

Standing tall but not aloof



The prospect of a condominium being built in a vibrant neighbourhood often causes concern among residents. The towers can act as gated communities in the sky: in the neighbourhood but not of the neighbourhood. Residents become isolated in their units and don't come to know the neighbours in the building or outside of it.

BY AMIE SILVERWOOD

Condominiums feed on the liveliness of the community in their marketing to attract buyers but some large structures take up whole city blocks and have security stationed behind closed doors to keep the neighbourhood off the front steps. These buildings don't give anything back to the community in which they were built. Streets that invite too many of these towers can become urban ghost towns.

The big blocks of buildings that offer little interest and do not interact with pedestrians deter them to other streets that have managed to hold onto their character with little shops and restaurants. Walking south from Bloor, pedestrians flock to Yonge Street and avoid Bay. The activity on the street makes for a dynamic stroll even if the sidewalks on Yonge Street are

narrow and overflowing with people, merchandise and patios. This is what makes this area attractive.

But condominium towers must be built to accommodate the throngs of people moving into the area. Condos have a lot to offer a neighbourhood if they're built to interact with the streetscape. Wise developers are finding ways to make their condominiums a more lively place to live in,

to walk past or even to linger within. When it is done successfully, the condominium is not just a building but a hub of activity that energizes the neighbourhood instead of feeding off it.

TAS DesignBuild has done just this in designing Giraffe, a building that has it all and promises to be an anchor on the busy corner of Bloor and Dundas Street West.

"Our location is a pivotal point where all three neighbourhoods begin to meet," explains Mazyar Mortazavi, Principal of TAS DesignBuild, of the Junction, Bloor West Village and Roncesvalles. "And what we're offering to the purchasers who decide to make Giraffe their home, is access and that access is to the neighbourhoods depending on what they feel like and what they want to do."

The building will invite the public in by devoting two floors to commercial use, retail or restaurants. Mortazavi recognizes that part of the attraction to the building (other than its creative design and green features) is the commercial character of the streets that intersect at the site. He believes the commercial nature the building will feature at grade will create a relationship with the street. Instead of competing with that character, the developer is building from it.

"We have a mix of retail, commercial and residential around us," he says, "and I think what makes it a very unique and charged neighbourhood is that diversity. It begins to speak to the uniqueness of the community that lives there. And one of the things we recognize, and we always recognize with our projects, is being in line with the neighbourhood and with the character that's there and how we can enhance that."

A big part of this organic vision involves being considerate of the character of the neighbourhood and of the environment as well. Giraffe is being built to a high standard that residents can be proud to support. Mortazavi predicts that by the time the project is completed, there will be a higher level of environmental awareness and he's positioned TAS DesignBuild to lead the way in environmental stewardship.

He's leading towards renewable power by adopting Bullfrog Power for the building. The little green frog has been popping up around businesses that are on the cutting edge of sustainability. Bullfrog's power is provided by the wind and low-impact hydro and ten per cent of its profits go to non-profit organizations that promote sustainability. It has become a popular power source for those who like to be

seen as green: reaching 600 organizations and 6,000 homes.

But TAS DesignBuild is the first developer to use Bullfrog Power as the default power company for a condominium. Greenies pay a premium for the clear air and clear consciences that result from the switch. But Mortazavi is betting that it won't stop residents from buying into his high standards.

"As the technology develops and access improves, I think we'll begin to recognize that our reliance on the kinds of fuels we've been used to is going to have to change not necessarily by choice but as a result of circumstance. So all of those changes are going to have a significant impact."

But sustainability is a package. Giraffe has been designed to LEED standards (silver), will have a living wall in the lobby, is located close to the subway and GO Transit and will have a rooftop rainwater retrieval system. He calls it the "Four Pillars of Sustainability" that guide the designs of all the homes the developer takes on. By inviting the neighbourhood in and developing sustainably, Giraffe is promising to become a healthy and vibrant hub for the already bustling neighbouring communities. **CB**

