

Building to last

Reaching for great heights

Condo owner Carolyn Haydon is impressed with the wide range of amenities available to her — from dog-washing to a ‘tool room’

When Carolyn Haydon was shopping around for a new condo, she knew what was important to her. The surrounding area. The building. High ceilings. Quality finishes.

That wish list took Haydon, a seasoned condo dweller, to the Liberty Market Lofts in Toronto’s hip Liberty Village neighbourhood.

“As soon as I sold [my other condo], I already had my eye on that building,” says the 45-year-old executive assistant. “I’ve always loved lofts. . . . My unit is about 675 sq. ft., but it feels so much bigger because of the height of the ceiling.”

“I love that, in Liberty Village, any direction you go, there’s somewhere fun or interesting where you can eat or meet with friends.”

How buyers like Haydon define quality is key to where, what and how development companies plan and build. Developing that awareness of what buyers want is paramount.

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BRIAN BROWN VP, LIFETIME DEVELOPMENTS

“We’ve been quite active using social media to get a real direct dialogue with our consumers,” says Brian Brown, vice-president of Toronto-based Lifetime Developments and a member of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) since 2007. “We have a very strong relationship with past customers. We have a very strong relationship with the brokers and agents that represent us to their clients. We talk to those people quite frequently to get an understanding of what their clients are looking for. As a developer, we’ve had to recognize that it’s about designing the right building for the right tenant and the right neighbourhood. There isn’t a buyer for every 50-storey building.”

Haydon is a perfect example. “I tend to like buildings that are a little more ‘boutique’ — they’re not the super-high high-rises,” says Haydon, whose current condo building is eight storeys high.

What buyers do go for has changed, notes

Brown. Elements that may not have been top of mind for them a decade ago are now becoming important.

“Ten years ago, we would design a nice lobby and we would design a basic amenity space,” says Brown. “But, as condominiums have become more refined over the last decade, we recognize that the lobby is really the first experience the purchaser [has] and the purchaser’s friends and family have when they visit. That first impression is important.”

A condo’s amenities are important, too. While a basic fitness room and social space may have been standard 10 years ago, now the menu has expanded to include media rooms, rooftop hot tubs and even perks for your pets, such as a dog-washing room.

“Another cool [condo feature] is the tool room,” says Haydon. “Let’s say you buy a bunch of Ikea furniture and it’s hard to lay it all out in your own unit. You can go down there and use their tools.”

Meanwhile, a buyer’s definition of quality and that of the developer actually align fairly closely. Rich-looking features — stainless steel appliances, modern bathrooms and high-end stone countertops — are typically expected by purchasers, and builders deliver.

But while buyers may be more focused on the appearance of their unit and what the neighbourhood is like, developers think critically about the future of a building. “A quality building is a safe building and safety is a top priority for our industry,” said Bryan Tuckey, BILD’s president and CEO.

“Our members construct quality buildings that comply with the Ontario Building Code and they plan their projects with the principles of good community planning and support for the environment in mind.”

Another consideration is how the building will be used and its larger role in the neighbourhood.

“When we look at sites, we’re not just thinking, ‘What size of building can I build?’ but also ‘What’s the neighbourhood? How’s the building going to affect the neighbourhood?’ ” Brown explains. “Often, we go out into the neighbourhood and talk to people.”

That legwork has contributed to how Lifetime thinks about quality. The company tries to incorporate retail space in the base of the building, as well as office space and parking, to help the building integrate and interact



As well as a great location, Carolyn Haydon’s Liberty Village condo has high ceilings and quality finishes. Condo developers believe unique amenities are key to attracting buyers.

with the neighbourhood. It has also spent time to make its building practices “greener,” developing LEED projects and reviewing construction methods and materials.

According to Brown, at the end of the day, quality for the developer is largely defined by

the satisfaction of the buyer.

“We’re [always] seeing how we can improve with each development. . . . But it comes down to making sure that they’re buying into a building or purchasing a suite in a building that lives up to their expectations.”

Key to office space — location, flexibility and transit

Commercial developers strike a balance between what a tenant wants and what the building’s landlord wants



Location is the most important consideration for developers who are planning to build office spaces, says Phil King, president of Orlando Corporation.

For condo dwellers and businesses alike, location is everything.

“Location is probably the most important aspect when it comes to developing office buildings,” says Phil King, president of Orlando Corporation. “Close proximity to amenities, especially transportation.”

According to King, who has been with the Mississauga-based industrial real estate developer and landlord for 27 years, transportation means different things, depending on whether office tenants want to be downtown or in the suburbs. “Downtown means transit, and in the suburbs, there are highways and major roads because there’s no comprehensive transit.”

But it’s not just proximity to public transportation and roadways that’s important; it’s also about retail. While most office spaces in downtown Toronto offer great dining and shopping options at their doorsteps, it’s a different story in smaller cities and towns.

King explains. “In the suburbs, where do you go for lunch? You might have some amenities in the building. . . . but you’ve got to be close to shopping and restaurants.”

For commercial developers, there must be a balance between what a tenant wants and what the

building’s landlord wants.

Both landlords and tenants are looking for buildings that are very efficient, can be operated inexpensively and are flexible in terms of usage.

Further, a landlord may want floor plates that are smaller and can be divided to allow for multiple tenants, with efficient corridors, whereas many tenants want large, open floor plates. Compromise usually resolves any differences, says King.

The quality of finishes in a building is another quality-marker for business tenants, in both the dedicated office spaces and even in the lobby. Says King, “That’s the first impression for visitors coming to meet people in that space.”

This is the third in a four-part series sponsored by BILD. Look for the next one on Sat., May 18.



BUILDING TO LAST

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