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## Gen Z Renters Are Looking for Buildings They Never Need to Leave

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

By: Jessica Flint  
Impressions: 26,462,489

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.

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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.



**Max Eulenhoefer**

**Age:** 21

**Location:** West Palm Beach, Fla.

**Job:** Real estate broker



**Josefina Londono**

**Age:** 27

**Location:** Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Job:** Furniture entrepreneur



**Christian Rivera**

**Age:** 26

**Location:** Phoenix, Ariz.

**Job:** Store manager



**Emaan Yusuf**

**Age:** 20

**Location:** Houston, Texas

**Job:** Student

PHOTOS: ALFONSO DURAN FOR WSJ, MICHAEL BUCHER/WSJ, JOHNNY KOMPAN FOR WSJ, JOSEPH BUI FOR WSJ

Gen Z is raising the bar on renting, says Zillow's Emily McDonald. They think renting an apartment should be as simple and seamless as renting an Uber.

**MAX EULENHOFER:** I started seeing Instagram ads for Lumaire when I was relocating from Jupiter, Fla. to West Palm Beach. I was like, "What is this place?" I looked up its website. I was like, "Oh my gosh. I've gotta live there." The application process was super straightforward. In fall 2024, I browsed floor plans online. Before committing, I visited the building. I chose my unit: A 600-square-foot studio on the 19th floor, overlooking the city and pool, with a west-facing sunset view. That night, I selected the apartment online. Within a few days, I was approved, arranged movers and moved in.

**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.

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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

**CHRISTIAN RIVERA:** In 2022, my company relocated me from rural Arizona to Phoenix. For 30 days, I was put up in a one-bedroom furnished rental. All I had to bring were my clothes. I liked the building, so I stayed. First, I rented an unfurnished studio. Recently, I signed a lease with a roommate for an unfurnished two-bedroom apartment that is about 1,120 square feet.

**EMAAN YUSUF:** I'm a college student in Houston. I live off-campus with a roommate in a 520-square-foot studio. Units are fully furnished down to the dishes, trash can and bathroom mat. Next year, I'll live alone in a studio in the building.

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Emaan Yusuf lives in Uniti Montrose, in Houston. The building opened in 2024 and has 374 leasable bedrooms.

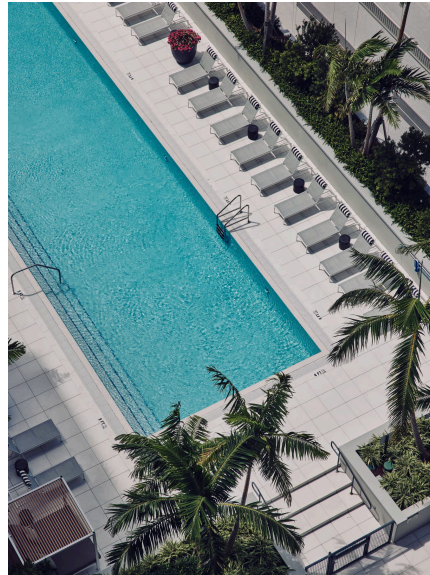
PHOTOS: Joseph Bui for WSJ

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.

MAX: After graduating high school in California, I drove toward Florida. I had a dream to work in real estate and I wanted to chase it. At first, I rented an [Airbnb](#). Then, I found a random online rental. It was a nightmare. I got put into an unrenovated unit. The Wi-Fi was messed up. There wasn't a sense of community. It was isolating. That's when I decided to move to Lumaire. Now, I wake up and my building is fresh, and it's new, and it's exciting. I feel really good being in my space.



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Lumaire, where Max lives, opened in 2024. It has 457 units. Amenities include ping pong and pool tables, gym, yoga studio, bocce, sports simulator, pickleball and a pool.

PHOTOS: Alfonso Duran for WSJ

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.

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EMAAN: My pre-med major is demanding. Living somewhere that makes me feel good helps me manage the pressure.

Gen Z is accustomed to efficiency: online shopping, web-based learning, entertainment on-demand. Similarly, they want their living spaces to streamline their lives, says Workshop Studio co-founder Julia Lauve, whose team designed Houston's Uniti Montrose building.

CHRISTIAN: A big attraction of the apartment building is that I don't have to leave to go to a gym or use a pool.



Christian Rivera lives in Ave Phoenix Terra, in Phoenix. It opened in 2022 and has 348 units.  
Photo: Johnny Kompar for WSJ

EMAAN: My life is in the building. I study in the coworking room. I'll do some morning yoga on the deck. I tan by the pool. I utilize every single amenity. The building is designed with usefulness in mind.

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.

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EMAAN : My building feels like a beautiful mansion where every room is unique. A coworking room has chandelier lighting. The Sky Lounge has a gorgeous emerald-green couch. The library has color-coded books. Even the mail room is cute. It feels straight out of [Pinterest](#).



Emaan in a workout space in her building; the color-coded library.  
PHOTOS: JOSEPH BUI for WSJ



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

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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.

MAX: I pay about \$2,300 per month. My rent is one-fifth to one-sixth of my monthly income.

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

CHRISTIAN: My roommate and I each pay about \$1,260 per month. I'm fortunate to say I've developed a career where I can pay rent with no issues, and having a roommate makes it easier to be able to do some leisure activities.



The amenities in Christian's building include a fitness center, pool, yoga lawn, putting green, fire pits, business center, barbecue grills, coffee and cold brew bars, a social lounge and speakeasy.

Photo: Johnny Kompar for WSJ

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EMAAN: I pay around \$1,700 per month. My dad is the guarantor on the lease for next fall.

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.

MAX: I've met a ton of friends in my building. I've met people in the gym. There is a coffee machine on the amenity floor that everyone flocks to. The pool table is a place to make friends. There is a website through the building where you can create different groups; there's a cooking group and a sports group.

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.



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

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CHRISTIAN: The community aspect is what gravitated me toward signing a lease. A lot of people I hang out with are my neighbors. We have similar lifestyles, and similar mentalities. The building has attracted very authentic and genuine people. 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?'

EMAAN: I study on the rooftop with the sun setting. I sit by the pool and eat my sushi. On social media, there are pictures of me doing these things.



Emaan's building has many spaces where she can get work done, including a lounge, coworking space and Zoom rooms. When it comes time for play, there is a pool, podcast room, craft room, rooftop barbecue and TV lounge.

Photo: Joseph Bui for WSJ

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.

MAX: A lot of my friends are just graduating college, and they're extremely fearful of the real world. Our parents had what seemed like a very structured life. You go to high school, you go to college, you buy a house for 10 nickels, and it's like, perfect, no problem. That linear structure has blown up. Now, you have to have 10 years of

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experience to get an internship, and it's unpaid, and you can't find an apartment for less than \$2,000 per month. A ton of people from my generation think, "How am I supposed to live?" Knowing that you're going to live in a building with a built-in community that will support you is extremely motivating.



One of the reasons Max likes living at Lumaire is because of the community that has developed within the building.

PHOTOS: Alfonso Duran for 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.

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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.

CHRISTIAN: I moved out of my house in New Jersey when I was 17 and went to college in Arizona, where I didn't have family. I'm willing to take on risk. I see it as an opportunity. But based on the people I know, I do notice a cautiousness.

It's not all doom and gloom, says Seemiller, who believes Gen Z is an inspiring generation. They are values-driven. They live their passions in their day-to-day life.

MAX: My building is more than a place to live. It's a thriving young community. Everyone here is on a fresh start, a new journey. We're all here chasing our dreams. We're all helping push each other past the finish line.

CHRISTIAN: I don't see renting as throwing money away, but as adding value. I wanted to rent to leverage the opportunity to make connections, and be around people who are doing really well in their careers to push me to do better in my life. It has worked out for me.



Christian likes that he doesn't have to leave his building to go the gym or use a pool.  
Photo: Johnny Kompar for WSJ

*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,*

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*Hermann says. Accessing homeownership could be difficult for them, he says. Gen Z'ers themselves, however, are optimistic.*

MAX: I'm on track to buy a condo in two years. I would love a condo because it just has so many amenities, and again, I love the community aspect. And because of the views. I love being high up and looking out over the city or the ocean."

CHRISTIAN: My roommate and I moved in with each other to save money so we can buy a house together. We have a year or two before we consider purchasing a house.

JOSEFINA: I envision myself eventually owning a big home.

EMAAN : I want to own multiple properties and Airbnb them.

Three in five Gen Z renters have a pet, says McDonald, and most say pet-friendly rentals are essential.

MAX: The only reason I would move to a single-family house is if my girlfriend really wanted more space for our future dog.

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