

THE BALLAD OF BOHEMIAN PROGENY

Millennials might be seen as all fun and games, but with the eldest of this demographic reaching 35, children may soon play a key role in downtown developments throughout the West.

By David Senden

Here's the story: Hipster moves downtown. He loves living near his job and the nightlife. He hangs out at the corner coffee shop and shops at the boutique down the street. And that's where it happens. Hearts flutter and angels sing. First, they share a micro-brew, maybe a little more, then an apartment, and, after an appropriate amount of time (and a marriage, if they are so inclined), a child. What to do? Downtown is no place to raise a child. But they love this place. Their friends are here. The smells, the sounds, the energy; it fits them. They know an offspring changes their life, but shouldn't you be able to raise a child in the place you love? Is there a way for kids and the city to coexist? What does it take? Could design make a difference?

This is uniquely an American problem, a problem forged by the automobile in the boom times of the early 20th century. Those were the days when the inner city meant dirty, polluted and industrial. Anybody with the wherewithal to escape packed up the family and headed for the fresh air and open spaces of the shiny new master-planned suburbs. Over the past couple of decades, all that has



Flexible rooms that can be turned into a nursery, office or playroom allow the unit to change as the family changes.

changed, however. Inner cities have become 24/7 live, work, play environments. They've been scrubbed clean. Millions of dollars in development money have poured in each year. The air is clean(er). Those super fresh suburbs are further out these days. The roads are clogged. Gas is expensive. So people are moving back to downtown. Back to the tall buildings and crowded sidewalks. Back to the ex-

citement and energy of the city.

Developers are helping. Thousands of residential units are under construction in downtowns from coast to coast, but most of the downtown developments have ignored families. The vast majority of units built and in the pipeline are small in size, great for singles and maybe couples. Restaurants, bars and other retail has followed, all aimed at the super hip and unattached, and with good reason. This is a huge market. There are 82 million Millennials. However, the leading edge of this generation is 35 years old. These are not the young partiers they once were. While the average age for starting a family continues to increase, especially for well-educated professionals, you can't fight nature and eventually there will be children.

In several downtowns there is a growing understanding. Dogs have been accepted and new developments are featuring dog salons, parks and play areas. Cities are hanging up poop bag dispensers all over down-

towns. Sure, kids aren't dogs, but they're next. There is a small visionary group of developers eyeing this growing market and looking for ways to dip their toes in. They are shifting unit floorplans, re-thinking amenities, and hoping to make it possible for those hipsters to stay where they are.



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The solution isn't simply providing more space. At rents around the \$4 per square foot mark in the trendiest of these downtown locales, pushing unit sizes up will price out all but the very top end of renters. So, it comes down to small things: stroller parking in the lobby, more storage within the building, hang-out spaces that are more Barney and less Miley. There are big things, too: a splash park instead of a swimming pool, a craft room instead of a wine bar, or a turf area for play instead of ornamental grasses. Unit plans need to offer flexibility, storage and emphasize function as much as style. They need to stay small. Kids don't come with a pay raise so the units need to do more. They need to offer space to play, a place to store the stuff and a way to grow as the family does.

Having kids in the city is still pioneering, and those willing to stay will sacrifice a lot, but do they really have to? As Gen Y grows up, the thumping base of the nightclubs will give way to the laughs of children. Developers and the cities in which Hipsters work need to find ways to satisfy them without compromising what makes living downtown great.

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A drop zone for backpacks and coats makes organization easy at the front door.



Sliding doors open the child's bedroom to the living space to allow for greater flexibility for play.

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used gathering more contacts, closing more deals, or spending more time with family and friends. Brokers should encourage management decision-makers to research and understand what is new in operations technology.

The right software could actually pay for itself with critical lease expiration alerts and management dashboards. It could help a firm grow without having to add more operations staff. Vibrant, growing firms need their brokers to have a good CRM, a user-friendly operations system and solid accounting software to be as efficient and profitable as possible. Technology can be disruptive in a good way if it adds tools to save time and money. Exactly how much is difficult to quantify. It does take some expense and time to onboard the systems, but the investment is worth it.

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