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What Do Gen Z Renters Want? Amenities, Aesthetics and Their Own Mini Universe

We talked to four young people who are changing the game when it comes to renting

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Josefina Londono, a furniture entrepreneur, lives in the Dupont building in Brooklyn, N.Y. It opened in 2024 and has 381 units. PHOTO: MICHAEL BUCHER/WSJ



Part of the reason she moved into the building was so she could use its common areas to photograph the furniture she produces. VIDEO: MICHAEL BUCHER/WSJ

From baby boomers to Gen Xers to millennials, American professionals used to have a somewhat common trajectory. Young adults graduated, moved to the city and rented a basic apartment. Eventually, the city became a community.

Not so for some Gen Zers, who are opting for a new urban way of life: Hunkering down in amenity-rich, high-design rental complexes that offer not just a place to live, but also a self-contained world that creates its own instant community.

“Gen Z is now the dominant force in the rental market and they are redefining what renting looks like,” says Emily McDonald, [Zillow’s](#) rental-trends expert.

Born from the mid-1990s to early 2010s, Gen Z’s ages range from 15 to 30. They represent 47% of recent U.S. renters, and comprise 25% of all U.S. renters, according to Zillow. As of 2023, there were 9.1 million Gen Z renter households, says Alexander Hermann, senior research associate at Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies.

According to Zillow, 44% of Gen Z renters live in apartment-style buildings. Today, some complexes have perks like pools, fitness centers, coworking spaces, social lounges and pet salons. These amenities are efficient and foster community. But they also provide a real world buffer, allowing residents to curate their own mini universes, not unlike personalizing a social-media feed.

We talked to four Gen Zers—and experts who study this generation—about this evolving metropolitan lifestyle. Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

JOSEFINA LONDONO: In New York City, finding an apartment can be traumatizing. You’re told to be at an apartment showing at, like, 10 a.m. and apply or the unit will be gone forever. There is a crazy application process, including proving you make 40 to 50 times the rent. I’m like, I can’t just leave my job at 10 a.m., and if I made 40 to 50 times the rent, I wouldn’t be living here. Part of the reason I like my building is it wasn’t pushy. I didn’t need a guarantor. The rental process was smooth and convenient. I moved into an approximately 500-square-foot studio in 2024.

Gen Z has destigmatized mental health, says Wright State University professor and Gen Z researcher Corey Seemiller. They leave situations that are toxic for them and engage in ones that meet their mental, emotional and physical needs. They understand that their environment can impact their mood and productivity.

JOSEFINA: I was working in finance and living in Manhattan with a roommate. I started a new job. My mental health suffered. Eventually, I quit and started a furniture company. At that time, I decided to move out on my own. I wanted a place that felt like home. The affordable apartments in Manhattan were older. They had heavy energy. They wouldn’t have made me happy. I thought if I’m not happy, my company won’t shine, because I am the company. My apartment in Brooklyn is new. Its energy feels light. My mind is clear here.

Gen Z was raised on social media. Easy access to visual content through Pinterest and Instagram has given them a high level of aesthetic awareness, style confidence and design expectation, interior designer Julia Lauve says.

JOSEFINA: The apartment finishes were important to me. The colors were important to me.

For some reason Gen Z is obsessed with natural light, Seemiller says.

JOSEFINA: My unit faces Manhattan and the East River. It feels open. I have a lot of natural light.

Just under half of Gen Z renters are cost-burdened, meaning spending more than 30% on rent, says Hermann. According to Zillow, in 2022, Gen Z renters’ median gross annual income was \$42,000 and median gross rent was \$1,415 per month—a roughly 40% ratio.

JOSEFINA: I pay \$3,595 per month. I’ve always been careful to never pay more than 50% of my income in rent.

Seemiller says many Gen Zers are lonely. When interior designer Julia Lauve designs a Gen Z apartment building, she says every detail, from the depth of a sofa to the glow of a light fixture, is an intentional contribution to a feeling of belonging and safety.

JOSEFINA: I wanted to be surrounded by people who were interesting and nice. That’s what this building attracts. The other day, I bought a bottle of wine, and someone I met in the building was like, ‘Okay, I’ll bring the glasses!’ This was a networking meetup, which was great because that’s what I was looking for when I moved. I wanted to be surrounded by people who were interesting and nice. That’s what the building attracts. The meetup felt like making a friend.

Still, their online community matters: Gen Z wants their living spaces to be Instagramable, interior designer Julia Lauve says.

JOSEFINA: I did think, ‘Can I film here and make content with my furniture pieces?’

Many in Gen Z are fearful about the economy, Seemiller says. They are worried about climate change, human rights and social justice. They are scared that older adults are making decisions that are knowingly moving society backwards. They don’t have the time or money to take chances since their failure threshold, both internally and externally, is lower. Taken together, this contributes to Gen Z being risk-averse.



In her apartment, Josefina and her boyfriend prepare a photo shoot for social media, which she planned to photograph in her building's social lounge. PHOTO: MICHAEL BUCHER/WSJ

JOSEFINA: When I first moved to New York, I had six months pre-Covid. It was the best time ever. I was going out Thursday, Fridays, Saturdays. I was meeting so many people. I was like, my world is opening. After Covid, life never went back to being the same. For me, the anxiousness of Covid has carried over a bit. I’m less interested in being in the scene. I am more interested in genuine relationships.

Gen Z isn’t in their peak homebuying years yet, but they are coming of age in a housing market with limited inventory, rapid home-price growth and high interest rates, Hermann says. Accessing homeownership could be difficult for them, he says. Gen Z’ers themselves, however, are optimistic.

JOSEFINA: I envision myself eventually owning a big home.