

# Toronto's heritage buildings revived with respect

By Kara Kurylłowicz



*The design for Five Condos at Yonge and St. Joseph Street preserves the original exterior of Rawlinson Cartage, one of the oldest moving companies in Toronto. This is touted as one of the most significant historic facade retention projects ever undertaken in Toronto.*

The best of the past, present and future comes together in new condos when open-minded, creatively innovative architects and developers work with the City of Toronto to preserve and protect heritage buildings.

“In 2005, the Ontario Heritage Act changed to better define and facilitate the City of Toronto’s ability to preserve and protect buildings, 40 years of age and older, in a way that maintains their integrity and place in the historic development of a particular street,” says Mary MacDonald, acting manager, Heritage Preservation Services, City Planning, Toronto. “There is still the potential for more grey versus black and white [in the] decision making process than some people would prefer, but overall, it’s an improvement on not being able to say ‘no’ to certain proposals.

“It’s complicated and a challenge to get people to understand that old and new buildings can exist for the greater good – it doesn’t have to be an either/or situation where one is sacrificed for the other,” says MacDonald.

Preserving heritage buildings can also make superb business sense as architects and developers recognize that heritage buildings can immediately bestow a recognizable identity and landmark status on new condo projects. In addition to acting



*The Massey Tower by Mod Developments*

“The best of these, for instance Five Condos at 5 St. Joseph (pictured on pg. 44, developed by Graywood Developments and Mod Developments) and Massey Tower at 197 Yonge St. (pictured left, also by Mod Developments), preserve the buildings’ contextual relationship to the city, provide economic stimulus at a commercial level, and contribute to the wellbeing of the community on multiple levels,” says MacDonald. “When architects and developers partner with the City to lead preservation by example, they can actually trigger more restoration.”

“The challenge lies in preserving the heritage building during construction,” says David Pontarini, founding partner, Hariri Pontarini Architects, Toronto, the firm behind Five Condos. “For example, at 5 St. Joseph, the 300-millimetre-thick historic north façade wall had to be suspended on a massive cantilevered steel truss over the excavation during a full year of construction, while the new west façade had to be rebuilt to look, materially, like it had always been there.”

as a tangible differentiator that sets it apart from the glass-tower masses, it provides an exceptional marketing hook and attracts homebuyers who want an exciting, interesting and compelling spot to call “home.”

“Homebuyers who want but can’t afford a piece of Toronto’s history in the form of a detached, semi-detached or row house may find that condos that incorporate a heritage building are a viable alternative,” says MacDonald.

Toronto homebuyers can find an extraordinary variety of in-the-works and completed new condo projects that illustrate the many possible design strategies that can be employed to preserve a heritage building. One such strategy, which involves simply slapping a heritage property’s façade onto the front of a new building, is relatively common, yet reactions to it vary.

“It tends to look silly and creates a conflict between the old and the new while diminishing the value of both buildings. I’ve never seen it work well and it’s the result of a time when we couldn’t say ‘no’ to that approach,” says MacDonald. “To do conservation properly, you really need to look at the integrity and value of the individual building then treat it with respect.”

Developers who buy a property precisely because of its heritage tend to enjoy and appreciate that aspect of the project, embracing it, rather than fearing the opportunities and challenges it presents.



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