

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Inside the High-End Mailrooms Wealthy Residents Visit When They've Got Mail

Some real-estate developments in New York, Florida and California are turning the lowly space into an attractive gathering spot; a hangout spot to chat over catalogs

The mailroom at One Hudson Yards includes strips of backlit Brazilian quartzite and a high-gloss stone floor
DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Candace Taylor
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Each morning, Diane Legault heads to an all-white space with floor-to-ceiling glass windows framing the Atlantic: the mailroom at Jade Signature, her beachfront condo building in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla.

"It has the most beautiful views," the 57-year-old pharmaceutical consultant says of the mailroom at Jade, where she lives in a \$5.4 million condo. She says she enjoys chatting with neighbors while sorting her mail at the reclaimed-wood table. "I take my time" going through the mail, she explains. "You don't mind doing it there because it's just such a lovely atmosphere."

The mailroom—that spot in every building where residents grab their bills and catalogs—is in transition. On one hand, postal mail grows ever less relevant amid the digital revolution: Overall volume fell by 4.9 billion to 149,491 billion pieces in fiscal 2017, the U.S. Postal Service reported. On the other hand, changes to the thicket of Postal Service, federal and local regulations that govern mailboxes are forcing real-estate developers to upsize these traditionally pedestrian spaces.

Posh Private Post Offices

Boasting ocean views and sleek materials, these luxurious mailrooms are a far cry from their pedestrian forebears.



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At the Jade Signature condominium in Florida, residents mingle in the mailroom.
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At the 56 Leonard condominium in Manhattan, the mailroom walls are covered in the same lozenge-shaped black tiles as the lobby. The rounded shape is repeated throughout the building. The gray-granite floor is intended to evoke the city sidewalk outside, and transporting the large granite slabs into the mailroom required taking down a wall in the lobby. HERZOG & DE MEURON

The solution? Turn the lowly mailroom into a luxury amenity that doubles as a place for residents to mingle.

The mailroom at Manhattan's Sky rental building, where rows of mailboxes are topped with gleaming bronze panels, served as the setting for a recent Haute Living Magazine photo shoot with Kristaps Porziņģis, an NBA player and building resident.



A table topped with reclaimed wood in the mailroom at Jade Signature. PHOTO: ALEXIA FODERE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

At One Hudson Yards, a recently completed luxury rental building in Manhattan where one-bedrooms start at \$5,095 a month, the mailroom includes strips of backlit Brazilian quartzite and a high-gloss stone floor. A sorting table is carved from chocolate-brown marble streaked with white. The space helps justify the rent, says tech-entrepreneur Larry Adams, 42, who moved into One Hudson Yards with his wife and two children in April. "I feel like I'm getting every dollar's worth."

At Manhattan's 56 Leonard condominium, the mailroom walls are covered in lozenge-shaped black tiles. The gray-granite floor is intended to evoke the city sidewalk outside, says Mehmet Noyan of Herzog & de Meuron, the building's design consultant. Transporting the large granite slabs into the mailroom required taking down a wall in the lobby, but Mr. Noyan says it was worth it to lend the mailroom the right look. And at the Eugene, a project in New York City where monthly rents start at around \$3,700, the mailroom has terrazzo floors and mailboxes in a bold red, bronze and gray pattern.

Esther Cuan moved into the Abaca rental building in San Francisco with her boyfriend in March. There, the 29-year-old software engineer collected her mail in the fancier of the building's two mailrooms: a space with 20-foot-high ceilings, a polished concrete floor and walls decorated with wooden panels painted a vibrant indigo. Free-standing, blackened-steel cabinets hold the mailboxes themselves.



One of two mailrooms at the Abaca rental building in San Francisco. A custom-designed sculptural chandelier is made from abaca, the fiber used to make rope in the factory that once stood at the site. PHOTO: GARRETT ROWLAND

Above hangs the pièce de résistance: a custom-designed rope chandelier made from abaca, the fiber once used at the former factory site to make rope for nets and other uses. In a nod to the property's history, "we wanted it to look like almost a jumble of fishing nets," says Dani Gelfand of Studio O+A, which designed the space.

Ms. Cuan argues that a luxurious mailroom makes sense in the digital era, when the majority of postal mail tends to be unexciting, low-quality miscellany like catalogs and bills. While she's always excited to get packages, and doesn't mind using the automated package-retrieval system in the building's garage to get them, regular mail "requires a beautiful space to be a nice experience," she says. She and her boyfriend were disappointed when they decided to move to another apartment within the building, which required switching to the project's less-enticing mailroom.

As they lavish more money on mailrooms, some developers are aiming to make them gathering spaces as well. At Jade Signature, the Florida luxury development that also boasts a private spa for residents and a yoga terrace, the mailroom was intentionally designed to help residents strike up conversations, says Ana Cristina Defortuna of developer Fortune International Group.



A sitting area next to the mailboxes at 1N4th. PHOTO: AXEL DUPEUX FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



Mailboxes at 1N4th. PHOTO: AXEL DUPEUX FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

At 1N4th, a rental building on the waterfront in Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood, mailboxes in free-standing wooden structures are staggered throughout the lobby, a setup that “lends itself to people catching up,” says resident Maria Makres, 44, who works in advertising sales. And at the Old Town development in Columbus, Ga., which has single-family homes and apartments, the architecture and planning firm Historical Concepts created a mailroom with turquoise walls and a fire-engine red glass chandelier. A bench encourages “catching up with neighbors,” says Historical Concepts’ Andrew Cogar.

Perhaps it is inevitable that as mailrooms grow in size and cost, some builders would want to get rid of them entirely. The Moinian Group, developer of Sky, is considering skipping mailrooms in some of its coming condo projects, says executive Jeanne McGuire. Instead, she says, staff will hand-deliver the mail to each unit.