

## THE GROWING POPULARITY OF SLIDING DOORS

by Ginny Powell

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**You don't have to look far to notice** the popularity of sliding doors and sliding barn-style doors. This trend is hitting the commercial and residential markets with gusto, and according to the experts we spoke to, the movement will continue to climb with no sign of letting up in the coming years.

While the use of sliding doors has steadily increased each year, the emerging trend itself is more about the expansion of use—how designers are finding new ways to integrate them into spaces.

This growth has also sparked a revolution in door and hardware manufacturing to meet the growing demand. For example, just a few years ago, a sliding barn-style door needed to be custom designed and built, but today the number of pre-fabricated doors on the market continues to rise. Accompanying hardware is evolving as well, offering many more finishes, styles and durability options—giving architects and designers a nice variety from which to choose.

Up until recently, the most common applications for sliding doors included healthcare and office spaces. While those segments are still strong, sliding doors are replacing traditional ones in several new areas.

### **City Loft Apartments**

In Minneapolis, where Mike Gall is the owner of Hardlines, Inc., an independent sales representative agency, he is seeing more sliding doors in revitalization projects.

“Developers are renovating old warehouses and manufacturing buildings into loft apartments,” explains Mike, “and sliding doors are selected much more often than traditional doors.”

In these projects, the combination of exposed brick and columns preserves the industrial feel of the space—an architectural style that many young professionals, which Minneapolis attracts, love.

“Industrial lofts want rustic-looking doors, so sliding barn-style doors are installed for the spaces that need privacy, such as the bedrooms and bath,” explains Mike. “Additionally, rough and worn-out looking hardware is used. We are making new hardware look old.”

### **Churches**

Tyler Stephens, AIA, a principal with Core10 Architects, shared that his firm recently completed two church youth centers where sliding barn doors were used. In both projects, a large space was designed where one side was a dedicated meeting space and the other side a casual break-out area.

“In these instances, we chose a largescale barn door because it matched the rough, industrial aesthetics of the space,” says Stephens. “The exposed hardware fastened to a wooden barn door made sense.”

“I generally recommend to my clients that we use barn doors anywhere you want a large-scale opening—

where you are going to leave it open the majority of the time,” Stephens said.

### **ADA Applications**

In addition to saving precious floor space, sliding doors also meet ADA requirements and are easy for people with disabilities to use. From a mobility standpoint, when a person is confined to a wheelchair or is using a walker, it is much easier to operate a sliding door than it is to navigate around a wide-swing door.

“We recently completed a high-end condominium renovation where we installed a sliding barn door,” notes Stephens. “The owners were in motorized wheelchairs and had limited use of their hands. They wanted a larger opening so they didn't have to worry about scuffing woodwork and doors with their chairs going between rooms.”

### **Hotels**

In the Florida market, Keith Belcourt, Vice President and Contract Sales, American Door & Hardware, notes that most of the major hotel brands are currently integrating—or have plans to include—sliding doors into their facilities. “In guest rooms where every square foot counts, it makes sense,” says Keith.

While the doors and hardware selected for hotels tend to be sleek and shiny, instead of rustic and industrial, the trend of sliding doors replacing traditional ones is increasingly prevalent in the hotel industry. “In this market, sliding doors make

complete sense,” says Belcourt. “Not only do they look great, but they eliminate the door swing—gaining usable square footage in every guest room.”

Many hotels are replacing both the bathroom and closet doors with one sliding door: slide it one way to close the bathroom, and slide it the other to close the adjacent closet door. Keith notes that while the sliding door is indeed an upgrade, the hotels see this space-saver as the modern, updated look that is well worth the investment because it is aesthetically pleasing to their hotel guests.

### Restaurants

Another emerging area for barn doors is in restaurants, and in this application, this is often more for looks than functionality. Barn doors are used to separate the kitchen/food prep area from the main restaurant, or they are being used to separate the private-party backroom from the main restaurant.

### Hardware as the Trend

While the type of hardware used on the sliding doors depends on the architectural style of the building, with the growing demand for sliding doors comes more hardware selections— from design styles to finish options. Many manufacturers are even more focused on developing products to match today’s needs as well as those in the future.

“We had a great response when we released our first surface-mounted product, the 9710 Series, which provided a more modern look than we previously had in the line,” says Bob Wilkins, Director of Marketing and Product Development with Hager Companies. “With the sliding door hardware trend becoming even more popular, we continue to focus on expanding designs for our customers. In fact, we recently released a stainless steel industrial barn door product and are developing additional innovative product ideas to enhance this overall offering.”

Sliding doors are a trend that will continue to grow, especially as the architectural and design community continues to find new and interesting ways to integrate them into their projects.

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