



SECTION C0 • TORONTO STAR

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CONDOS

**MARKETING**

COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Elaine Cecconi (in her office), along with her partner Anna Simone of Cecconi Simone Inc. received the highest honour in the sales centre category for their work on "X" The Condominium.

Trailer days ancient history

Sales centres have become sophisticated, award-winning, even models of eco-design

JOSEPH KIM
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When is a sales office not a sales office? Well, when you're hunting for a new unit in Toronto's red-hot condo market.

Potential buyers now find themselves visiting "presentation galleries" or "presentation centres."

These buildings are a far cry from the days when developers would simply plunk down a construction trailer — often with a nearby out-house — on an empty lot.

Builders now routinely spend millions of dollars on these so-called galleries, which act as key marketing tools to sell a particular lifestyle. Some designs are so striking they receive accolades from the building and design industry.

Last month, the designers of five sales centres in Toronto earned awards from the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO). It's the fifth year that marketing centres were among the winners.

Elaine Cecconi and partner Anna Simone of Cecconi Simone Inc. received the highest honour in the



JOY VON TIEDEMANN PHOTOS

Above and right: the 5,000-square-foot presentation centre for X.



sales centre category for their work on "X" The Condominium, a Great Gulf Homes project at 590 Jarvis St. The fact these awards are handed out is indicative of the just how far builders will go to sell condos in Toronto, Cecconi says.

The sleek and modern 5,000-square-foot presentation centre for "X" was built inside the shell of the old Metropolitan Police headquarters, but has since been gutted now to make way for the 44-storey tower on site. Units started at about \$180,000 during the first phase of sales, with a new sales launch anticipated in November.

These large budgets for presentation galleries allow designers to create full model suites when years ago only vignettes of kitchens or bedrooms were the norm.

"The budgets (for sales centres) have certainly gone up an extraordinary amount, that's for sure," Cecconi says. "You're really trying to represent what the product will be to the buyer, and the ability to show that has been created."

Canadian designer Brian Gluckstein was also honoured by ARIDO for his work at the sales gallery for

PRESENTATION continued on C08



condominiums

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CONDOS > COVER STORY

These aren't your dad's sales centres

PRESENTATION from CO1

the Four Seasons Private Residences in Yorkville.

Available for viewing by appointment only, it offers a glimpse of what's offered to those who buy one of the luxury hotelier's 200 residences, which range in price between \$1.6 to \$16 million.

Amenities include a private bar and lounge, private spa, housekeeping services and 24-hour-concierge.

Another project piquing interest in the city is the \$1-million-plus presentation centre that TAS DesignBuild has erected for its M5V development at King St. W. and Blue Jays Way.

6 You're either committed to change, leadership and innovation or you're not

MAZYAR MORTAZAVI
OF TAS DESIGNBUILD

M5V is in large part geared to the environmentally conscious consumer, and the sales office features green-living strategies that the completed development will incorporate. Residents, for instance, will get a membership with the car sharing company AutoShare.

The gallery is also the first in Canada to be certified as representing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).

LEED is a building rating system that is recognized as a benchmark for design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.

The M5V centre uses high-efficiency, sensor-activated fluorescent lights, low-flush toilets, and expansive use of windows and skylights to allow for natural lighting. It's powered by emissions-free

wind and waterpower (through Bullfrog Power, which derives power only from emission-free sources) and incorporates a heat recovery ventilation system that helps cut energy waste.

It also employs two giant cisterns that store rainwater from the rooftop, diverting it to landscaping around the building.

"You're either committed to change, leadership and innovation or you're not," says TAS DesignBuild principal Mazyar Mortazavi.

"Consumers today are far more educated and they look into this (condo-buying) process with a whole series of flags up already," he says. "If we want to sell this (LEED-living) project, we have to educate people about this."

The price tag for M5V suites starts in the low \$300,000s.

Joe Latobesi has seen the evolution of presentation centres during his 20 years working in the real estate advertising business.

"The level of sophistication that goes into the marketing of condos here in Toronto does not happen anywhere else," says Latobesi, vice-president with Montana Steele Advertising. He adds that market-savvy consumers are seeking sophisticated presentation centres.

"Everything is branded today. I have a brand, you have a brand, and it's just a matter of tapping into that brand and tapping into your likes, dislikes," he says.

Latobesi says the emergence of multi-million-dollar sales centres has come about because of the high demand in Toronto's condo market in the past decade. "As the competition started to heat up, so did the aggressiveness in terms of marketing and so did the nature of the presentation centres," he says.

Just like M5V, there are dozens of developments looking to tap into a niche market. The presentation gallery for the Festival Tower development in the entertainment district opened in September.

This joint venture between the Daniels Corp. and Canadian producer/director Ivan Reitman and



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Mazyar Mortazavi uses the LEED-certified M5V sales centre to educate buyers about environmental design.

his family is geared toward film and entertainment industry buffs.

Once complete, the 500 suites at King and John Sts. — with prices ranging from \$300,000s to more than \$2 million — will rise above the new headquarters for the Toronto International Film Festival Group.

The developers are offering intimate private screenings with special TIFF guests and receptions with world-renowned film stars.

Back at M5V, Mortazavi is not surprised by the lengths developers will go to lure buyers. And he says there's likely more innovation to come when it comes to presentation centres as builder respond to increased demands in the market.

"Consumers today are more savvy than two, three and even five years ago, and they need to be wowed," he says.

"We're not selling four walls and a box, we're selling an experience."



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Not so long ago, a trailer was plenty good enough as a sales office.




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