



Pier 27, designed by Peter Clewes of architectsAlliance, is expected to add some much-needed panache to Toronto's waterfront. Amenities will include a private screening theatre and a relaxation pool. WWW.PIER27.CA

Builders break out of the square concrete box in the sky

A new emphasis on architecture has taken hold as developers compete to offer more beautiful structures



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High-rise condominiums didn't start out as architectural showpieces. A quick inventory of the lamentable human warehouses built in the 1980s and 1990s illustrates that clearly enough. But as the number of towers and suites began to grow in central Toronto in the early 2000s, it became clear that builders would have to step up their design game in order to plant an enduring impression on the landscape.

At the same time, the pool of

buyers in this market was expanding, albeit slowly. In the 1980s, buyers who weren't single professionals were usually investors aiming either to flip a new condo suite for a tidy profit, or rent it out for income.

The recession of the early 1990s thinned out the ranks of investor-buyers considerably. It wasn't until the latter part of the decade that new construction began to rally to the same levels of the go-go eighties.

By this time, low interest rates made condo ownership more accessible to a lot of younger buyers.

At the same time, older couples and single parents began to buy into the concept of condominium living in greater numbers.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the resurgence of condominium construction.

A number of developers, inspired by successful redevelopment projects in the northeastern U.S. metropolises, began to bet on loft conversions as a potentially lucrative trend. It wasn't as if there was a shortage of empty industrial or warehouse buildings from which to choose. The early conversion projects – namely Church Street's Merchandise Building and King Street's Massey-Ferguson administration complex – turned a lot of heads because their designers respected the architectural principles of the booming industrial age in which the structures were built.

All of a sudden, it was proven that a condominium didn't have to be a square box in a square building with square windows and square tiles.

Even those buyers who weren't looking in the conversion mar-

ket began to demand greater attention to combining functionality and comfort with character and posterity.

There are currently more than 270 condominium projects either in preconstruction sales or under construction throughout Greater Toronto. It would be a big stretch to say that even half of them aim to preserve and enhance these design principles. But there are some new high-rise projects that are going to great lengths to lend an iconic accent to the skyline.

Citizen Developments and Fernbrook Homes have laid down the gauntlet in dramatic fashion with Pier 27, planned for the foot of Yonge Street on the shore of Lake Ontario. The location certainly can't be beat, but the planned project, scheduled to be completed in 2010, also adds a much-needed

grace note to the downtown waterfront, infested as it is with some of the most ghastly afterthoughts of condominium high-rises in Toronto, the most egregious of which are just across the street along Queen's Quay.

Pier 27 features two mid-rise towers of 12 and 14 storeys topped with a three-storey cantilevered bridge connecting them that will contain the project's penthouses. The glass-and-steel facade is nothing new to the landscape, but when you have a waterfront location, it wouldn't make much sense to feature anything other than floor-to-ceiling windows.

The site also will feature about three acres of parkland open to the public.

The project was designed by Peter Clewes of architectsAlliance, who has made no

bones about the fact that he wanted to offer up a vision that designers of future waterfront domiciles would strive for.

This includes giving the public access to the waterfront. The two main towers do not block out the waterfront, as they're designed to mimic piers jutting outward.

The towers will contain 477 suites, with the smallest measuring 670 square feet. Prices range from the \$400,000 up to \$4-million.

Another three towers are planned for the surrounding area to form the Pier 27 community, which will eventually include 2,000 units.

Over the next three weeks, we'll be taking a look at other new high-rise and low-rise projects that are making an architectural impression beyond their purpose as mere housing.