

LEEDer of the condo pack

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Is Enlightenment the next must-have condo amenity?

That's the question I considered during a recent dialectic (translation: mid-morning chat) with Mazyar Mortazavi, who speaks about his role as a Toronto developer with the same integrity and vision as a philosopher prince.

It's an earnest approach, to be sure, but Mr. Mortazavi, 32, thinks big when it comes to sustainability as a value proposition. And this will probably work in his favour as he continues to distinguish himself from overzealous competitors who are playing the city's urban landscape like a Monopoly board crowded with cheap plastic pieces.

As the principal of TAS DesignBuild, he has overseen such completed residential buildings as the Zed Lofts near King and Bathurst and Dia Condominiums in North York, which are unique in that neither is an eyesore within its neighbourhood.

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His integration of condos into their environments is about to get even more impressive. Just yesterday, Mr. Mortazavi publicly announced his corporate commitment to power all new buildings using Bullfrog, the increasingly ubiquitous supplier of green electricity.

This coincides with TAS DesignBuild's involvement in the second annual Green Living Show, which continues at the Direct Energy Centre through Sunday. The 3,000-square-foot booth will serve as the launch pad for his newest condo project, Giraffe. Located at the underwhelming intersection of Bloor and Dufferin, it is being designed by acclaimed local architecture firm Teeple.

"There's nothing innovative about going into an environment that's hot. Innovation comes by putting your ear to the ground and listening to the pulse of the place and identifying where a shift is going to take place," Mr. Mortazavi says from the LEED-certified M5V sales centre. (LEED refers to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a third-party rating system.)

M5V is his proposed 34-storey tower that will rise (thanks to Core Architects) from a former auto-body centre at the southwest corner of King and Blue Jays Way (note: The logo is topped with a crown).

Construction is slated to begin in the next few weeks and will include a laundry list of green features such as water-efficient landscaping and low-emission interior components.

Every condo that is purchased automatically provides a scholarship to Room to Read, the education outreach program founded by former Microsoft exec John Wood.

None of this should be mistaken as a sales pitch. "We're fortunate to be economically successful, but it is not the driver of everything we do," he says. "We believe in investment. Going green is an investment to the future, high design is an investment to the city and Room to Read is an investment to society."

These values have as much to do with nature as nurture. Mr. Mortazavi's parents arrived in Canada from Iran as architects. The company, originally named TAS Enterprises (T is his father's initial, A is his mother's and S stands for sons - he has a 30-year-old brother, Kamyar), is now 25 years old and once specialized in infill housing throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

Although his mother encouraged him to become a plastic surgeon, he pursued architecture at the University of Waterloo, where he earned a master's degree while simultaneously developing Zed, Dia and a Bridle Path mansion.

On this day, he has eschewed a suit for dark jeans and a tailored navy sport jacket. His thick black eyeglass frames are an homage to Daniel Libeskind. Speaking of the Crystal creator, Mr. Mortazavi says that the addition to the Royal Ontario Museum has prompted renewed international awareness of Toronto. "We need to develop the ego of our city," he says, while also declaring that developers are to blame for lacking any consideration of the future.

For this reason, he is happy to share his philosophies and plans. "Being an innovator doesn't mean hoarding ideas. Being an innovator means being able to bring change en masse," he says.

But he does keep some plans secret, at least to the general public. One of them has the potential to propel him onto an international stage. And when that time comes, he will be the king of a very cool castle.

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