



Not All Studios Are Created Equal

By Bart Walters

According to a newspaper report in The Bangkok Post, the average size of a condo sold in Bangkok last year was 29.9 square meters in size; 31.1 in 5 neighboring provinces. Where I come from, the average hotel room is bigger. Still, I have become accustomed to living in more confined spaces. While I cannot personally imagine myself residing in such a small space longer than a holiday, my appreciation for making them “livable” has grown since living in Asia.

The “studio” apartment is now the hottest selling product offered on

the property market here in Thailand. How developers and designers approach the particular challenges studios present will determine their success. This month I randomly selected three show units in Pattaya and Jomtien to compare how they solve the design challenges a studio presents. There are several key issues that must be addressed when designing a studio. Activities that take place in any condo include sleeping, eating, lounging and storing the occupant’s “stuff”. Let’s look at each unit individually and see how they fare.

Studio 1 :

Studio 1 is 54 square meters which is huge by modern standards. The bed is a full king size and dominates a corner of the long rectangular shaped room. The sofa too is full sized and faces a wall with the large flat screen, a wardrobe and a round dining table. The kitchen is as large as you’ll find in most one or two bedroom units. The bathroom contains a big walk-in shower with glass enclosure.

The designer of this unit has gotten it right with regard to sleeping and lounging. The space is big enough to support a king size bed and full sofa. However, the solutions for eating, storage and bathing could use a little work.

The full-blown kitchen could have easily been cut down by a full meter. All that kitchen storage just isn’t necessary in a studio. The dining table seems to be an afterthought and is jammed into one end in a very non-functional way. Perhaps an eat-in 2 seat arrangement connected to the kitchen would have been a better solution. Or maybe designate the table on the huge double balcony as the “dining area”.

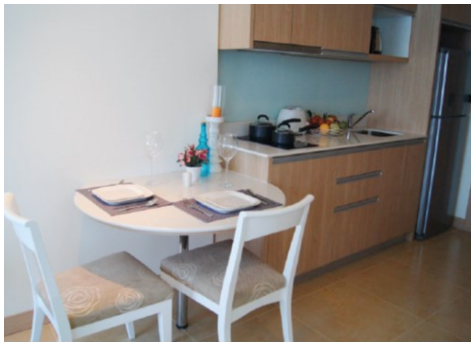
Storage overall is a problem. This designer opted for a stand-alone wardrobe as the main storage feature, leaving no room to hide suitcases, golf clubs or other large items. The sideboard offers a paltry amount of space; its sole purpose apparently to hold up the TV. With the space given, certainly giving up a few square meters on a closet would have been more logical.

The space allotted for the bathroom is adequate. The cumbersome full length glass door on the shower makes it feel small. Again, the size of this shower could have been maximized by using a glass wall 1/3 the size of the door and possibly building in some more bathroom storage.

It is apparent to me this condo was assembled without regard for its “studio” status. The kitchen is too big, the shower is too big, and no wardrobe is built in. This isn’t a studio; it’s a one bedroom without a dining room or a closet.

What’s the upside of Studio 1? It’s just a big rectangular room and you could do whatever you want with it. A few minor adjustments and this could be a very livable space.





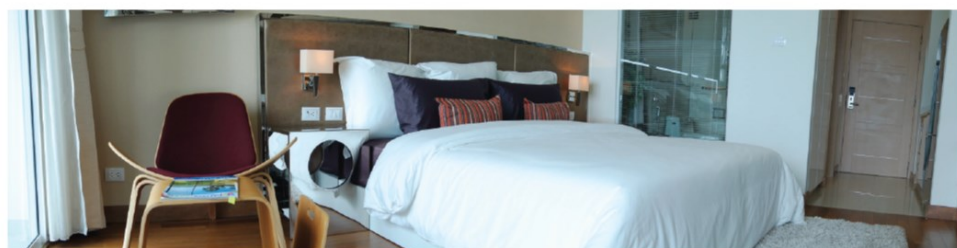
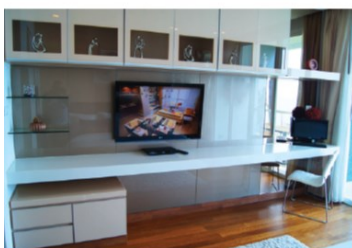
Studio 2 :

Studio 2 is 37 square meters and is in a squarer configuration. The sleeping and lounging areas are separated visually, both having use of the TV. The bathroom is well designed and spacious. This studio was quite obviously designed to be a living space for one person, or a couple. Everything is properly proportioned. The sleeping area is deceptively large thanks to the use of a queen size bed rather than a king. That slight change keeps the bed in proportion to the size of the room and creates "walk around" space. The closet hidden by mirrored doors also serves to make the room look much bigger. The lounging space is intimate and comfortable; the TV just the right size. The space saving narrow coffee table is a smart use of space. The kitchen/dining solution is ingenious and space saving. (Studio 1

could have used something like this.) Another private dining area is set up on the also perfectly proportioned balcony.

The bathroom is stylish with space in the right places. Small bathrooms are inexpensive to make opulent, and I think that's what the designer was thinking here. The rich brown granite, the big "room-for-two" shower and the slim-profile toilet all work well together. The storage space in this unit is a little suspect, with only the hotel sized wardrobe hidden away.

Overall I'd say Studio 2 truly benefits from its square shape. The "square-ness" of the floor plan makes it seem larger. The alcove created by the balcony also gives the place a little more personality than just a box. This is a real studio apartment.



INTERIORS

Studio 3 :

Studio 3 is 31 square meters, the size of the average condo sold in our province last year. This unit forfeits some of the comforts of larger units completely.

The eating requirement is solved by a very pared down, but functional unit with 2 burner hob, microwave, sink and fridge. If you want to eat what you prepared, you'll have to suffer the direct beach view on the balcony for your meal. I get it ... "if you don't want to take your meals outside, why did you buy a condo on the beach?" ... makes perfect sense to me.

Lounging in this unit is pretty much restricted to one uncomfortable looking chair. From the big fluffy bed, you could enjoy a movie on the nice flat screen TV. There is an incredible amount of space allotted to a work area and office-like storage space. Even though his part of the room seems very out of proportion, this is the only studio of the 3 that offer a computer station/work area.

The bathroom includes a cool shower with a seat. It's one of those "peek-a-boo" showers so popular in Bangkok hotels. I understand the designer's purpose is to open up the room to make it appear bigger and get natural light in the bathroom. It's just kind of hotel-like to me.

And that would be my summary of Studio 3. It isn't a studio at all ... it's a nice hotel room at the beach. It is not designed for residence, but for holiday. Don't get me wrong. I enjoy a nice hotel room at the beach as much as the next guy. But, as nice as Studio 3 is ... for me it crosses the line from apartment to hotel room.

It is important to note that the price for these three condos varies wildly. The closer to the beach you get the smaller the unit and

the higher the price per square meter.

Studio one was obviously not professionally designed to be used as a studio. Studio 3 is designed as a hotel room you can own. Studio 2 clearly displays vision, design and execution as a classic example of a studio apartment.

So, if you are in the market for a small-ish condo unit; either as an investment or weekend getaway pad, consider how much time you'll spend there or what kind of tenant you hope to attract. Pay attention to the details and remember; not all studios are created equal.

