

Not just another tower in the park

At the blossoming Yonge and Eglinton neighbourhood, a condo project aims to prove that pragmatism makes perfect



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The rapidly intensifying neighbourhood around the intersection of Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue isn't Toronto's coolest place to live, and it's not the toniest spot in town to put down roots. But for middle-earning people who value the convenience of modernist apartment living, and who don't want to be slaves to the car – it's on the Yonge subway line and the soon-to-be Eglinton light rapid transit route – this district definitely has its charms.

The prolific high-rise architect Peter Clewes believes that a new condominium tower he is designing for a site at 155 Redpath Avenue will fit right in.

“It's unabashedly modern, in the true sense and spirit of modern architecture since the 1930s,” Mr. Clewes told me. “It's about as pragmatic and rigorous as you can get in residential architecture. It harkens back to fifties and sixties residential development in Toronto. You have great examples and horrible examples, but [Toronto's move to tall apartment buildings] started with a deep pragmatism about residential design.”

Of Yonge and Eglinton, he said: “This is an apartment neighbourhood ... where Toronto was celebrating this notion of very urban apartment living after the Second World War.” The architect went on to describe what he's doing in blunt words liable to strike terror into the hearts of anti-modernists everywhere: He called it “a tower in the park.”

But turning from this scary talk to the renderings and plans of the structure Mr. Clewes is actually crafting for developer Peter Freed and CD Capital, I got something of a surprise.

The 36-storey building certainly doesn't appear to be just another great block of concrete and glass sprouting into the sky from a windswept, desolate lawn, which is the usual image conjured up by the phrase “tower in the park.” Instead – if, indeed, renderings and plans can be believed – its massiveness will be textured and lightened, as the building gracefully rises to its full height from a nine-storey podium, by the tucking



The 36-storey building will rise to its full height from a nine-storey podium, tucking in and pushing out balconies at various levels.

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The tower's facades will be further brightened by multistorey, glassy cutaways that will lend drama to what could otherwise be (in a more ordinary building) an uninflected escarpment of balcony fronts.

If all works out according to plan, the up-tempo, fresh modernist styling of the structure's external wrapper will be effectively carried into its common areas by interior designer Johnson Chou and the land-

scape architects at NAK Design Group.

The spaces on the double-height ground floor and ninth-storey amenities level, Mr. Chou said, are to be “imbued with spa-like calm.” Practically, this means planting tall, enclosing hedges around the perimeter of the tower, and laying out paved aprons and reflecting pools beyond the high, movable glass partitions that separate the lobby, library, yoga studio, exercise room and other areas from the external world.



The small park in which the tower stands, in other words, is to be not a blank lawn but a series of carefully framed, landscaped “vignettes” – Mr. Chou's word.

There (at least during the precious months when the weather is good), residents may (as fancy strikes them) read, play, practise yoga, or watch the little waterfall or the fire-fountain installed in the ground-level pool. If homeowners want to enjoy their common space, but don't want to go outside, they can always relax and look out the glass walls of their building's first storey. A considerable amount of internal territory has been set aside for them to do so.

In fact, I don't recall ever seeing plans for a tall residential building in Toronto that featured a more generous spatial allotment at grade for the pleasure of residents and their guests.

In many condo towers these days, you're lucky to get a lobby that's a little more ample than a

foyer for the elevators. Encircling the core of this new building there is (along with a foyer for the elevators) a spacious lobby where the concierge sits, and there are the other places I have mentioned.

This is in addition to the amenities floor, where one finds the swimming pool, hot tub and other indoor and outdoor facilities.

“The older I get,” said Mr. Clewes (who is not old at all), “the simpler I want to become.” His architectural scheme for 155 Redpath, and the designs of his colleagues on this project, are surely simple, spare, economical – but hardly simplistic. They are notably liberal, especially in a mid-priced offering like this one. If these interesting and attractive treatments are “as pragmatic and rigorous as you can get in residential architecture,” then we can hope Mr. Clewes's unorthodox idea of “pragmatism” quickly goes viral among the other authors of Toronto's tall condominium buildings.

ON SITE » BY SYDNIA YU

Builder promises more calm, less commute

BUILDER/DEVELOPER:
Geranium Corp.

SIZE:
430 to 4,260 square feet

PRICE:
Mid-\$200,000s to more than \$2-million

SALES CENTRE:
49 Wellington St. E., second floor, east of Yonge Street in Toronto. Open Monday to Friday from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; weekends from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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The catalyst for this sustainable community was a photo developer Earl Rumm spotted at a local boat shop. The project will feature wide boardwalks and winding streets with cottage-country-style buildings, house studios and townhouses.

Friday Harbour. We're five minutes away from the GO train and GO buses for people who want to use those modes of transportation and we can go straight up the 400 [highway] to the south end of Barrie before all the congestion really starts.”

The catalyst behind vision for this sustainable, master-planned community was a photo Mr. Rumm spotted at a boat shop in the old Big Bay Point Marina, which is being redeveloped within the 600-acre site at Big Bay Point Road and 13th Line.

“We are the largest real estate resort going on from inception in North America,” says Mr. Rumm, who began project marketing late last year. “We open and sold \$50-million dollars worth of real estate at a time when things appeared to be a little quieter than normal.”

About 1,600 condominiums

and 400 hotel suites will be built around a 200-acre protected nature preserve with walking trails, an 18-hole championship golf course and a 40-acre marina with up to 1,000 boat slips.

“Lake Simcoe is on the Trent-Severn Waterway, so you can go all the way to the St. Lawrence River and United States through the lock systems. We are accessible really to the world,” Mr. Rumm states. “There are no other projects that can boast all the amenities that we will provide, and we are a true year-round resort.”

For instance, there will be a performing arts centre, boutiques and bistros in the village, as well as a private beach, tennis courts, business centre and clubhouse with a training centre, pools, croquet lawn, bar and fireside patio.

“Whether you buy a \$1.5-million unit or a \$300,000 unit,



we're all going to eat at the same restaurants, use the same golf club and marina, and do the same activities,” says Mr. Rumm, who adds that amenities will be completed before the first residents move in by spring 2015. “That brings back a real sense of community.”

Plus, the site will be a short drive to malls, theatres and attractions in and around Barrie.

“We're within 20 minutes of a quarter million people who can come use our facilities and support our shopkeepers and our downtown village. We're not a population that goes from 20,000 a year in the summer up to 100,000 and when those seasonal people leave, it's a ghost town,” Mr. Rumm states. “No other cottage project can boast those kinds of numbers.”

Drawing some of the best elements of European harbour

towns, the pedestrian-friendly project will feature wide boardwalks and gently winding streets lined with modern yet traditional cottage-country-style buildings to house studios to five-bedroom models in one or two-storey layouts, plus six-bedroom townhouses.

“About 95 per cent of our buyers are what we call end users ... as opposed to investors from abroad that rent it out and you never know who your neighbours are,” Mr. Rumm adds. “That's an important differentiation between us and other resorts as well.”

Monthly fees will range from 24 to 73 cents per square feet as Boardwalk and Harbour Flat suites include parking and a locker, while Marina Residences will be in a gated area with private garages, boat slips and boardwalks.