every confidence that the professionals in the interior architecture and design community, along with their clients, will develop new and innovative solutions to the yet-to-be discovered issues and concerns of both the client companies and their employees. As of today, we can only imagine what those issues and concerns are and will be. To that end, our panel has made a good stab at identifying some of them.”

And without further ado, we present our top COVID-19 2021 predictions, along with individual thoughts from our discussion members...Happy reading!

**>Act now, think agile and nimble. We/you will likely know more in six months and may need to iterate again...be empathetic yet decisive.**

“As fast as this pandemic has accel-

erated change to our lives, the wind-down will not be as swift. Pandemics don’t end suddenly, they decelerate gradually, like a supertanker...and this is a fleet of supertankers. It’s important to be accepting of whatever happens. As designers, we’re problem solvers. But this problem is a moving target, and it’s also never going to be just one thing, so reading and reacting to things as they happen with empathy will be so important.” – Brian Graham

“The mindset of using and wearing a mask as a way to protect the people around you, rather than protect yourself will prevail.” – Martin Flaherty

**>Companies will have to reevaluate why staff need to go to the office and develop “new” flexible spaces with safety as the key objective.**

“People will be questioning going back to the office at all. We will develop more work schedules where



Design Principal at the Washington, D.C. office of Perkins+Will



Rosalyn Cama, founder of CAMA, Inc., a health design studio spearheading the evidence-based design movement



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Viveca Bissonnette, Founder/Principal of Hollander Design Group, Jeffrey Hollander, Founder/President of Hollander Design Group

heads down work is done at home, and collaboration and teamwork with others will be done in the office. I hope the reality is that we don't go back to how it all was before whenever COVID is resolved. Because if we go back to 'normal', we didn't learn anything." – Viveca Bissonette

The concept of a "work ethic" is changing – shifting away from the "perfect attendance", never miss work mindset, and moving toward being safe." – Martin Flaherty

"The resimercial trend was already in place four or five years ago, So in a sense, we were set up well to be able to handle working from home and blending spaces." – David Silverman

**>New confidence will come from the previously introverted due to increased participation via virtual technology. Be prepared to hear their voices equally.**

"We are learning a lot about human behavior, collaboration, and teams – and all of that knowledge will impact how we program and design equitable spaces. We have spent years creating spaces that allow for collaboration, synergy, chance encounters, all with the idea that these were positive experiences for everyone. Now working remotely, I see that some people miss that, but some thrive on a different kind of space and experience. In some ways the "Zoom room" is an equitable environment, everyone on the same playing field, introverts and extroverts alike." – Felice Silverman

**>Companies now have learned, by necessity, to trust employees who work from home. Expect work from home to continue at an increased level.**

"Change in workplace will only happen if corporate and senior leadership embed it into their company values, so the likelihood of anticipating real disruption in workplace

design will be in small pockets. That being said, we have proven work from home can work, so let's anticipate smaller, commercial real estate footprints." – Chris Stulpin

"Personal choice will become an important aspect of an individual's compensation package." – Brian Graham

**>This is an opportunity for organizations to "make changes for the better" rather than revert to "old patterns."**

"We're going to be in a sustained crisis. There will be a renewed sense of people taking care of their employees beyond a paycheck. Hopefully, a deeper, two-way trust will develop: trust from the employer in their staff to get their work done, and trust from employees to their employer and coworkers to have their best interests and safety at heart." – Viveca Bissonette

**>Travel is not required for virtual meetings, so more of them are happening. More meetings build stronger relationships, even when they are virtual.**

"We have to be incredibly agile right now, and that's an easier thing to say than do. There are new kids out of school that haven't had any serious mentoring in their career, and it's incredibly difficult for them to have those experiences." – Viveca Bissonette

"Access to a healthcare visit looks very different now. Telemedicine visits have gone up 4,300%. Ambulatory exam space will go down. Doctors are finding they can do virtual visits effectively." – Rosalyn Cama

**>Architects and designers have a unique business acumen, education and experience to partner with clients in solving the challenges of the pandemic...both physical and humanist.**

"The *thinking* in "design thinking" is already built-in, and our industry [furniture manufacturing side] isn't

necessarily built to be so agile so quickly. There's lots of hacking going on, and some of it is good, and some not so good – but I do think through all of this we're going to be learning a lot." – Brian Graham

"Designers will take what we've learned about collaboration and teaming from the extreme condition of working remotely to inform how we plan and program for people in a remote, hybrid or fully occupied environment. When we finally go back to creating spaces for people to connect, we will have a deeper understanding of how to create an equitable workspace." – Felice Silverman

"Designers will need to rethink how we make people feel comfortable and safe in a space. Today, every space is a reminder that we are in a pandemic. With literal graphics on the floors and walls, physical dividers, and closed off amenities, we are constantly in fear of, or at least questioning our environment and other people. While these measures are all well intentioned and important in this urgent time, there is a more creative way to create safe, comfortable space. Good design can help people be safe, and transition back into being comfortable in a space with other people." – Felice Silverman

**>Periods of radical change are opportunities to advance on many levels. It is time to seize the day – take more control and responsibility. Assume the/your proper place in creating the next normal.**

"Our effectiveness in this entire figuring-out process is felt on many levels. How hard do we push our young staff members to engage with our clients beyond pushing out an email? As designers, we're one of the most qualified groups to set people on a path to something newer and better." – Jeffrey Hollander



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“With a rise in unemployment at the design firm level, we will lose some critical knowledge from those who have left. There will be many firms and companies that see this as an opportunity to accelerate. There’s the potential for startups to increase. Big firms will get bigger, and also very small, agile firms will begin to pop up more.” – Chris Stulpin

“Plexiglass and hand sanitizer have taken over the world right now, but that’s not where we’re going to be going. This is an opportunity to look at

quality of life. The potential for a disease like this to be around for a long time means there is an opportunity for us in the design field to take this and be the ones to lead in solving problems.” – Rosalyn Cama

**>Acknowledge and sponsor less-precious materials. Practical solutions and communication of same, build trust.**

“We’ve discovered we can do with less, in part because we had to. Things were not available - we’ve learned to

treasure each paper towel! Hopefully that has led us to thinking more sustainably and resourcefully - use less, appreciate more, be more resourceful. Also, a minimalist environment will feel safer - less stuff around is less stuff to clean. I predict this will be a movement for residential as well as workplace - will the “resimerical” workplace now become the “commerdential” residence?” – Felice Silverman

“The past is the past and the reactive crisis is now but the future must be different...Therefore, we need



Zoom cocktails, always an adventure

to reach across design sectors and disciplines and collaborate. Multidisciplinary collaboration is needed to rapidly develop a few evidence-based scenarios whereby the design of the built environment can take a leap that it is neither detrimental to human health nor to our evolving economy. A non-discernible pathogen took out both in a small number of days. Our future reality must give way to a much more manageable way of life for all, regardless of socio-economic position – access to life’s joy – health being at the top of that list!” – Rosalyn Cama

***>Virtual reality has forever changed the way we shop, communicate and play. Think about how to incorporate virtual reality and augmented reality into everything you plan, make and sell. It is the future.***

“AR/VR technology for our industry will be more widely leveraged as a means to connect with clients and further the design process. With the anticipated growth of this market from \$6B to \$20B in the next five years, we all need to be ready for this kind of engagement. It has been interesting to see how many firms have further

developed their VR strategies in the last seven months alone. With these streamlined technologies and more instant gratification aspects, will our clients demand more of us after the pandemic?” – Jennifer McGregor

“Living, working, learning, playing, and healing at home suddenly has new meaning as we develop and design the best/next new lifestyle communities for our evolving multifaceted lives. Lives that are socially dependent (people need people), environmentally rich (biophilia or love of life), yet electronically virtual as revolutionary ideas require reach to gather broad data needed to spark innovation. AI and AR will tip this point.” – Rosalyn Cama

***>The pandemic has created an environment for technology to advance at an incredible pace. It will allow us to reach further, faster, but will also invade our personal lives in perhaps unwanted ways.***

“The need for data integration and dashboarding of building assets and systems is a top priority. Portfolio owners, property managers, etc. – will all have a heightened need to measure

efficiencies and effectiveness in real time. Imagine being able to determine the indoor air quality of your office or even a specific conference room in advance of your scheduled meeting. This is what’s next.” – Jennifer McGregor

“Since we’ve been working virtually, I no longer have the power to interrupt. To walk through our studio and stop or interrupt something and then work together at that stopping point. I’m more scheduled than I ever was. There is this creative energy we get from being with other people, that you just can’t replicate remotely. We can do our work, and can limp along if we need to, but I don’t think the work is as good. How can you do a design charrette virtually?” – Ken Wilson

“It is pretty scary, but the whole “big brother” mentality is even more of a reality now. With remote work, employers are searching for ways to monitor staff productivity beyond design process assessments and discussions around lean enterprise. The use of surveillance apps and programs monitoring work behavior and efficiency will increase yet an organization’s culture will be the predictor of adoption.” – Jennifer McGregor ■