

BLOOR ST. AND DUNDAS ST.

Long-necked condo up to the challenge

29-storey building aims to fit into complex juncture of three eclectic neighbourhoods

ALEX NEWMAN
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Perched high above Roncesvalles' eccentric jumble and High Park's leafy bowers, the new Giraffe condo will add an innovative facade to the off-kilter intersection at Bloor St. W. and Dundas St. W.

Giraffe's staggered face creates an optical illusion of swaying precariously — not unlike the long-necked animal it's named after — and giving the 29-storey building a deconstructivist feel.

But as developer Mazyar Mortazavi of TAS DesignBuild explains, the building itself is symmetrical while the inner and outer "skins" are layered. Driven by the placement of balconies in each of the 275 suites and large windows in principal rooms with smaller windows in private spaces, the design is a complex one that creates different and interesting elevations — regardless of what direction you come at it.

Mortazavi says that it's up to developers to "empower" the city's design talent by providing opportunities to change the urban landscape. "As developers, we play a big role in city building and need to relate to the city. We're one of the fastest growing cities in the world, and we need a commitment to good design in our building now."

There were other challenges with the project, admits Mortazavi. The convoluted intersection, the angled topography and the site's unusual hockey stick shape all presented constraints.

That "also presented opportunity." And led him to seek out non-traditional architect Stephen Teeple, whose portfolio ranges from light-filled otherworldly churches and soaring libraries, to residences



TAS DesignBuild's Giraffe will rise above one of the city's most diverse intersections. Its 1,200-square-foot, two-bedroom units sell for about \$600,000.

that defy gravity and institutional structures that are or appear integral to the natural landscape.

Mortazavi is pleased with the results.

Giraffe by TAS DesignBuild will offer a variety of layouts from studios to three-bedroom plus den, ranging from 482 square feet to more than 1,600 square feet, starting from the low \$200,000s. Occupancy dates are summer 2012 and maintenance fees are 44 cents per square foot plus water and hydro.

Giraffe's presence in the city's west end — long an immigrant/multicultural enclave — is probably a good place to change the urban landscape. With the "socio-cultural shifts" especially where Toronto's conservative Anglo-Saxon past abuts its multicultural present, Mortazavi feels design could create a bridge for the offspring of that heritage.

The building is at the juncture of three eclectic neighbourhoods — Roncesvalles to the south, the



DANNY BRIZZI PHOTOS

Junction to the north, and Bloor West Village to the west, and has an equally diverse buyer demographic to draw from — long-time Eastern European residents interested in downsizing, young artists, and upscale singles and families eager for wide lots and tree-lined streets. What unites them is the neighbourhood: parks and schools; butchers, green grocers, and other specialty shops; ready access to the TTC, GO Transit, highways and its proximity to downtown.

Although condos are always a harder sell for families, who need more space for less cost, Mortazavi is sure that a 1,200-square-foot, two-bedroom model for about \$600,000 will convince them. Especially with the building's amenities — concierge, party room, fitness room, sun deck with barbecue, ground-floor retail — and the good schools, parks, and community centres within walking distance. In fact, he's so sure of its appeal, he's had the second bedroom in the

model suite decorated as a nursery. Mortazavi says he will also publish a guide to neighbourhood businesses to promote local economic health.

With just 60 per cent glass and 40 per cent solid materials, the building is not a typical glass condo box, and the list of green elements — enough that they hope to garner a silver Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification — is impressive. Each suite has an energy recovery ventilator for reduced demands, low-VOC paints, flooring, sealants and adhesives; water-conserving faucets, energy rated appliances and individually controlled heating and air conditioning.

The building will have a rooftop rainwater retrieval system, water-efficient landscaping, and a waste-recycling sorter. The builder will divert most construction waste from landfill, is partnering with Bullfrog Power to provide 100-per-cent green electricity and has included

in the plans an 8,000-square-foot roof garden for residents to grow vegetables and to reduce energy costs.

Everything the builder does is part of its "four pillars" concept, Mortazavi explains.

"On the culture side, the design of the building and a commitment to local art galleries. On the social side, we've partnered with the Ontario chapter of Waterkeeper Alliance, an organization founded by Robert Kennedy Jr. to protect waterways. On the economic side, we're promoting the health of local business. And the fourth pillar is the green building, though sustainability goes beyond that. It means developing sustainable cities, and that can only happen if the neighbourhood is healthy."

The presentation centre at 1540 Bloor St. W. features touch-screen technology for viewing 3D floor-plan renderings and two model suites. Call 416-588-8020 or visit giraffeliving.com.

Building with society in mind

DEVELOPER from C01

It is impossible to reference Mortazavi and his firm's success without also talking about family: parents Babak and Tooran, and particularly, Kam.

In personality, Mortazavi is point-counterpoint to the 30-year-old Kam, an urban planner who is also a partner in the family construction firm started by their parents in 1983 after a move from Iran.

Where Mortazavi comes across as an intense, driven, uncompromising — almost solitary — perfectionist, Kam is his charmingly affable, easy-going foil.

"We each bring something to the table that the other doesn't," Kam says. "Otherwise, it wouldn't work at all."

But make no mistake — Kam shares the family vision for improving Toronto's urban landscape, one TAS DesignBuild condo at a time.

"We have a passion for making this a better city," Kam says as he downs fries drizzled with truffle oil.

6 We see this neighbourhood as rich and diverse. One of the last, untapped, up-and-coming areas in the city

MAZYAR MORTAZAVI,
ON GIRAFFE'S LOCATION

The brothers live a few floors apart in the same condo building and although they have a busy outside social life, they spend much of their free time together or with their parents, who have a background in architecture and who the brothers meet for lunch every Tuesday to talk business.

Mazyar and Kam also love biking around the city with their friends or whipping up gourmet meals.

Biking also gives Mazyar a window into Toronto's diverse neighbourhoods, all while travelling in the slow lane, outside the protective cocoon of a vehicle.

"It really gives you a very different sense of place," he says.

The brothers credit their parents for shaping the firm's (and their own) strong value system that puts a priority on what is best for the community.

"My parents had a vision of doing some-

thing good in this city and we are building on that foundation with a very strong core philosophy," Mazyar says.

He adds that growing up in multicultural Toronto made him aware of diversity and what individuals bring to the collective table. "I know how to celebrate differences," he says. "I grew up bridging those gaps."

The cornerstone of TAS DesignBuild's unique business philosophy is outlined in the company's credo, called the Four Pillars of Sustainability.

"Everything we take on refers back to the four pillars," Mortazavi says. "It is what drives the vision of the company and it informs everything we do."

The four pillars start with the firm's stated commitment to "fostering a positive impact on the social fibre of local and global communities."

The support of innovative local art and culture comes next, followed by showing a respect for nature by developing ecologically sensitive projects. Finally, the firm pledges to foster economic prosperity in the communities in which it builds.

"The four pillars also represent our family's four members," he adds. "The sense of what our family brings in the creation of homes for other families."

It all fits into the purposeful vision Mortazavi brings to his much-heralded Toronto condo developments.

"It's a very comprehensive approach with every step relating back to the principals of the four pillars," he says.

Mortazavi's firm has been the spark behind some of Toronto's most interesting condo developments — such as M5V on King St. W., east of Spadina Ave.; dia, west of Yonge St. and south of Finch Ave.; zed on Bathurst St., south of King; and his latest offering, Giraffe.

Giraffe, a cantilevered condo that resembles the lanky denizen of the African savannah, is being hailed for its innovative Teeple Architects design.

The condo is still in the approval stage at the city and is slated for the key Bloor St. W. and Dundas St. W. junction.

"We see this neighbourhood as rich and diverse," Mortazavi says. "One of the last, untapped, up-and-coming areas in the city."

Giraffe will have allotment gardens and an 8,000 to 10,000-square-foot amenity area with yoga, party and dining rooms.

"It's what people want," he adds.

Mortazavi doesn't see himself as a design trendsetter, but more as an interpreter of what is happening in the community at large. "We're not looking at trends," he says. "We're looking at social shifts that create change."

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